Extracting Meaning from Strangeness:
Strategies to Enhance Viewer Engagement
with Contemporary Art in the Public Art Museum

by

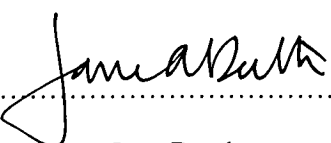**Jane Deeth** B.A. (Env. Des.), B.A. (Soc. Wk.), MFAD

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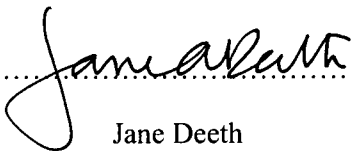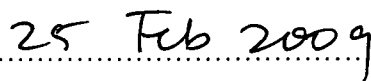
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ABSTRACT

Extracting Meaning from Strangeness: Strategies to Enhance Viewer Engagement with Contemporary Art in the Public Art Museum

This research questions the notion that contemporary art is difficult to engage with, and considers what the public art museum can do to enhance viewers' experience of contemporary art. Contemporary art in this context is understood as the discursive, ideas-based art that has come to the fore since the 1960s. It is argued that because the formalist aesthetic remains the dominant mode of responding to art, this has limited the capacity for viewers to make sense of more conceptually based contemporary art and, therefore, more discursive approaches need to be enacted for meaningful engagement to occur.

While the contributions that artists and curators make in this regard are acknowledged, the focus of the analysis is the constructivist museum as described by George Hein, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill and Elaine Heumann Gurian, especially the emphasis placed on direct experience and participation. It is argued that while constructivism presents some possibilities for increasing engagement, it also has limitations. In particular, in emphasising individual learning over the specifics of artwork, advocates of constructivism run the risk of maintaining the formalist aesthetic as the dominant mode of response to contemporary art.

In critiquing the constructivist approach, Helen Illeris's concept of the performative museum and recognition of the existence of a range of interpretive roles for art provides a valuable construct. However, Illeris does not address the issue of how to guide viewers to enact the role most appropriate for the type of art they are encountering. This is

particularly problematic when it comes to the reception of discursive based art which requires engagement with ideas rather than aesthetic form.

In seeking to understand the rules of engagement appropriate for discursive art practice, aspects of reception theory, in particular ideas about the role of the reader/viewer postulated by philosophers Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jacques Derrida and art historians/theorists Keith Moxey, Mieke Bal, Ian McLean and Justin Paton, are examined. Rather than using their interpretations of particular artworks to explain contemporary art, however, the study examines their behaviours in the act of interpretation. The parallels between these behaviours and the psychoanalytic conversation of Jacques Lacan are discussed and, in doing so, practical strategies for engaging viewers with the discursivity of contemporary art are devised and enacted in a public art museum setting. From the results of this analysis, a reorientation of the role of the public art museum in relation to contemporary discursive art practice is advocated in which the expert speaker becomes the expert listener.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an investigation of the experience of contemporary art in the context of the public art museum. It is not so much an analysis from the point of view of getting the numbers through the doors, although this is important, but it is more concerned with what the visitor is supposed to do when they encounter works of contemporary art and what the art museum can offer to this encounter.

My interest in the experience of art from the viewer's perspective arises from working as a contemporary gallery director in the late 1980s and early 1990s. I was already aware that people spend very little time engaging with artwork and that this applied as much to my peers and colleagues as it did to the 'general public'. However, a pivotal moment occurred at Arthouse in Launceston, Tasmania, in 1990. Arthouse was an artist-run initiative funded through the federal government's arts funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts, and the State's art agency, Arts Tasmania. The gallery presented an annual program of exhibitions by local artists, curated group shows with a national focus, and a touring program developed through the network of contemporary art venues throughout the country. On this particular occasion, the gallery was just about filled with a wonderful

large-scale installation by Sieglinde Karl-Spence (then Karl), a local artist with a national reputation. A passer-by put his head around the gallery door and said, looking at me through the artwork, 'Excuse me, I thought this was an art gallery.' The realisation, that despite looking straight at the artwork he could not see it, was intriguing. This experience was reinforced during a number of years as a first-year art theory lecturer at the School of Visual and Performing Arts at the University of Tasmania. Here I encountered both young and older students as baffled as anyone about what they were being asked to look at and decipher. They were energetic about making judgements, but often this meant unsophisticated outpourings of taste and prejudice with reliance on the codes of formalism and self-expression. It was ultimately very unsatisfying, particularly when contemporary art was under consideration. I became fascinated with the question: What is the viewer supposed to do when they look at a work of contemporary art? It is this fascination that has lead to the question under consideration in this thesis: What can the public art museum do to facilitate greater participation in the experience of contemporary art?

This question contains a number of aspects that will be examined: What is the definition of contemporary art? What is participation? What is meant by the experience of contemporary art? These questions form the basis of the argument as it unfolds in this thesis.

A focus on the public art museum is also a parameter of this research. As such institutions are supported from the public purse, it might be expected that they take some responsibility to ensure that access is available to as many as possible of those who ostensibly pay the bills. In addition, public art museums have the custodianship of cultural material that belongs to the state or which has the imprimatur of the state, and therefore has a special role in identifying and defining what is valued.

In choosing to focus on the public art museum I am aware of the need to define which viewers I am considering. My concern in this research is not with getting new visitors into the art museum in the first place but, rather,

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with exploring what happens to the visitors once they have entered a contemporary art gallery. Therefore, the viewers I am referring to are those visitors to the art museum who, either by design or accident, find themselves in the contemporary art galleries. Implicit in this is the desire to bring into the experience of contemporary art those who already feel comfortable with entering into, and engaging with, what the art museum has to offer, as well as those who would engage with contemporary art if the circumstances were such that they felt included.

In seeking to address the issue of greater participation with contemporary art in the public art museum, I have chosen to look to a range of disciplines that impact on the viewer's experience of the museum and of contemporary art. Taking such an interdisciplinary approach acknowledges the work relating to inclusion that has been done across the disciplines since at least the 1960s. Each of these disciplines has undergone a shift from a self-referential form to one in which the viewer has become central. Art appreciation has shifted its focus from the art object (Greenberg 1961) to philosophical discourse (Danto 1964, 1981). Art history has become what TJ Clark termed 'the new art history' as attention turned from reconstructing artists' intentions to interpretation (Rees & Borzello 1986; Harris 2001). Museology has been transformed via the 'new museology' (Vergo 1989) into museum studies (Macdonald 2006). Museum education has shifted from teaching to learning (Hein 1994). Museum architecture and design architecture and design has been redefined in the move from Mies van der Rohe's modernist mantra 'less is more' (1965) to the engagement with human experience implied in Robert Venturi's postmodern replacement 'less is a bore' (Venturi, Scott Brown & Izenour 1972). And finally, market research has spawned the new discipline of visitor studies with the change from a quantitative focus on the needs of the institution to one firmly embedded in a qualitative understanding of audience experience (Bourdieu & Darbel 1991).

There are lessons to be learned about the viewer experience from each of these disciplines, all of which have a concern with greater inclusion of the viewer. My approach is to graze across these disciplines, as each seeks to place the person at the centre, be it as viewer, visitor, customer, client, or even author. The necessity for this approach comes from the awareness that while each discipline has a particular focus, a turn towards another discipline has often provided the impetus for removing the constraints and opening up alternative possibilities. In this way, as the following chapters will seek to describe, art history has been inflected by sociology and anthropology; museology has turned to education theory; architecture has been inspired by art; exhibition design has learned from market research; visitor studies have been influenced by psychology; and art has been infiltrated by almost everything.

Each of the chapters in this research takes the perspective of a discipline, or set of related disciplines, and considers the impact on the art museum's capacity to actively engage viewers with the experience of contemporary art.

The first chapter explains the difficulty that audiences have in engaging with contemporary art by using Arthur Danto's observations to establish that there has been a paradigm shift in the perceived purpose of art and that this has brought with it different kinds of art as well as alternative approaches to addressing art (Danto 1964, 1981, 1986, 1997). In comparing Danto's understanding with that of Susanne Langer (1953) and Susan Sontag (1966), a fundamental difference is revealed between ways of understanding art before and after 1960, give or take a year or two. Post-60s practice is seen to open up the possibilities for art to engage discursively with the world, in opposition to the reductive frame of modernism, which sought to define art in increasingly self-referential terms. In doing do, the approach to contemporary art used in this research is defined as discursive art practice.

Chapter two looks at how such discursive art has entered the public

museum and focuses on the Australian situation from the 1960s to the early 1990s. The chapter considers some of the events subsequent to *The Field* in 1968, which is seen as a pivotal moment between formalist and discursive phases. Recognition is given to individual artists such as Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, Domenico de Clario and Imants Tillers, and curators such as Graeme Sturgeon, Peter Cripps, Terry Smith, Daniel Thomas and Ian North, who introduced discursive practices into the public art museum. The chapter traces these interventions as well as the plethora of input from the academy and the instigation of an active network of alternative art spaces provided by the state and/or supported by the academy. How discursive art practice is circulated amongst this array of environments reveals both the potential and the limitation of the public art museum.

Chapter three brings the perspective of the art educator to the museum, and with it the call for inclusion that has been increasing exponentially in the museum sector at least since Peter Vergo's seminal text, *The New Museology* (1989). The desire for greater acknowledgment and inclusion of viewers from different social, cultural and educational backgrounds is evidenced in the increasing changes to exhibition programming and presentation strategies. The chapter focuses on George E Hein's notion of the constructivist museum (1994) and notes some resultant adjustments to exhibition design, as well as the increasing emphasis on education and public programs as advocated by such leaders in the field as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (1987, 1999, 2000, 2006) and Elaine Heumann Gurian (1992, 2006). The translation to the peculiarities of visual art in general and discursive contemporary art in particular reveals some limitations on the very processes that are most valued by the constructivist art educator – participation and direct experience.

As strategies in participation and direct experience the concepts of 'visual thinking' developed by Abigail Housen (1983, 2002) and 'visuacy,' a term coined by Dianne Davis to describe the value of the visual arts in creating a society able to embrace innovation, risk and complexity (Davis 2008), are

examined and some contradictions are revealed. Helene Illeris's critique of the constructivist paradigm and advocacy of the performative museum (Illeris 2006) provides an alternative model for engaging these contradictions.

In chapter four an excursion is taken into the contributions made to the viewer's experience of art though exhibition design and museum architecture. In recent years the art museum has become regarded almost as the contemporary cathedral and architects have been given opportunities to design extraordinary edifices that are almost beyond imagination. In doing so, spaces in the art museum have been redefined with the intention of creating new kinds of relationships between audiences and art (Newhouse 1998). The success of this strategy is considered in relation to the place and status of the white cube that had been ubiquitous since the mid 1930s and in particular Brian O'Doherty's critique of this gallery form (O'Doherty 1986). It is acknowledged that artists have played an active role in this rethinking, engaging what Andrea Fraser termed 'institutional critique' as an art-making strategy, thereby constructing the museum as an ideological space, and even seeking to undermine the museum's authority (Fraser 2005). The way in which contemporary art museums such as Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao in Spain and the National Gallery of Victoria at Federation Square in Melbourne are affecting art through deconstructivist design practices that counter the white cube is contrasted with the way in which contemporary art is affecting the gallery space. The degree to which these strategies have brought the public viewer into a closer experience of contemporary art is examined in order to come to a definition of discursive space. Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud 2002) that seeks to remove barriers between the art museum and living space informs this discussion.

In chapter five, attention is focused on the contribution that art history and theory have made to the experience of discursivity in relation to contemporary art. Invoking the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), it is

acknowledged that the viewer's role has become pivotal to the art process. The approach in this chapter is to notice not what the theorists and critics *say* about art, but rather what they *do* in making their interpretations. From the practical activity undertaken by experts in the field, including art theorists Keith Moxey (1994) and Mieke Bal (2001) and antipodean art historians Ian McLean (1998) and Justin Paton (2005), a set of useful and necessary principles can be discerned. Particular attention is given to the contribution of Jacques Derrida's notion of doubling the text (Derrida 1976, 1987), and Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytical conversation as translated by one of his students, Stuart Schneiderman (1983, 1990).

In the final chapter, the principles and practices gleaned from the examination of the activities of these experts are used as the basis for the design of practical strategies in viewer engagement applied in a contemporary art setting. These strategies are enacted in a case study conducted at a public art museum, and were analysed from the data gathered in relation to viewers' responses. Some recommendations as what the public art museum might do to facilitate greater participation in the experience of contemporary art are extracted from this case study.

The overarching aim of this thesis is to be able to offer alternative experiences within the contemporary art museum context in order that viewers, including those who previously have not felt engaged, can actively participate in the cultural conversations that contemporary art affords.

CHAPTER 1

A MISMATCH: AESTHETICS VERSUS DISCOURSE

Going to an art gallery is a delightful experience for some people and a confusing, uncomfortable or irrelevant experience for others. The belief that art is a matter of personal taste (and that therefore positive and negative experiences are all par for the course) is often used to deflect attention from the complexity of the issues that are exposed in the diversity of responses that artworks might elicit. This is especially noticeable in the arena of contemporary art, which on many occasions seems to challenge sensibilities to such an extent that positive engagement becomes well nigh impossible for a vast proportion of the public.

While many define 'contemporary' as anything that is made in very recent times and contemporary art as 'creative work by living visual artists and craft practitioners' (Myer 2002), some suggest that contemporary art refers to work made since the 1970s (Judd 2002), or to art made after the social upheavals of the 1960s (Madison 1988; Bann 1991; Burke 1995; Culler 1997; Harland 1999; Richter 2000; Martindale & Thomas 2006), and is marked by the division between object-based and ideas-based practices (Timms 2004). This implicates discursivity as a defining quality of

contemporary art. British installation artist Jake Chapman[1] exemplifies this discursive nature of art: .

> [I]t is too easy to reduce the experience of the art object to looking... [A]rt is a discursive practice above all... When you put a frame around a picture that picture is in dialogue with other pictures by the same artist and other artists, it's open ended (Chapman, cited in Turning Point 2006).

Therefore, while contemporary practice might be thought of as anything made today, in the context of this study contemporary art is that work which seeks to engage discursively rather than aesthetically. While it is acknowledged that art may have caused consternation for audiences for centuries, there would appear to be a particular difficulty experienced by present-day audiences with respect to much art made since the 1960s. This chapter considers the impact of discursive art practice on the viewer's relationship to understanding art.

DANTO'S ARTWORLD

The cause of the disconnection between the viewer and discursive art practice is articulated in the split that Arthur C Danto identified in 'The Artworld', a paper he delivered to the American Philosophical Association in 1964, which was extended in his subsequent book *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (1981). In his writing, Danto employs dialectics to unpack some of the most commonly held assumptions about the nature of art. In another publication, *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and The Pale of History* (1997), Danto compresses over thirty years of investigation and analysis into an account of three major phases in western art and in doing so proposes a definition of art. He names the phases – illusionism, essentialism and the philosophical. It is the third phase, originating in the 1960s, which delineates the period when art practice becomes confronting, if not impossible, for many people. Danto's

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[1]   Jake Chapman is quoted in *Turning Point Strategy for the Contemporary Visual Arts in England* (Turning Point 2006). This report is in turn highlighted in *First We See, a* recent review of visual arts education in Australia (Davies 2008).

consideration of the differences between these phases provides a useful tool in understanding contemporary art and its relationship to the viewer. What follows is a summary of Danto's three phases with a view to coming to some understanding of the inevitability of many viewers' disconnection with contemporary art.

Phase 1: Illusionism

The first phase in Danto's triad is basically that articulated by Plato in classical times and Giorgio Vasari in the sixteenth century in his book *The Lives of the Artists* (Vasari 1550 and 1964). This phase sees the purpose of art as mimesis, the representation of nature in its ideal form. Between classical artists and those of the Renaissance, techniques that could represent three-dimensional form and space were invented or revived from the past. These included shading, chiaroscuro, mathematical single-point perspective, foreshortening and the modulation of tone and colour. From the Renaissance to the Academy and the salons of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, individual artists and their associated schools battled to come to grips with the translation of optical reality onto a two-dimensional surface.

Vasari's rules were based on the assumption that the origin of art was the reflection of nature and a re-enactment of God's plan, which had reached perfection in Antiquity (Vasari 1964, pp.1-11). The qualities of a painting or a sculpture could be assessed in terms of how much the representation looked like the real thing; that is, how much the two-dimensional surface could give the illusion of three dimensions. The role of the viewer was to engage in judgement using the principles of the ideal and the illusion of the real as the benchmarks. The rules of representation did not exclude the imaginary as long as what was being imagined operated within a space determined by the rules of three-dimensional optical illusionism.

Danto concludes his analysis of illusionism with the argument that '[i]f illusion is to occur, the viewer cannot be conscious of any properties that

really belong to the medium, for the degree that we perceive that it is medium, illusion is effectively aborted. The medium ... must be invisible' (Danto 1981, p.151). In other words, for the illusion to be successful, the image is understood in terms of what it represents, rather than as a painting.

Phase 2: Essentialism

It is the invisibility of the artwork as a painting that is overthrown in the second phase, which Danto refers to generally as 'essentialism' or 'formalism' but which he has also described as the 'Greenberg episode' (Danto 1997, p.125) and the 'Age of Manifestos' (ibid., p.29). With the advent of the camera and the completion of the realism/illusionism project, what was to become of art? In concert with the trends in science and atomic physics at the time, artists and theorists sought to reveal art's essential qualities.

Danto bestows the primary role of articulating what the new theory would mean in painting on Clement Greenberg, calling him the 'greatest narrativist of modernism' (ibid., p.8). The narrative was the progressive stripping away of the inessential mimetic qualities of painting. While Greenberg is known primarily for his advocacy of minimalist abstraction, he credits Manet with being the artist who first exposed the essential two-dimensionality of the painted surface, thus disrupting the mimetic illusion. Greenberg sees in Manet's painting the moment when the materiality of the illusion is made manifest 'by virtue of the frankness with which [his paintings] declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, pp.73-74). Greenberg describes how the Impressionists showed that their work was made from 'paint that came from pots and tubes' and that Cézanne sacrificed optical correctness in order to fit his design to the rectangular shape of the canvas. Thus, step-by-step Greenberg constructed a narrative of modernism to replace the narrative of the traditional representational painting as defined by Vasari (Danto 1997, p.7).

Danto records how Greenberg's position was informed by Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 1781, 1963), referring to Greenberg as 'incontestably the foremost Kantian art critic of our time' (Danto 1997, p.84). Greenberg acknowledged Kant as the first real modernist because he was the first to 'criticize the means itself of criticism' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997). Danto elaborates this aspect of Kant's contribution, noting that Kant called a mode of knowledge pure when 'there is no admixture of anything empirical,' that is, when it was pure *a priori* knowledge. And 'pure reason' is the source of the 'principles whereby we know we know anything absolutely *a priori*' (Kant, cited in Danto 1997, p.67).

For Greenberg, applying Kant's aesthetic theory to art meant that 'the essence of modernism [lies] in the use of the characteristics of the discipline to criticize the discipline' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, p.67). As a consequence, to be true to its essence each modernist work was obliged to 'eliminate ... any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, p.67). Thus, the techniques of perspective, foreshortening and chiaroscuro, which marked the progressive steps of mimesis, were displaced by painting's non-mimetic features – 'flatness, the consciousness of paint and brushstroke, the rectangular shape' (Danto 1997, p.7). In other words, the parameters of the medium were defined according to the medium's own terms. Danto refers to the transition from mimesis to essentialism as 'the moment of self-consciousness when painting undertakes to ask what itself is, and so the art of painting becomes simultaneously a philosophical investigation into the nature of painting' (ibid., p.68). Danto says of Greenberg's view that:

> Each modernist painting ... would then be a critique of pure painting: painting from which one should be able to deduce the principles peculiar to painting as painting ... Thus each art would be rendered 'pure', and in its purity find the guarantee of its standards as well as of its independence. 'Purity" meant self-definition (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, pp.67-69).

The division between realist theory and formalism was neatly collapsed by Greenberg, with the incorporation of realist art within the formalist frame through the edict that it was the form rather than the content of an image that determined its qualities (Danto 1997, p.7). As Danto puts it, 'the conditions of representation themselves become central, so that art in a way becomes its own subject' (ibid., p.7). True to Kant, the role of the artist was to reveal art's essential form and thereby eliminate those factors that were held to be untrue to the medium.

Greenberg was also influenced by Kant in the belief that art should be apprehended through *disinterest*. Danto quotes Kant saying, 'taste is the faculty of judging of an object or a method of representing it by an *entirely disinterested* satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The object of such satisfaction is called *beautiful*' (Kant, cited in Danto 1997, p.81). Disinterest meant 'the intellect working independently of the will' or, quoting Kant himself, without recourse to 'the maintenance and relief of our existence' (ibid., p.82). In other words, disinterest requires a distancing from normal earthly matters. For Greenberg, as with Kant, 'every interest spoils the judgment of taste' (Danto 1997, p.82).

The disinterested eye was not, however, a random, freewheeling phenomenon but, as Greenberg would have it, '[q]uality in art is not just a matter of private experience. There is a *consensus* of taste' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, 89). Yet, the capacity to engage this consensus was conditional. In the case of modern art, Greenberg believed that people who do not make the effort to experience or appreciate abstract art in the way he prescribed '[did] not have the right to pronounce on any kind of art – much less abstract art'. They do not because they 'have not taken the trouble to amass sufficient experience of it, and it makes no difference in this respect how much experience they have in other fields of art' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, p.87). In other words, Greenberg with his 'practiced eye' had gained the capacity to discern the truth of art. He had both judgement and taste.

As a consequence, the experience of art for Greenberg is more or less encapsulated in an absolute and disinterested moment. Danto relates the story of Greenberg visiting artists in their studios:

> Greenberg would stand with his back to a new painting until it was in place, and then wheel abruptly around to let his practiced eye take it in without giving the mind a chance to interpose any prior theories, as if it were a race between the transmission of visual stimuli and the speed of thought (Danto 1997, p.89).

Greenberg believed adamantly that any external influence or disruption would interfere and corrupt the aesthetic response. While the art expert and critic may discuss and comment on such factors as the intentions of the artist, their social and historical background and knowledge of materials and stylistic possibilities, when it comes to the crunch – the moment of aesthetic response – all this extraneous material must be set aside if an authentic experience is to be achieved.

The formalist aesthetic code was of a completely different order to the representational code that had been applied successfully in previous periods. As a consequence, the appreciation of art was available to only the few in possession of 'the practiced eye' with which they could judge the good from the bad. Such critics became champions for particular artists and their reputations intertwined. Through the writing of manifestos and the direct influence on how artists worked, critics like Greenberg become as integral to the art-making process as the artists themselves. The discipline required to sustain aesthetic judgement under these stipulations accelerated the alienation of the general public from the experience of art. The only opportunity for the viewer was to learn the language of the avant-garde and become a connoisseur.

A corollary to the 'disinterested' apprehension of art derives from Kant's notion of beauty as 'purposiveness without specific purpose' (Kant, cited in Danto 1997, p.84). Quoting Kant in his discussion of Greenberg, Danto records, '[t]he concept of beautiful art does not permit the judgement upon the beauty of a product to be derived from any rule which has a concept as

its determining ground' (ibid., p.86). This is reflected in Greenberg's own statement:

> Quality in art can be neither ascertained nor proved by logic or discourse. Experience alone in this area – and the experience, so to speak, of experience. This is what all the serious philosophers of art since Immanuel Kant have concluded (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, p.86).

In other words, to engage anything outside the artwork would introduce an element of utility, which was anathema to the essentialist aesthetic experience and what had come to be understood as the philosophical imperative of art.

Phase 3: Post-historical/Philosophical

In Danto's third phase the limits of essential form and the exclusion of utility are questioned. Danto refers to this phase as post-historical because he sees it marking the end of the progressive notion of art history. It can also be understood as the philosophical phase, or what I have termed the phase of 'discursive art', as Danto believes it is here where 'the true form of the philosophical question' of art becomes apparent (Danto 1997, p.113).

By 1964, when Danto wrote his seminal paper 'The Artworld', artists' achievements over hundreds of years of art history seemed to cover every possibility. This led Dickie to pronounce in his 'institutional theory' that artists had *carte blanche* to do anything and everything as long as the artworld said it was all right (Dickie 1974). Danto, however, was not so sure Dickie's pronouncement was correct. Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box* (1964), provided Danto's epiphany and his point of difference with Dickie. This object, which looked like a mere real thing that could be found in any supermarket, was somehow transformed into an artwork. How could the same thing be two different things? Danto, who incidentally coined the term 'the artworld', refuted Dickie's claim that the artworld decided it was so, concluding that the difference between art and non-art was not

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'nothing'; rather, the very difference between art and non-art made *Brillo Box* art (Danto 1981).

Danto argues that when Andy Warhol put a Brillo box in the New York gallery in 1964, the definition of art was turned upside-down. Instead of being a realistic object or an object that could be evaluated according to formalist principles, here was something that was a real thing. If something could be an ordinary utilitarian object one moment and a work of art the next, what was involved in such a transformation or *transfiguration*?

From this moment, Danto postulates:

> [T]here are two orders of aesthetic response, depending upon whether the response is to an artwork or to a mere real thing that cannot be told apart from it. Hence we cannot appeal to aesthetic considerations in order to get our definition of art, inasmuch as we need the definition of art in order to identify the sorts of aesthetic responses appropriate to works of art in contrast with mere real things (Danto 1981, pp.94-95).

In other words, Danto is not concerned with the pronouncement as Dickie would have it, but with what actually changed as a consequence of the pronouncement or, perhaps more accurately, in order to make the pronouncement possible in the first place.

Although the essentialist period seemed to have been located in the reductionist project of High Modernism and in the resolution of the philosophical question, 'What is art?', this philosophical position could not be maintained once *Brillo Box* eliminated the need for any particular form or formal qualities, be they essentialist or any other kind. Danto sees in this new condition that form becomes a psychological question about what constitutes the aesthetic response rather than a philosophical one about what constitutes the art object. Danto (1981, p.114) also appreciates that in coming to this understanding, the overriding philosophical question that art had been investigating since its inception was: What is the difference between artworks and mere things?

Danto realised that whereas Greenberg believed that 'art alone and unaided presents itself to the eye as art ... this cannot be so, that artworks and real things cannot be told apart by visual inspection alone' (Danto 1997, p.71). Some argue that Duchamp's ready-mades, exhibited almost half a century before Warhol's *Brillo Box*, did the same thing (Ades 1986, p.11). Danto is less convinced, seeing Duchamp's contribution as refuting the necessity for the aesthetic in art but also noting how readily Duchamp's peers and subsequent supporters were able to accommodate his found objects within the aesthetic (Danto 1997, p.84). That it is almost impossible to find urinals of the same design exhibited by Duchamp on the open market is testament to the aestheticisation of this particular form. In a recent ABC Radio National interview with Alan Saunders, Danto said of the relationship between the work of Duchamp and Warhol that 'there are the outward similarities, but very different artistic impulses and very different ... art historical explanations of the two bodies of work' (Saunders 2007). It could be argued that while Duchamp removed the necessity of the aesthetic from art, Warhol removed the entire object. Whoever is to blame, it would seem that between Duchamp and Warhol, previous theories of art were put on notice. Both Duchamp's anti-aesthetic provocations and Warhol's facsimiles of ordinary things are parts of a dis-continuum that has created havoc for those who value aesthetic judgement.

As a consequence of the removal of the deference to form as the criterion for aesthetic judgement, the discerning eye is disarmed. For Danto, aesthetic judgement is no longer paramount in the engagement with art because the necessary condition of the artwork no longer resides in either the aesthetic form or the material qualities of the art object. Therefore, there is nothing to judge. Danto adds that he became aware of 'the dawning sense that the absence of direction was the defining trait of the new period' (Danto 1997, p.13). The critic's role of judging the true direction of art becomes diminished, at least at a theoretical level, for as has been noted, aesthetic judgement is still the focus of art appreciation. It is this

disconnection from aesthetic judgement that Danto describes as 'the end of art' (Danto 1997).

Danto finds that 'once the status of art was established [that is, art at the end of art], it was fairly clear that aesthetics as a theory was badly in need of repair if it was to be helpful in dealing with art at all' (ibid., p.86). This meant 'overhauling the distinction between aesthetics and the practical as the default basis of the discipline' (ibid., p.86). He clarifies what he means by 'the practical', saying artworks 'use the form ... to make a point' (Danto 1981, p.146):

> Any representation not an artwork can be matched by one that is one, the
> difference lying in the fact that the artwork uses the way the non artwork presents
> its content to make a point about how that content is presented (Danto 1981,
> p.146).

So rather than the aesthetic form providing the totality of the fuel for the response, Danto exposes one of the grim truths of contemporary art in relationship to aesthetics when he notes in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* that, 'surfaces, lovely or awful, are irrelevant or merely a fact' (Danto 1986, p.13).

This shift towards emphasising the practical act of 'making a point' by using the aesthetic rather than responding to it, is perhaps the most radical difference between formalist aesthetics and the post-historical. It marks the shift from aesthetic judgement to discursive practice. The question remains, what effect does this shift have on the experience of the viewer?

AGAINST INTERPRETATION

It is over forty years since Danto first published 'The Artworld', and yet his understanding of the necessary condition of art is by no means taken as universal. To gain some understanding of why this may be the case, I wish to return to the pre-Warhol condition and to the power exerted by the dominant paradigm to bring into its realm whatever it needed to sustain

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itself. In doing so I will focus primarily on the writings of Susan Sontag and Danto's teacher, Susanne Langer.

Two fields of conflict became apparent as artists begin to play with the philosophical boundaries of formalist aesthetics. On the one side of this conflict, critics such as Greenberg and Michael Fried argued for a strict adherence to the creed of formalism. In Fried's opinion, this meant excluding works that might slip into literality and theatricality, such as the three-dimensional work of Donald Judd and Robert Morris (Fried 1992, pp.822-834). Fried's criticism was based on his perception that, as these works involved duration, they violated the essentialist principle that required that 'at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest' (ibid., p.832). For their part, artists like Judd and Morris were questioning the orthodoxy of this absolutist position – Judd with his reliefs and freestanding objects and Morris with his exploration of the relationship between the spectators and the object.

While this work confounded Greenberg and Fried, others, including Susan Sontag, were able to reach out beyond the confines of rigid essentialism in order to encompass many of the new practices. An example of Sontag's capacity for conflating the new into a formalist paradigm focuses on the 1960's invention of 'the happening'. According to Sontag's description, this innovation in art practice included: assaulting the audience with water and objects; making it difficult for the audience to see what is happening; treating time so that no one knew when the event was over; a lack of climax or sense of a plot; the use of impermanent materials, including people; an ambiguity between sets and props and costumes; and the use of ritual and repetition (Sontag 1966, pp.263-274). Despite the seeming dissolution of form, Sontag described the happening as:

> a logical development of the New York school of painting of the fifties ... The
> gigantic size of many of the canvases ... designed to overwhelm and envelop the
> spectator, plus the increasing use of materials other than paint to adhere to, and
> later extend from the canvas, indicate the latent intention of this type of painting to
> project itself into a three-dimensional form (Sontag 1966, pp.268- 269).

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In other words, in spite of the challenge to formalism that the happening exemplifies for some, Sontag's definition absorbs the happening into the aesthetic realm, insisting that the purpose of the happening and its surrealistic agenda was to 'reeducate the senses' (Sontag 1966, p.271) and that it is 'designed to stir the modern audience from its cozy (sic) emotional anaesthesia' (ibid., p.273). She offers no social perspective with regard to the happening, continuing to see interpretation as anathema to the aesthetic experience. Despite the alternative political climate in which she was immersed, she was unable to place happenings in a broader, alternative frame. Her writings are located firmly within a formalist aesthetic – describing the messiness and clutter without consideration of the meaning of such a manoeuvre.

In similar vein, Sontag is able to readily collapse Pop Art within the formalist aesthetic by seeing it as an opportunity for the viewer to become more alert to aesthetic potentialities. In her essay 'Against Interpretation' (Sontag 1966) she says, when comparing abstraction to Pop Art:

> The flight from interpretation seems particularly a feature of modern painting. Abstract painting is the attempt to have, in the ordinary sense, no content; since there is no content, there can be no interpretation. Pop Art works by the opposite means to the same result; using a content so blatant, so 'what it is,' it, too, ends by being uninterpretable (Sontag 1966, p.10).

Sontag describes the basic premise as follows:

> [T]he purpose of art is always, ultimately, to give pleasure – though our sensibilities may take time to catch up with the forms of pleasure that art in a given time may offer ... If art is understood as a form of discipline of the feelings and a programming of the sensations, then the feeling (or sensation) given off by a Rauschenberg painting might be like that of a song by the Supremes. The brio and elegance of Budd Boetticher's *The Rise and Fall of Legs Diamond* or the singing style of Dionne Warwick can be appreciated as a complex and pleasurable event. They are experienced without condescension (Sontag 1966, p.303).

In other words, the social and political conditions have no bearing on the fundamentals of the aesthetic experience. For Sontag, the new

developments were simply new styles, which could also serve the senses. She also seems to imply that because it appeals primarily to the senses, no special training is needed to appreciate it.

Sontag's entire premise is that interpretation is anathema to the aesthetic response. In the title essay she says:

> What is needed, first, is more attention to form in art. If excessive stress on content provokes the arrogance of interpretation, more extended and more thorough descriptions of form would silence. What is needed is a vocabulary – a descriptive, rather than prescriptive, vocabulary – for forms (Sontag 1966, p.12).

Her connection to Kant is obvious: 'Transparence is the highest, most liberating value in art – and in criticism – today. Transparence means experiencing the luminousness of the thing itself, of things being what they are' (Sontag 1966, p.13). She is able to justify the seeming absence of art content on aesthetic grounds commensurate with Greenbergian thought, while at the same time extending beyond Greenberg's aversion to art as popular culture. Sontag thus keeps the Kantian promise alive in an environment in which many others can only see decadence. Sontag opens up the possibility for aesthetics to embrace more pluralistic manifestations of culture without 'the renunciation of all standards' by accessing a 'new sensibility', which is capable of discerning 'new standards of beauty and style and taste' (ibid., p.304).

The second field of conflict concentrates on the fundamental assumption of formalist aesthetics that there is no room for the statement or the proposition. Greenberg believed that '[a] work of art must *be* not *mean*' (Greenberg, cited in Danto 1997, p.71). This was a position he had held since the 1940s and which Susanne Langer was instrumental in defining in her work *Feeling and Form* (Langer 1953, p.20). Langer goes to great lengths to prove that the nature of the aesthetic experience is fundamentally non-propositional or non-discursive. By 'non-discursive' Langer means that whereas language has a vocabulary, syntax and a linear structure, the aesthetic realm does not function in this way. An artwork is experienced at

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once in its entirety through the apprehension of its 'significant form' whose 'significance is that of a symbol', which she describes as:

> a highly articulated sensuous object, which by virtue of its dynamic structure can express the forms of vital experience which language is peculiarly unfit to convey. Feeling, life, motion and emotion constitute its import. The entire qualification one must have for understanding art is responsiveness (Langer 1953, p.401).

Langer understood responsiveness as a 'natural gift', which, though influenced positively or negatively by experience, is essentially intuitive:

> [T]he free exercise of artistic intuition often depends on clearing the mind of intellectual prejudices and false conceptions that inhibit people's natural responsiveness (Langer 1953, p.401).

In other words, art should not engage in questions and answers about political, cultural and social matters but rather should offer the viewer the chance for transcendence from such earthly concerns.

In the 1960s, Sontag reiterated this belief in her article 'On Style', in which she argued adamantly against works of art being statements:

> To treat works of art in this fashion is not wholly irrelevant. But it is, obviously, putting art to use – for such purpose as inquiring into the history of ideas, diagnosing contemporary culture, or creating social solidarity. Such a treatment has little to do with what actually happens when a person possessing some training and aesthetic sensibility looks at a work of art appropriately. A work of art encountered as a work of art is an experience, not a statement or an answer to a question. Art is not only about something, it is something. A work of art is a thing *in* the world, not just a text or commentary *on* the world (Sontag 1966, p.21).

Sontag is arguing, as did Kant, that the experience of art is not discursive. She goes on to interpose the transcendence of the aesthetic experience in contrast to the consideration of earthy matters:

> I am not saying that a work of art creates a world which is entirely self-referring. Of course, works of art (with the important exception of music) refer to the real world – to our knowledge, to our experience, to our values. They present information and evaluations. But their distinctive feature is that they give rise not to conceptual knowledge (which *is* the distinctive feature of discursive or scientific

knowledge – e.g., philosophy, sociology, psychology, history) but to something like an excitation, a phenomenon of commitment, judgment in a state of thralldom [sic] or captivation (Sontag 1966, pp.21-22).

Langer's and Sontag's assertions that the aesthetic experience is non-discursive and non-propositional is at odds with what Duchamp's ready-mades and Warhol's Brillo boxes managed to achieve; that is, to ask questions and to make the prevailing discourses apparent. In other words, these works *are* propositional and discursive. I believe that Danto's understanding of the split between essentialism and the philosophical hinges on the impossibility of the propositional being included within the aesthetic. Not only are aesthetic judgement and discursive interpretation alternative ways to appreciate artwork, they are diametrically opposed. On the one hand, aesthetic judgement cannot involve interpretation and, on the other, interpretation precludes the purity of aesthetic judgement. The interpreter might *use* aesthetic judgement, but as utility is anathema to aesthetic judgement, there is an impasse.

Addressing this impasse and its effect on the viewer of contemporary art is the fundamental purpose of this research. What are the conditions in which the viewer can successfully negotiate this impasse?

CHAPTER 2

DISCURSIVE PRACTICE IN THE PUBLIC ART MUSEUM

The first requirement for engaging the viewer with discursive art practice is exposure to such practice. This chapter examines how the shift from formalist aesthetics to discursive art practice became manifest in the public art museum in the Australian setting, following the watershed that Danto identifies with Warhol's *Brillo Box* in the 1960s. Consideration is given to the way in which exposure to discursive practice relates to the viewer's experience of the public art museum.

AUSTRALIA'S PIVOTAL MOMENT

On the surface discursive practice enters the art museum via a number of channels — first by the artists themselves, then by interested others such as curators championing particular ways of working, then in pockets of practice sanctioned by public institutions, and finally as an integrated strategic policy of the institution. The events selected to illustrate these stages are taken from a number of significant texts on the history of Australian art. These include: *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Art 1970-*

1994 by Charles Green (1995); *A Quiet Revolution: The Rise of Australian Art 1946-1968* by Christopher Heathcote (1995); *What is Appropriation? An anthology of critical writings on Australian art in the '80s and '90s* by Rex Butler (1996); *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art* by Ian McLean (1998); *Australian Art* by Andrew Sayers (2001); and *Transformations in Australian Art* by Terence Smith (2002).

There is a considerable degree of consensus amongst the authors of these texts that *The Field* exhibition was a pivotal moment in the history of Australian art. The exhibition was curated by Brian Finemore and John Stringer to coincide with the 1968 reopening of Melbourne's National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) at Roy Grounds' new modernist edifice on St Kilda Road. At the time, *The Field* was seen as representing either the triumph or the last gasp of formalism. However, with the benefit of hindsight the exhibition can also be seen as marking a move, albeit a subtle one, towards a more discursive form of art practice (Heathcote 1995; Smith 2002).
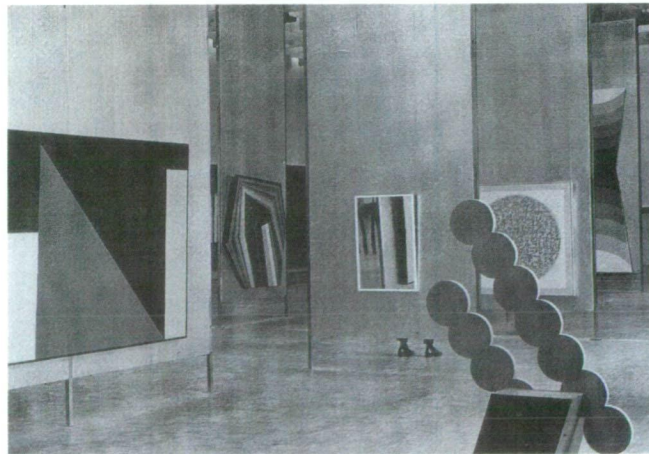
The Field, National Gallery of Victoria, 1968
(Image: reproduced from Heathcote 1995)

The *Field* was perceived by its instigators as an exhibition that would act as a dynamic articulation of the vision for Australia's newest gallery. The exhibition consisted of large-scale paintings and sculptures by contemporary Australian artists ostensibly working in the styles of hard-

edge and colour-field. The initial public response to the exhibition verged on the euphoric. Daniel Thomas, later reflecting on the occasion, said:

> [T]he new building's visitors had probably not thought much about art at all before and they probably enjoyed the bright colour, the newness, the bigness, the spectacle, in [the] new entertainment centre ... with its air-conditioning, carpets, escalators, shops and cafés and glossy presentation that could begin to compete with the excitement of a visit to Myer's or David Jones' department stores (Thomas 1988, p.60).

However, the enthusiasm from the visiting public was swiftly countered by disillusionment on the part of many critics and local artists. While *The Field* represented Australian artists as players in an international scene, according to critics such as Patrick McCaughey and Elwyn Lynn (Smith 2002, p.120), others saw the show as mere plagiarism (ibid., p.108). This derogatory comparison was readily made with the exhibition *Two Decades of American Art* that had toured to Australia in the previous year. This major exhibition had included works by de Kooning, Pollock, Guston, Still, Rothko, Johns, Louis, Newman, Stella, Reinhardt, Warhol, Held, Noland and Frankenthaler, creating a display that exemplified the Greenbergian canon. For critics of *The Field* and even for some of the participating artists, the exhibition understood as the Australian answer to the American show was found wanting. Bruce Pollard, director of the renowned Melbourne commercial art gallery Pinacotheca, said, 'I think previously artists thought they were onto something revolutionary, only to be confronted with acres of fairly average empty painting' (Pollard 1980, p.134). Smith suggests that the bringing together of *The Field* enabled artists to see their work as one amongst others and that some works 'were not only *like* theirs, but were often comparable in quality. In other words, their sense of themselves as avant-garde artists was, for all these reasons, shaken' (Smith 2002, p.109).

According to Katherine Gregory, in her comprehensive thesis on the relationship between visual art and the public museum, the exhibition '[u]ncovered the split within current practice and instigated debate about

the nature of contemporary art', with Patrick McCaughey, art critic for the *Age* newspaper, on one side advocating an international style, and on the other, younger artists claiming that the work was 'outmoded and unsustainable Greenbergian aesthetics' (Gregory 2004, p.35).

Irrespective of perceptions of *The Field* as a beginning or end, the atmosphere created around the exhibition helped to focus attention on alternative means of making art. *The Field* was not an isolated event, however. It coincided with the oppositional politics of a developing counter-culture that was increasingly unwilling to align the Australian future with American foreign policy. From a counter-cultural perspective the participating artists in *The Field* were seen as 'accomplices in US cultural imperialism' (Heathcote 1995, p.208). By inference the National Gallery of Victoria was seen as aligning with an outmoded ideology. Thus, *The Field* marks a dividing line. Heathcote says:

> Contemporary art fractured following the criticism brought on by *The Field*. Henceforth, younger painters and sculptors could be divided between those who continued to believe in the primacy of art objects, who maintained a faith in aesthetic values and expressive concerns, and artists who asserted that content was of critical importance, in the social significance and semantic dimensions of art (Heathcote 1995, p.210).

This set the scene for an accelerating gravitation towards alternative practices and alternative means of presentation. This is not to say, however, that alternative practices were being totally ignored by Australian artists who were exhibited in *The Field*. In fact there were some rebels within show itself. The most obvious were Ian Burn and Mel Ramsden. At one level, the minimalist aesthetic of their contributions complied with the curatorial brief. On another level, however, these were conceptual works that played with perceptions and the object in art. Ramsden's *Secret Painting* (1967-68) was described as an acrylic on canvas and Photostat. It was a painted black square and an adjacent piece of text that read: 'The content of this painting is invisible; the character and dimension of the content are to be kept permanently secret, known only to the artist'.

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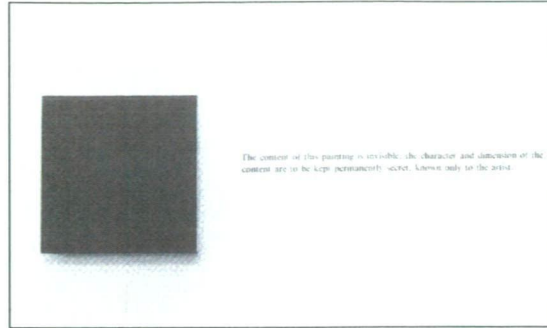
Mel Ramsden
Secret Painting, 1968
(Image: reproduced from Smith 2002, p.129)

Burn's *Two Glass/Mirror Piece* (1967-68) is described by Terry Smith as:

> two sheets of glass, about three feet high and two wide, mounted over mirrors and
> framed with thin white strips of painted wood – just this set on the line on the wall
> like … as if they were … paintings (Smith 2002, p.123).
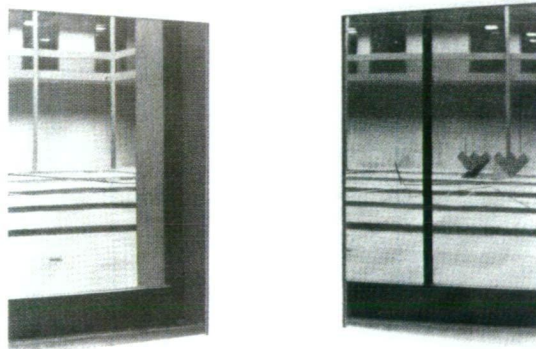
Ian Burn
Two Glass/Mirror Piece, 1967-68
(Image: reproduced from *The Field* catalogue, pp.12-13)

Interestingly, Green notes in relation to the non-object nature of Burn's and
Ramsden's work that 'neither their art nor mention of any such tendency
appeared in the three exhibition catalogue essays' (Green 1995, p.31).
Terry Smith himself admits that he hardly noticed Burn's work:

> I recall walking straight past thinking that I had 'got the picture' in a glance: oh
> no, one of those anti-painting stunts … Mirrors instead of painting! We get to see
> ourselves instead of a portrait of the artist – how obvious! … For someone
> accustomed to staring long and hard at painting, all interpretative faculties on full

> alert, striving to stay attuned to the finest nuances of colour and shape, this seemed like a gap in the flow of the exhibition, almost a hole in the wall (Smith 2002, p.123).

Smith defends his failure at the time to make the connections between the specificity of the artwork and Burn's entry in the catalogue, which gave clues to the work's dialogical content, generalising his difficulty by saying:

> None of this was visible at the time. Not to me, nor to any of those who wrote about the exhibition ... What got in the way? Why did we fail to make the connection? ... Formalism seemed large enough to contain all the avant-garde impulses which Modernism might require. Thus the stylistic blinkers worn by most viewers of 'The Field' exhibition [sic] (Smith 2002, p.124).

With hindsight, Smith also suggests that other artists were not simply mimicking the international style either, noting that 'many artists played fast and loose with some of these much-heralded international styles and, in the case of Dale Hickey and Robert Rooney, ironically with the idea of style as such' (Smith 2002, pp.122-23). In other words, Australian artists were tampering with the formalist rules. Critics at the time, however, were unable to see this in any other way than pejoratively because of the limitations they placed on what art could or should be. From these examples, it is apparent that individual artists made the initial inroads into the art museum as far as discursive practice was concerned, even if at the time the discursivity of their work was invisible. Indeed, even artistically literate critics like Smith experienced this invisibility. This is even more ironic given that in this work Burn sought to locate the viewer as the subject at the centre of the process of viewing.

Smith questions whether Finemore and Stringer were aware of what they were actually doing in curating this exhibition. In the catalogue the curators describe the exhibition as follows:

> It concentrates on the abstractionists, and further restricts itself to an aspect thereof which one is reluctant to confine by terminology, but the words, hard edge, unit pattern, colour field, flat abstraction, conceptual and minimal have been used (Finemore & Stringer 1968, p.3).

That 'conceptual' is conflated within the field of abstraction would seem to indicate their lack of awareness of the discursivity of some of the works in the exhibition.

Smith notes the curators' stated intention to highlight 'the simultaneity of uniformity and variety' (Smith 2002, p.122). He goes on to conclude that 'nothing is more indicative of that historical moment than the sense that what now appears as an open list followed by a subtle insight, then seemed a description of a narrow artistic option followed by a banality' (ibid., p.122). In other words, an aesthetic reading, which is implicit in his use of 'banality', interrupted the capacity to engage with the work as Burn and others intended.

The likelihood that the curators may have not quite understood what they were dealing with, at least in relation to Burn's work, gains credence from Ramsden's recent disclosure to Terry Smith concerning some notes that Burn intended to have 'framed and mounted alongside' the mirror components. These notes, which Smith says 'discussed the materiality of the spectator's encounter, and, increasingly, its phenomenology' (Smith 2002, p.128), were not included in *The Field*. It is significant to note that the decision to exclude them was not made by Burn but by the gallery. Smith speculates on the impact that the inclusion of these notes might have had, not least for his own comprehension, concluding that, '[t]his was an inexcusable failure of curatorial nerve' (ibid., p.128).

The omission is perhaps an understandable one. Given the disparity between the autonomy of the aesthetic mode of viewing and the edict that the artwork should 'speak for itself,' the problem faced by the curators becomes apparent. Any explanatory wall text would interrupt the aesthetic space whose presentation style demanded that extraneous clutter be eliminated. If this meant Burn's notes, then so be it. Burn may have had the intention to take the viewer into an alternative viewing space through his text; however, within the context of conceptual frame of *The Field,* this was too alternative a proposition. In fact, what Burn had intended was so

alternative that the idea that discounting the text would interfere with the meaning of the work was not even considered.

While many writers acknowledge the significance of Burn in the transformation of Australian art from object to non-object forms, I argue that it is this singular omission which encapsulates the decisive moment between formalist aesthetics and discursive practice within the public art museum. Here was an artist actively seeking to give the viewer an alternative code that would make the meaning of the work more accessible by making the utility of the work apparent. The museum, in its incapacity to recognise this alternative code, denied the viewer access to this possibility.

Burn had made work that included text panels prior to *The Field*. However, in the context of this thesis, what is significant is that *Two Glass/Mirror Piece* was included in an exhibition that was held in the public space of the National Gallery of Victoria. It is therefore of even greater significance that the notes were excluded, as this museum has a responsibility to a larger, broader and more general audience and therefore the likelihood of misinterpretation could be expected to be even greater. If Terry Smith, as an active member of the artworld, had difficulty with Burn's work, what chance did the general public have? It would seem that Burn had predicted this and had sought to ameliorate some of the effects, but this method did not conform to the dominant minimalist aesthetic. As a consequence, the point of the work was lost, as it was collapsed back into formalism.

In 1971, Smith endeavoured to make amends for his original oversight by curating the exhibition *The Situation Now: Object or Post Object Art?* at the new Contemporary Art Society Gallery in Sydney. Through this exhibition, Smith sought to articulate the transition between minimalism and conceptualism in an Australian art context, both through the work selected and through a number of 'propositions' that accompanied the show. These included: the ideas on the incorporation of the viewer in the work; the split from art's-for-art-sake or an aesthetic position; the

disillusionment with hegemony; and the bringing of life into art (Smith 2002, pp.135-137). In doing so, Smith's awareness of the shift in art practice away from the formalist aesthetic was made apparent. However, in the context of this research it is significant to note that Smith used the Contemporary Art Society Gallery in Sydney as the venue for this exhibition and that this was not the public art museum but, rather, what could be described as an alternative art space.[2]

TENTATIVE STEPS

The Field had been an attempt by the museum to engage an avant-garde art scene. While it may be seen to have backfired, the art museum still endeavoured to rise to the demands being placed on it, including responding to the changes in arts practice. There were spaces for alternative practice within art museums, be they marginal within the institution as a whole. Charles Green notes that the only space for contemporary art at the NGV before their survey program began in 1978 was a small gallery on the third floor, which he describes as 'a low-ceiling cramped ivory tower' (Green 1995, p.31). The exhibitions within these subsidiary spaces tended to be generated by individuals championing alternative ways of working. They rarely had the wholehearted support of the museum. In other words, contemporary practice did not come into the public gallery easily, nor was it attained through the enlightenment of its directors. It was hard-won through the efforts of particular individuals making small inroads over considerable periods of time. These curators were willing to advocate on the artists' behalf, indeed, artists themselves often took on the role of curator. Some examples of progressive practice include: Brian Finemore's *Object and Idea* at the NGV in 1973, which exhibited artworks by John Armstrong, Tony Coleing, Aleks Danko, Nigel

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[2]   The Contemporary Art Society Gallery, previously the Central Street Gallery and later the Institute of Contemporary Art, was established in Sydney in 1966 by Tony McGillick, John White and Harold Noritis. They are described by Max Germaine as 'a group of young artists to promote their own 'avant garde' art in a co-operative venture' (Germaine 1984). Ian Milliss refers to the space as 'the artist run centre of hard-edged abstraction' (Carlson 2006).

Lendon, Ti Parks and Imants Tillers; *Recent Australian Art* in 1973 and the *Project* exhibitions between 1974 and 1977 at the Art Gallery of New South Wales under the curatorship of Daniel Thomas; the *Link* exhibition program by Ian North, also at the Art Gallery of South Australia between 1974 and 1979; and the *Survey* shows by Robert Lindsay at the National Gallery of Victoria from 1977 to 1980.

Such exhibitions introduced a different breed of artists and ideas into the pubic art museum. I would like to point out, however, that while these events were appreciated by those directly involved, they were peripheral to the primary activities of the institution. In his reflections on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the art journal *Artlink*, North describes the *Link* shows as 'a series of contemporary art exhibitions run on a very low budget ... on a regular basis without the fanfare of a major exhibition or the commitment of purchasing ... [and] satisfyingly feral' (North 2001, p.30). He also writes that he 'found it necessary to protect [his] director of the time from the truth, for fear that he might go cold on the project' (ibid., p.31). And further, that he 'had been obliged to run it almost as a hobby, given [his] other responsibilities, and several major retrospectives were brewing' (ibid., p.31). In other words, this series of innovative exhibitions was more or less secreted in the cracks as far as the institution was concerned, despite the fact that, with hindsight, the exhibitions are valued as significant moments in the history of Australian art.

Another significant example of the inclusion of discursive art practice in the public art museum is *Performance Documents Film Video* by Jennifer Phipps, curator of Australian art at National Gallery of Victoria, in which works by Tim Burns, Aleks Danko, Mike Parr, Robert Rooney, Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden and Terry Smith were presented (Gregory 2004, p.34). For the purposes of this study it is important to note that the people working in the public art museum were instrumental in bringing new art into the public arena. However, at the same time, the exhibitions were often undertaken

somewhat surreptitiously by the curators or begrudgingly on the part of the institution as a whole.

A number of art historians have noted that during the 1970s, despite the antagonism that had been shown towards the government's cultural instrumentalities by artists who felt excluded, these public agencies were pivotal in the development of contemporary practice. Bruce Adams (1990, p.33) and Charles Green (1995, pp.33-35) note that the state galleries showed the most progressive art. Green is perhaps a little circumspect in his support, saying:

> The art of the 1970s was characterised by pluralism, but the result of pluralism tended towards a dependence on institutions which were, in turn, occasionally forced to set aside inertia and conservatism to confront new art ... Public galleries such as the NGV were surprisingly quick to incorporate a few innovative projects like Kaldor's in order to confirm their own authority and prestige or in response to the fierce efforts of individual curators such as Brian Finemore, Daniel Thomas and Jennifer Phipps (Green 1995, p.29).

In other words, the art museum administration may not have been active advocates of the new practices but they were willing to include some of the new artistic trends if they were not too intrusive in terms of the commitment of financial and human resources, and did not rock the boat politically.

One exhibition stands out as exemplifying a dual position taken by the public art museum. In 1975, *Artists' Artists* was curated by Graeme Sturgeon and Peter Cripps at the NGV. Neither Sturgeon nor Cripps was an official curator at the gallery; rather, both were employed as education officers, as well as being artists in their own right. As outsider-curators, however, they were able to go about the planning of the exhibition in innovative ways. In keeping with the increasing call for inclusion, they invited the art community to select the artists to be shown. Gregory describes their approach as follows:

> Sturgeon and Cripps's methodology was distinctly utopian in its quasi-Marxist

On the one hand, the staging of this exhibition shows the museum's readiness to engage with contemporary practice; on the other, the museum directors were not afraid to exercise ultimate control over the curators' choices. The option for the gallery to exert its veto was enacted in response to Domenico de Clario's installation, *Elemental Landscapes* (1975).

Domenico de Clario
Elemental Landscapes, 1975
(Image: reproduced from Green 1995, p.16)

De Clario's work, 'an urban landscape in contrast to the tradition of Australian landscape painting' (Holmes 2003, p.4), consisted of a collection of personal artifacts, including furniture, clothes, documents and books, and radiators placed in the gallery in front of paintings from the permanent collection 'such a way the viewers were forced to confront his sculpture as they tried to contemplate the works on permanent display' (ibid., p.4). Thus, the placement of the work was essential to its meaning – the work was a discursive engagement with the gallery's collection. De Clario's work was removed from the exhibition by the administration without consulting the artist. The official reason given for the removal of the work by Gordon Thomson, the director of NGV, was that:

[The] effect of the juxtaposition on many important works of art in the collection

and on a part of it which there is a specifically dedicated public is such that [the director] had to decide that they cannot be placed there (Thomson, cited in Holmes 2003).

It could be argued from this comment that the dialogical nature of the work in its specific location was unable to be read, let alone appreciated, by the museum authorities. Instead, the pre-existing codes operating in the gallery were given priority and thus maintained. *Artists' Artists* was an example of the art museum wanting it both ways – including artists in decision-making and having the museum as the location for progressive practice on the one hand, yet having final say over the curatorship with the removal of difficult work that might offend its more prestigious clients on the other. That is, despite paying lip-service to contemporary practice, in general the museum perpetuated a more conventional line in regard to art.

While *Artists' Artists* was important with regard to the oppositional politics that was affecting the artworld, in the context of this thesis, *Artists' Artists* was also significant in terms of the way in which the selected work was physically located and presented within the public art museum. Rather than being hung in the primary gallery space, *Artists' Artists* was installed throughout the 'public' spaces of the gallery, such as the foyer and in free spaces within the permanent collection galleries, rather than in a specific gallery' (Gregory 2004, p.40). This was in part because of the lack of a contemporary gallery. However, this positioning can also be seen as an indicator of the marginal status of contemporary practice. Not to be defeated, the curators chose to use the spatial limitations to support the exhibition's conceptual framework:

> [T]he artworks' intervention into a particular, ideologically driven, narrative of art
> ... was epitomised by the physical arrangement of art in the gallery. By placing
> exhibitions of artworks in public spaces of the gallery, such as in the ground floor
> foyer where Cripps's sculpture entry was exhibited, or in the 'empty' centre of the
> Australian art gallery as was de Clario's installation, Sturgeon and Cripps drew
> attention to particular gaps in the gallery's survey of art that were conveyed
> through physical and spatial means as much as conceptual and curatorial (Gregory
> 2004, pp.39-40).

In other words, the curators placed the work within the institution in a way that transformed the entire art museum into a discursive space.

While it could be argued that through such interventions the most radical forms of 1970s art were shown in public gallery survey exhibitions, there were limits to what the public museum would tolerate. According to Green, as 'most experimental art was critical of the museum, ... [a]rt largely became what galleries and museums allowed inside their doors. The way this happened confirmed the ideologies that underlie the industry of art' (Green 1995, p.29). In other words, what was exhibited stood for how the museum wanted to be positioned. After all, *Artists' Artists* was only one small element in the scheme of things. More 'accepted' forms of art continued to dominate, with radical practice secreted more or less into the crevices. For example, despite the antagonism that had been generated over *The Field*, another internationalist exhibition, *Some Recent American Art*, was included in the NGV's exhibition program in 1973. Not long after this, in 1975, an exhibition entitled *Art and Language* was planned for the NGV. This exhibition was to be shown concurrently with *Modern Masters: Manet to Matisse,* a show from the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA). According to some historians, the NGV cancelled *Art and Language* because it offended William Leiberman, the curator of the MoMA show (Green 1995, p.31; Gregory 2004, p.41). Subsequently, *Art and Language* was moved to another venue. The NGV cancellation affronted the contemporary art fraternity and protest meetings, chaired by Terry Smith, were organised by Ewing and George Paton Gallery at the University of Melbourne in August 1975. At the first of the two meetings, six resolutions were presented, including, according to the poster advertising the second protest, 'that the [NGV] be restructured to make it responsive to the needs and interests of artists and public in an expansively democratic way' (Gregory 2004, p.43). Green generalises the tendency that these examples represent. He says that radical art was excluded despite the efforts of progressive patrons and curatorial staff and that:

exclusion was based, according to gallery trustees, on aesthetic grounds: either artistic merit was the question, or the museum was deemed to be above politics. Appeals for pragmatism and common sense, the two favourite motifs, justified the withdrawal of support from the most radical contemporary art (Green 1995, p.31).

Referring to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Holmes notes that it is 'the "more manageable" of contemporary arts' manifestations that find their way into the ... temporary galleries' (Holmes 2003, p.6).

I have argued there is timidity on the part of the public art museums when it comes to non-conventional practice and that what had marked this phase of discursive practice was the way individuals with access to these institutions made things happen by insinuating projects where they could. The projects that were more able to succeed were those that presented the art museum in a contemporary light while keeping the dominant conservative tendencies intact and, in the main, unchallenged. As long as the museum authorities could manage this ambiguity, they could maintain both radical and conservative images simultaneously, leaving only the occasional more extremely discursive artist, and their no doubt small audience, out in the cold.

ATTAINING CRITICAL MASS

The treatment of new practice was not just the art museum endeavouring to use particular art practices to articulate its position in relationship to traditional and contemporary practices, it was also a response to a broader political agenda that was being played out through various cultural institutions. In this regard, it is significant to note that the arts, including their contemporary aspects, were supported by the Whitlam Labor Government in the early 1970s as Terry Smith describes:

[A]long with its radical social agenda went [an] ... internationalising cultural policy including the establishment of significant support for experimental arts (Smith, 2002, p.138).

Under the Whitlam Government's auspices administrative support for the arts was restructured with the creation of the Australia Council and the budget for the arts was increased substantially. While the Labor Party's reign was short-lived, its legacy ensured that by 1980 the arts, including their more experimental aspects, were on a surer footing.

The increase in support provided to alternative arts activity created an atmosphere in which it could thrive relatively unfettered. As part of defining new forms of presentation, hierarchical social and political structures exemplified in the museum were jettisoned in favour of more collective approaches. In 1970, Inhibodress, a collective involving Sydney artists Mike Parr, Peter Kennedy and Tim Johnson, was formed, with others, such as Praxis in Perth in the early 1970s, Progressive Art Movement in Adelaide in 1974 and Community Arts Workers in Melbourne in 1975, following suit.

The alternative artspace network was augmented by the academy, with university galleries choosing to support alternative practice. This often took the form of research generated by art history departments or in response to new practices being forged by the students and staff in answer to the embrace of more overtly theoretical concerns. Since the 1960s, academics and intellectuals within the tertiary institutions of Europe had been increasingly engaged in questioning and re-evaluating the status quo and modernity. In *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Art 1970–1990,* Green asks the question: 'Where did postmodernism come from?' And answers it thus:

> Various intellectual currents – of structural anthropology, Lacanian psychoanalysis, film theory, formalist linguistics, French post-structural philosophy and the new, hybrid, discipline of cultural studies – were crucial in its formation, usually grouped together under the rubric of Theory (Green 1995, p.60).

The currents described by Green were not contained within the traditional self-referential disciplines. In 1974, TJ Clarke had established the first masters course in the social history of art at Leeds Polytechnic (now Leeds

University) in the United Kingdom (Rees & Borzello 1986, p.3). It was
through this course, and others that followed, that the writings of European
philosophers and theorists in literature and psychoanalysis were introduced
to an English-speaking world, albeit a selected academic one. The feminist
movement was instrumental in the rehabilitation of psychoanalytic theory.
Green says of the Australian situation:

> The crucial influence of feminist precedents is often over-looked, but feminist art
> of the 1970s laid much of the groundwork for postmodern art in Australia. Feminist
> art maintained that all art has a political dimension; feminist thinkers questioned
> established institutions and reasserted the role of intellect in art, over dogmas of
> supposedly self-evident 'creativity' ... They realised that oppression was inherent
> in the very structures of language and codes of visual representation, and
> appropriated the discourse of psychoanalysis to explain the way that this worked
> (Green 1995, p.60).

Feminist theory was distributed though feminist journals such as *LIP*, the
interdisciplinary feminist arts magazine which began publication from
Melbourne in 1976. A scan through the chronology prepared by Barbara
Hall for inclusion in *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970-90* (Hall
1994, pp.277-284), reveals just how much academia rather than the gallery
system was instrumental in the development of alternative art practice.
Academic courses were fed by a number of significant publications that
became available around the time. These included Clark's own influential
studies *The Absolute Bourgeois: artists and politics in France 1848-51*
(1973a) and *The Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848
Revolution* (1973b), which reveal the relationship between art and the class
struggle.

The increasing collegial dialogue that this shift towards discursive practice
generated was augmented by 'a tidal wave of art magazines' (Green 1995,
p.42) that emerged during this period and to which artists as well as
theorists and historians contributed. In 1979, *Block* was published in
association with Middlesex Polytechnic '[c]hallenging the polite tones of
conventional scholarly exchange' (Rees & Borzello 1986, p.3). In 1980,

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Art History, the prestigious art journal of the Association of Art Historians, opened its pages to the new trends of methodology, feminism and social history. Examples of publications in Australia included: *Art Network* out of Sydney in 1979; *Art and Text* with Paul Taylor as editor in 1981; and *Artlink,* which has been published from Adelaide, also since 1981. That these three journals started to receive funding support from the Australia Council for the Arts at around the same time as funding to the more traditional magazine *Art and Australia* ceased, confirms the shift way from connoisseurship and towards debate and critique.[3]

Besides the instigation of art journals, conferences were convened and significant texts translated and published. In 1981 the conference *Foreign Bodies: Semiotics in/and Australia* was held and the associated papers by Paul Foss, Meaghan Morris and Edward Colless were published. In 1982, *Block* convened a conference with the title *The New Art History?.* The book of the same name by Rees and Borzello was published in 1986 and included a chapter by Victor Burgin entitled 'Something about photography theory' (Rees & Borzello 1986). Burgin, who was one of the increasing number of 'artists-cum-academics' was associated with the push into theory and with *Block,* his work at the time referencing Michel Foucault and Sigmund Freud. It is significant to note that Burgin was selected as an artist for the 1979 Sydney Biennale. In 1983, Paul Foss and Paul Patton translated Jean Baudrillard's 'The Precession of Simulacra' for the international journal *Art & Text,* in which assumptions about the nature of reality were critiqued in favour of notions of simulacra and hyperreality (Green 1995, p.71). The following year Baudrillard was invited to speak at the *FuturFall* Conference in Sydney. This conference, auspiced by the University of Sydney, included a paper by Sydney femininist and academic

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[3]   Some other journals were initiated throughout the 1980s, including *Praxis M* (1983); *Tension,* Virgin Press, Victoria (1983); *On the Beach,* On the Beach Collective, New South Wales (c.1983); *Eyeline,* Queensland Artworkers Alliance (1987); *Antithesis,* Department of English, University of Melbourne (1987); *Agenda,* George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne (1988); *West,* University of Western Sydney (1989).

Elizabeth Grosz on ethics and post-modernity (Grosz 1986). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who translated the work of Jacques Derrida's *On Grammatology*, gave a paper concerned with 'how feminist literary critique can be placed within a critique of imperialism' (McRobbie 1985). While these represent a minute sample of the activity being generated, they indicate the developing fascination with theory and the desire for Australia to engage with theory as it was being articulated at least across the Western world.[4] These events launched a decade of intense arts activity focused on theoretical analysis and critical writing which pulled apart and examined in minute detail how art worked and how it could work. Unlike previous decades that had been artist and practice-driven, this activity was largely generated by theorists, historians and curators within the academy. Artists enacted their responses to theoretical considerations within academy galleries and alternative spaces. In this climate, art schools sought entry into the academy, the Tasmanian School of Art in 1979 becoming the first art school in Australia to gain university status. Other art schools throughout the country followed this precedent.

Increasingly during this dynamic period, exhibitions that manifested a particular theoretical notion replaced those that were medium or subject matter focused. One interesting manifestation of this shift is that whereas the essays that accompanied modern art tended to be in the back of catalogues after the images of the artworks and the artist biography, after the incursion of the academy and discursive art practice, essays took up the primary position at the front of catalogues that on occasion were entirely

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[4] Curiously enough, Clement Greenberg returned to Australia in 1979 and, in an interview with Paul Taylor of the Tasmanian School of Art, seemed to be endeavouring to distance himself from the perceived dogmatism of his previous position, saying: 'Self-criticism seemed to me to be a rationale of what had happened – I didn't say I was for this, I didn't advocate this. I was describing, not prescribing' (Taylor 1980, p.144). This seeming softening of Greenberg's original absolutist stance, as outlined extensively in the previous chapter, would seem to indicate that even the chief exponent of formalism was aware of formalism's limitations. It is perhaps significant that this event was organised through an art school within a tertiary institution, the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart.

devoid of images.[5] In other words, the focus was on discursivity with the particularities of the individual artwork taking second place to the ideas being espoused.

An example of this curatorial emphasis is Paul Taylor's exhibition *POPism*, installed at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1982. Taylor's premise 'was based on postmodern theories of cultural appropriation, the elimination of divisions between 'high' and 'low' art, and 'image-scavenging' (Green 1995, p.43). By the 1980s, curators were deliberately seeking to construct dialogue between exhibitions. Rex Butler's comparison between *POPism* and Edward Colless's *Design for Living* at Artspace in Sydney in 1985 provides an example of this dialogical approach (Butler 1996).

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[5]   A comparison between the catalogues for *The Field* (Finemore & Stringer 1968) and *Private Symbol: Social Metaphor*, Sydney Biennale (Paroissien et al. 1984) reveals this change. The order in *The Field* is a double-page spread of images of work, some in colour, together with short biographical notes followed by two essays. In contrast, the order of contents of *Private Symbol: Social Metaphor* is an introduction by the director, Leon Paroissien, followed by five critical essays from diverse geo-cultural perspectives, a double-page spread of primarily colour images of the work of each artist, and finally the artists' statements with extensive exhibition and publication listings.
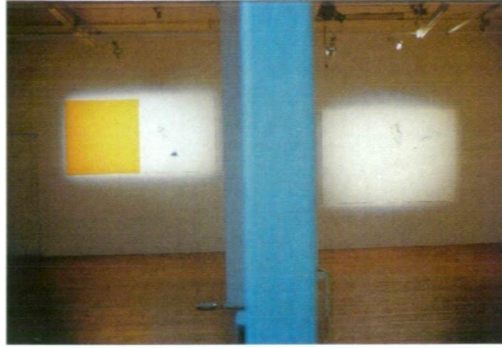
Design for Living Artspace, Sydney 1985
(Image: reproduced from Butler 1996)

In *Design for Living*, the curator presented an argument in opposition to
what he called the 'Image' of Popist art in which the original is destroyed,
proposing instead the 'Icon' which 'can absorb the quoted image, restore
its faith, freeze the itinerary of its citation' (Colless, cited in Butler 1996,
p.168). Butler notes that these two exhibitions 'could hardly have been
more different' (Butler 1996, p.31). One difference was manifested in the
layout of the exhibitions. *POPism* was displayed for maximum visibility of
the total installation, whereas at Artspace individual works were isolated
and spotlighted like icons, with the viewer casting shadows so the work
became difficult to see. Another difference was in the style of the catalogue
with *POPism*'s being like a newspaper that referred stylistically to
advertising and promotion while *Design for Living*'s is described by Butler
as 'a highly wrought, elliptical, almost liturgical text' (ibid., p.31).

The venues for the shows can also be seen as oppositional. *POPism* was
installed at a major state gallery with high public profile and *Design for
Living* at a small alternative art space. This opposition applied equally to
the way in which the exhibitions were critiqued and evaluated. *Design for
Living* was criticised for being 'spiritual', 'conservative', 'devotional' and
'political fascism', as well as for its 'alliance with the rhetoric of religion'
(Butler 1996, pp.34-35). In contrast, *POPism* had a political agenda, with
appropriation seen as an attack on the patriarchal culture of art history
(ibid., p.35). While these differences may seem superficial at one level,
they are indicative of the curators' endeavours to physically manifest the

conversation around theorised concerns. They are also indicative of the focus on exhibitions about curatorial ideas, rather than individual and autonomous artworks. Geoffrey Batchen articulated this changing role of the curator in relation to his 1987 exhibition *Borderlines*:

> The *Borderlines* exhibition incorporates the work of five artist-photographers presently living and working in Sydney. This is the first time their work has been seen together. Each set of work of course has its own particular concerns and its own aesthetic and intellectual pleasures to offer. However, a good exhibition is one where the collective whole says something more than just the jumbled sum of its individual parts. In this case I, as curator, have tried to initiate a dialogue between these works about the operations of photography as a socially productive force (Batchen 1987, p.5).

During the 1980s, the professionalisation of alternative artspaces parallelled this increasingly discursive curatorial practice. In 1985, 200 Gertrude Street was established in Melbourne under the directorship of Louise Neri. This artspace, on the main street of a then run-down part of Melbourne, had a selection policy aimed directly at fostering innovative contemporary practice. This contrasted with the usual egalitarian and collective approach of places such as Roar Studios, a collective-run artspace in Fitzroy (Green 1995, p.44). Green describes the difference in this way: 'The gallery and studio complex was the most important venue in the city for new (but not "raw") painters' (ibid., p.44). This could have been a cutting reference to Roar Studios.

The perspective taken at 200 Gertrude Street was extended from the mid-80s via the federal government's funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts, and its support for a national network of contemporary art space.[6] One or two spaces in each state were funded with the intention of

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[6] The national network of art spaces included: Artspace and First Draft in Sydney; 200 Gertrude Street and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Photography in Melbourne; Praxis, which became Perth Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA); the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) in Brisbane; the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) and the Experimental Art Foundation (EAF) in Adelaide; Chameleon (later renamed Contemporary Art Services Tasmania or CAST) in Hobart; the Canberra Contemporary Art Space; and 24 Hour Art in Darwin.

developing and promoting innovative practices. Such art spaces were not only for showing the physical manifestations of contemporary art practice but also for encouraging the development of theoretical concerns through dialogue and debate. For example, in 1987 Chameleon, under the directorship of Jim Logan, held an art forum on current trends and critical relationships at which Geoffrey Batchen, Harriet Edquist, Rob Horne, Julie Ewington and Gary Sangster presented their ideas on the critic/curator/theorist in contemporary art practice. These papers were subsequently published as *The Chameleon Papers* (Atherton et al. 1988). Geoffrey Batchen, for example, considered the problematics of the division between practice and critique (Batchen 1988). In the same year, Kevin Murray's lecture series, *The Judgment of Paris,* which considered recent French thought in a local context, was held at 200 Gertrude Street (Murray 1992).

As well as contemporary art spaces, galleries associated with universities such as the Ewing and George Paton Galleries and Ian Potter Museum of Art at the University of Melbourne, the Power Gallery (now the Museum of Contemporary Art) associated with Sydney University, the Ivan Dougherty at Monash University and the Plimsoll Gallery at the Tasmanian School of Art, also presented 'cutting edge' contemporary arts practice. The combination of these two streams of arts organisation – the contemporary art space and the university gallery – helped to attain a critical mass of contemporary art activity. The networks of both the university galleries and the contemporary art spaces were officially mandated to present experimental work. This created an environment in which some of the pressure to present new art could be taken off the public gallery. In other words, the alternative spaces were valuable to the public system in providing a testing ground so that work could be viewed and vetted from a safe distance before gaining entry into its hallowed galleries or could disappear altogether without the public system ever knowing.

Ian North, reflecting on the role the public art museum played in presenting alternative art practice in the 1970s, is sceptical of the significance placed on alternative art spaces. He contrasts the *Link* exhibitions that he presented at the Art Gallery of South Australia with the increasing reliance on alternative art spaces for such radical interventions. He argues that alternative art spaces 'segued into the publicly-funded respectability of contemporary art spaces', becoming 'a gulag of ghettoized institutions' (North 2000, p.31). In essence, what he is saying is that the alternative system, while supporting alternative practice, ironically had the effect of marginalising this practice.

Thus, in this seemingly burgeoning environment, two kinds of art spaces were created – one for alternative practice and one for the officially sanctioned version of art practice. In achieving this duality, the government agencies, being the primary funding source for both, were able to support innovation while sidelining most of the potential for disruption that such uncomfortable or controversial practice might engender. In doing so, the dominant modes of art and art presentation could be maintained. As a consequence, any alignment of experimental practice with the public museum can be seen to carry even greater significance, not for art practice as such, but for the national political agenda. This leads to a consideration of some significant moments of inclusion of new art practice in the public art museum and what this might say about politics, ideology and the utility of art.

THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Gregory notes that as a consequence of the protests in the 1970s, the NGV established the position of Curator of Australian Art, with other museums such as the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Art Gallery of South Australia following suit. Increasing numbers of survey shows by contemporary artists and major visual art events were devised (Gregory 2004, pp.44-45).

The Biennale of Sydney provides a valuable example of a public art museum engaging with contemporary practice. The inaugural Biennale was primarily created as an adjunct to the opening of the Opera House in 1973 and in that venue rather than the art gallery. Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, the founding governor of the event, had a background in engineering rather than art and was enamoured with the Venice Biennale. He hoped to transfer the energy of Venice to Sydney, using art in the way that would present an image of Australia as an energetic and innovative nation (Biennale of Sydney n.d.). The Biennale's second incarnation in 1976 was curated by Tom McCullough, who had successfully developed the Mildura Sculpture Triennial in the previous year. The second biennale was more directly supported by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. As a professional curator, McCullough's approach was focused on the presentation of new art. In his artistic director's report, McCullough places the emphasis on the specifics of new practices rather than socio-political objectives. His contribution set the scene for Nick Waterlow's directorship of the third Biennale in 1979.

Despite the inclusion of new art practices, progress was not without controversy. In 1976, at the opening of McCullough's Biennale, the art community protested against the Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's dismissal the previous year by staging a walkout. For Waterlow's Biennale, the art community focused its criticism on the processes of selection for the event itself. Some members of the art community were concerned that the Biennale would not deliver on issues of social importance. In demonstrations against the organisation, they demanded equality for local artists and the inclusion of an equal number of women artists. This was not the first time such demands had been made. Four years earlier some feminists had been critical of the lack of gender balance in the NGV exhibition, *Artists' Artists,* in which only six out of the eighty-three artists selected for the exhibition were women. The previous two Sydney Biennales also had very low representation of women artists.

Following extensive confrontations and negotiations with art communities in Melbourne and Sydney, the 1979 Biennale Committee agreed in principle and invited twenty-four locals to participate, including eleven women, although according to Sturgeon, writing in *Art and Australia* at the time, only three of the women presented what might be termed 'feminist' art (Sturgeon 1979, p.155). Two of the disenfranchised artists, Vivienne Binns and Ian Milliss, in documenting the events of the time in the publication *Sydney Biennale: White Elephant or Red Herring?*, noted that the status of women and Australian artists was only partially resolved (Binns & Milliss 1979).[7] Further, the protesters' demand for community participation came to nothing (Sturgeon 1979, p.146). Nevertheless, according to Sturgeon, some important issues had been raised through the protests and negotiations, including:

> foreign versus local content, organization by benevolent dictatorship versus community participation in decision making, exclusiveness versus inclusiveness of content, male dominance versus equality of women in all aspects of the Biennale, quality versus quantity, art presented for the elite versus art for the whole community and high culture versus popular, broadly based activity (Sturgeon 1979, p.146).

Waterlow initially entitled the Biennale 'Recent European Art'. However, after the engagement with the art community regarding the relationship between international and local content, the title became *European Dialogue* (Binns & Milliss 1979). The curatorial aim of the Biennale was described in the catalogue as being '[t]o provide a unique opportunity for artists and the public to become aware of cultural trends taking place in the rapidly changing world outside' (Waterlow 1979).

A significant factor in Waterlow's selection of artists for the Biennale was the shift from the artistic hegemony of the United States to an engagement with contemporary European art. Alun Leach-Jones noted that the

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[7]   The curator of *European Dialogue*, Nick Waterlow, has also confirmed the failure to adequately include women artists in his more recent reflections on the Sydney Biennale (Waterlow c.2000).

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exhibition exemplified the search for alternative practice in opposition to America and what it might stand for in the collective imagination of the generation brought up in the shadow of Vietnam and the hegemony of the United States (Leach-Jones, cited in Lansell 1980, p.135).[8] According to its official website, the 1979 Biennale questioned the predominance of New York as the centre of the international contemporary artworld and explored the links and influences between Europe and Australia and European and Australian art (Biennale of Sydney n.d.).

A total of 131 artists from nineteen countries were featured, including Josef Beuys, Victor Burgin, Daniel Buren, Marina Abramovic, Imants Tillers, Hamish Fulton, Hermann Nitsch, Rosalie Gasgoigne, Tom Arthur, Nikolaus Lang, Bea and Mike Parr.[9] The exhibition was a project of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, which housed the major exhibition, *European Dialogue*, as well as *Recent European Drawing*, while *Uses of Photography in Europe* was installed at the Australian Centre for Photography. Other venues presented exhibitions to complement the theme of the Biennale; however, documentation of artists participating in these events was limited to a general listing in the catalogue. Thus, the primary focus on the event was the Art Gallery of New South Wales; that is, the major public art museum.

The nature of the art is one aspect of the Biennale's contribution to the insertion of alternative art practice into the public art museum. However, while the Biennale showcased the work of many artists, it is also apparent from a number of the texts that appear at the beginning of the catalogue that the Biennale was about more than simply art. In the introduction, Nelson Meers, Sydney's Lord Mayor at the time, said that the Biennale would be beneficial to Sydney by focusing the attention of the world on the

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[8]   Terry Smith had pre-empted this situation in 1974 with his seminal essay 'The Provincialism Problem' published in *Artforum*, in which he argued the impossibility of a neutral relationship between the provincial artist and the centre and vice versa (Smith 2002, pp.113-121).

[9]   Aboriginal art was also included for the first time in the 1979 Biennale (Waterlow c.2000). This will be taken up later in this chapter.

city as a visitor destination (Meers, cited in Biennial of Sydney & Crowley 1979), implying that the contemporary art presented would confirm the city's status as having the maturity to warrant its comparison with international art centres.

Affirming Sydney's internationalist aspirations in another statement in the catalogue, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis, Chair of the Biennale Committee wrote:

> There is no nostalgia for the past in the art presented but a clear indication that art is acquiring a new exciting aspect – a 'novel renaissance'... Art becomes international when it achieves its highest possible performance, and ceases to be rooted in a purely local culture or tradition; then art can be handled or exported (Belgiorno-Nettis, cited in Biennale of Sydney & Crowley 1979).

Elwyn Lynn, Chair of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, expounded an even broader agenda in his contribution, saying of his understanding of current practice:

> This situation seems to be clearly characteristic of Europe; if the trend in Europe is towards themes, in the United States it is still towards the retrospective of the individual artist and the re-appraisal of a movement already securely ordained. The European mind at its best – to generalise rather wildly – is speculative, passionately detached, undogmatic, thoroughly sceptical of fixed values in culture and wary of art institutions that can advance only domination (Lynn, cited in Biennale of Sydney & Crowley 1979).

In this statement, the relationship between art and politics is made particularly clear. The structure of the Biennale can be seen not just as an opportunity for artists to have their work shown to an audience wanting to see it, but also as a political tool. Each arm of government had its own agenda that could be potentially fulfilled through the way the exhibition was manifested. For the city it could create an impression of a forward looking metropolis, for the art market it offered an innovative commodity to be traded, and for the Federal Government it defined the national

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persona in alignment with Europe and, by inference, in opposition to the hegemony of the United States.[10]

Thus, it is in the arena of identity politics that the public art museum becomes increasingly significant when incorporating contemporary discourse within its walls. During the 1980s, coming to grips with what it might mean to be Australian was one of the primary themes generated both inside and outside many art institutions. This was prompted, at least in part, by the impending celebration of the bicentenary of European settlement.

In the academy and the artworld, various theoretical tools were employed to examine history and the arts 'against the grain', bringing the concept of agency into the Australian art scene where previously mimicry of the centre had been the dominant paradigm for making of art and its evaluation. Terry Smith believes the transition from a centralist focus occurred first as the resistance against this 'top-down distribution of cultural power' and that:

> [T]here emerged a recognition that perhaps a different structure of valuing had been in place all along, that the local visual culture at the colonial periphery had been evolving in its own ways since settlement, that it frequently originated its own changes, but also was able to pick and choose among the messages brought back by its mobile members (Smith 2002, p.141).

In other words, the mimicry of which Australian art had been accused and which justified the dismissal of Australian art as second-rate becomes the vocabulary for inscribing a postcolonial position by co-opting the negative criticism and turning it back on itself.

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[10]   This theme was reiterated in subsequent exhibitions, including *Perspecta* 1981, curated by Bernice Murphy, Australia's first curator of contemporary art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, and Leon Paroissien's *Private Symbol: Social Metaphor* of 1984. Pam Zeplin describes a similar phenomenon in an Australian and New Zealand context in an article entitled 'Lost White Tribes of the Tasman-Pacific: An Archaeology of Australia-New Zealand Art Exchanges in the 1970s and 1980s', tracing how Australian/New Zealand cultural relations in the visual arts rose and fell in line with political agenda in particular the non-nuclear stance taken by New Zealand in 1985 (Zeplin 2003).

The climate of rigorous critique and the application of cross-disciplinary ideas and theories enabled the work of artists to turn conventions and old truths inside out and to redefine possibilities that could be enacted in the Australian periphery. Green describes how artists were instrumental in redefining the possibilities of Australian art particularly by not buying into the meta-narrative of originality. In doing so, they were able to take Walter Benjamin's thesis that reproduction strips the original of its aura, and reinsert the aura back into art history. Green goes on to consider Imants Tillers' role in redefining Australia's place in the world, saying:

> Tillers' ... twice-removed Australian experience of art was an advantage, because the contemporary Australian artist was absolutely at home in a postmodern morass of copies, fakes, kitsch and the unattainable (Green, 1995, p.68).

In other words, the very reliance on the copy, which seemed to be the basis of criticism of the capacity of Australian art to contribute to any international debate on art, was converted into a mechanism whereby the centre could be critiqued from the decentred vantage point of the Australian periphery.
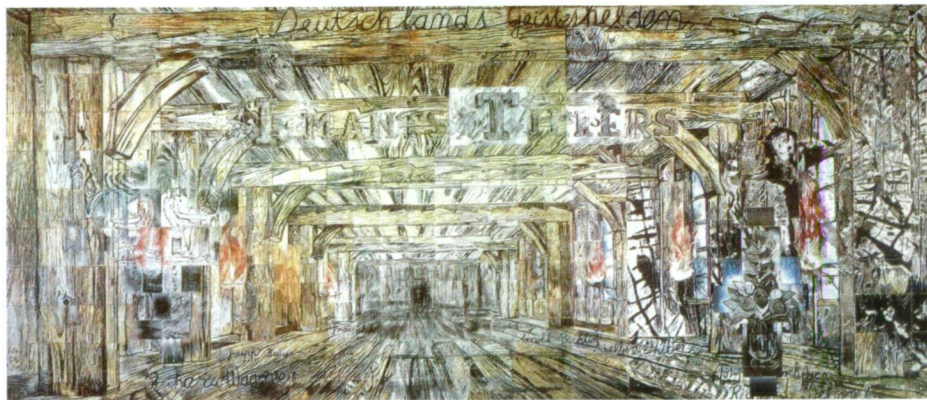
Imants Tillers
Heart of the Wood, 1985
oil stick charcoal, oil, synthetic polymer paint
on 388 canvas-boards 280cm x 648cm
(Image: reproduced from Green 1995, p.6)

That Tillers, under the auspices of the Art Gallery of South Australia, was chosen to represent Australia at the Venice Biennale in 1986 indicates that the discourse embedded in his work was registered at a national level. Not

only did the work flaunt the seeming lack of authenticity of art in Australia without apology, using it as a strategy to underline the arrogance of Euro-centrism, but also, in blatantly quoting Anselm Kiefer, the hero of new Abstract Expressionism, Tillers' work went straight to the heart of contemporary European art. On a seemingly superficial note, Ron Radford says that 'the paintings from the *Diaspora* series [were] some of the largest works painted in this country or indeed anywhere' and that '[d]ue to their scale, many of the works can only be shown in public institutions' (Radford 2006). Such strategic decisions by Tillers leaves the weight of his proposition without doubt.[11]

While Tillers' effrontery may be seen as radical, it could be argued that the perspective it offered was aligned with the position that the powers-that-be also wanted to project to the world – that is, Australia could be a player on the world stage. Through the work of Tillers and those that followed in the ensuing decade, postcolonial practices that rejected centralist notions dominated the contemporary art scene and focused attention on the inversion of cultural hierarchies and translation across the borders.

The 9th Biennale of Sydney (1992–93) provided another example of this practice. Curated by Tony Bond and entitled *The Boundary Rider*, the Biennale sought to present work in terms of a negotiation of the borders between territories (Bond 1992). Bond advocated hybridity rather than a singular progressive path towards the future, seeing that singularity 'has been replaced by theories of borders where the conceptual territories must be constantly negotiated' (Bond, cited in McLean 1998, p.142). The Biennale was auspiced by the Art Gallery of New South Wales and held at a number of the major cultural venues in the city, namely the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Bond Store, Artspace, the Mitchell Library, the

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[11]   Tillers was not the only one to send large scale works into the international arena with the support of government. The exhibition *Australian Visions*, which was shown at the Guggenheim in New York in 1983, included not only large-scale works by Tillers but also works by Peter Booth, Susan Norrie, Frank Murray and Bill Henson. The exhibition was government-supported (Waldman 1984).

Ivan Dougherty Gallery and the Australian Museum. The list of participants included one hundred and twelve artists of whom eighty-four were from other countries primarily in Europe, Scandinavia and North America but also Eastern Europe, Japan, the Philippines, Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, Ghana, Cameroon, Haiti, Colombia, Benin and New Zealand.

Green describes the exhibition's purpose as 'an examination of borders – of conditions at the edges of culture, politics and science – [that] was clearly timely, given the dubious credibility of cultural convergence' (Green 1995, p.121). The works 'rejected the quest of universalising tendencies,' and employed postcolonial strategies such as bricolage, mimicry and hybridisation. In doing so, Bond was arguing for 'the colonisation and perversion of the mainstream through the appropriation of both modernity and postmodernity by artists at the periphery' (ibid., p.122). Green quotes Latin American art critic and essayist Nelly Richard, saying such practice provided a counter to the tendency to 'discount all secondary or minor forms of art under the déjà-vu label' (Richard, cited in Green 1995, p.133). Green gives a concise account of the centre/periphery conundrum parodied by postcolonial artists saying that through impersonation, translation and mimicry 'many Australian artists during the 1990s projected an unorthodox distorted image of the West back towards its centres' (Green 1995, p.138).

It could be argued that this is just what the governmental authorities wanted, even if it was not stated overtly. The notion of Australia being a main player, rather than an also-ran, met the political agenda of a government seeking to rearticulate its space and place as independent from both the 'mother country' and the patriarchy of the United States. This is the argument Tony Bennett proffered, particularly in relation to Aboriginal art and its place in defining Australia's identity (Bennett 1988, p.9), an issue that will be considered in the next section.

THE INCLUSION OF INDIGENOUS PRACTICE

It has been argued that the public art museums tend to take on those forms of practice and those artists whose work assisted in defining identity in some way that is consistent with broader socio-political objectives. The increased inclusion of women in the social agenda was paralleled by increased participation of women artists in numerical terms. This was later augmented to include examples of what was viewed as women's creative practice – that is, work that was textile-based, body-related, personal and/or private (Kirby 1992; Moore 1994).

In the international arena, the championing of work that shifted the axis towards the edges represented Australia's reassessment of its colonial past and its political allegiances. As part of this reassessment, the capacity to alter the notion of Australia as a young nation with the inference of ignorance and immaturity, to that of the oldest nation on Earth, was irresistible. This required embracing the original inhabitants, perhaps not in practical terms, but at least as an idea. The visual arts became a pivotal player in this realignment.

While artists sought to critique the hegemony of the centre against the periphery, outsiders constantly sought to align Australian art with its recognised point of difference, namely the outback. A significant episode in the development of discursive art practice focuses on the place of Aboriginal culture within the construction of the Australian identity. Ian McLean argues that the Aboriginal presence has always been a sub-text of Australian identity and that this has been represented through art and the way that art has been evaluated over time (McLean 1998) in particular how the question of identity was foreshadowed in the knowledge that the bicentenary of white settlement was fast approaching. This moment provided the impetus for harnessing Aboriginal time and culture in a very direct way.

The call to the bush had been an ongoing theme in the history and critique of Australian art. As early as 1960, Chris Wallace-Crabbe, in his capacity as critic for the *Observer* newspaper, had been critical of Albert Tucker's exhibition at MoMA in New York, which included the painting *Cratered Head*, on the grounds that images like this perpetuated a view that the only way to make art in Australia was to construct imagery that referenced the isolation, sparseness and desiccation of the bush and outback (Heathcote 1995, p.173). This view of Australian art was even perpetuated by Greenberg, who in 1969, when high modernism was still the dominant form, expressed a preference for the art of Boyd, Nolan and Tucker which he identified as being a more appropriate Australian form (Heathcote 1995, p.191). Similarly, French art critic and cultural philosopher Pierre Restany, in reviewing Waterlow's 1979 Sydney Biennale, had written, 'The Australians are searching for a fundamental identity ... A whole lot of values consecrated by European culture begin to smell musty when seen from Sydney and, *a fortiori*, from Alice Springs' (Restany 1979, p.186). In 1980, American artist and art critic Suzi Gablik, while visiting Australia, also reflected on Australian art, asking, 'Is there anything we can justifiably call an Australian identity?'. She concluded that it was best when it was connected to the land beyond the urban. Gablik chose to single out Tom Arthur, John Davis and Peter Taylor, three artists whose work is connected directly to the bush and which conjure something of an Aboriginal sensibility (Gablik 1980).

However, it didn't take foreigners to encourage the local scene in this direction. The 1980 Boyer Lectures, entitled *The Spectre of Truganini*, were delivered by art historian Bernard Smith. In these lectures Smith called for 'cultural convergence' (Smith 1980). Despite the antagonism to the ideas of convergence, McLean believes that Smith's lectures arguably 'provided the main focus of debate in Australian visual arts in the early 1980s,' encouraging artists such as Tim Johnson and John Wolseley to 'enthusiastically practise' a form of cultural convergence (McLean 1998, p.114).

In similar vein, Tasmanian-based artist and musician Leigh Hobba was chosen to represent Australia at the Paris Biennale in 1980. His piece involved him playing a didgeridu that he had made 'while living with an Aboriginal tribe on the Bamyili Reserve near Katherine, and painted with his own blood (extracted in a Paris laboratory)' (Paroissien 1981). While Hobba's practice is no doubt more complex than this (Holmes 2007), his affiliation with Indigenous culture was a significant and timely contributor to the fascination his practice generated.

No doubt one of the reasons for this increasing interest was that at the back of the Australian collective mind during the 1980s were the preparations for the bicentenary of the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and with it a growing awareness that an exclusive focus on European settlement would be an inadequate response. The place of Aboriginal cultural practice within public cultural institutions both in Australia and overseas in the leadup to the bicentenary was increasingly debated, although such considerations had in fact started earlier. Daniel Thomas recalls that in the 1950s Tony Tuckson was 'the first to liberate [Aboriginal art] from anthropology museums and ... give it high visibility in the collections of at least one museum, the Art Galley of New South Wales' (Thomas 1988, 70). Waterlow's 1979 Sydney Biennale had included Aboriginal artists David Malangi and George Milpurrurru. According to Waterlow, this was the first time the work of Indigenous artists had been shown in an international contemporary art context (Waterlow c.2000; McLean 1998). Bernice Murphy, Australia's first Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (1979–1984), curated the first two *Australian Perspecta* survey exhibitions in 1981 and 1983, and works by Australian Aboriginal artists were included in these events.

It is interesting to note that Aboriginal art was collected for the National Gallery of Australia from 1972 (Caruana 1993; McNicoll 1982) during the institution's preparatory phase, as had been recommended by the committee of inquiry into the establishment of a national gallery (Radford

2005, pp.1-3). When the gallery opened in 1982, Aboriginal works were displayed in various places throughout the building. The first two works to be seen on entering the gallery were George Garrawun's *Freshwater Fish* (c.1979) and Jimmy Njiminjuma's *Rainbow Serpent with Buffalo Head and Horns* (c.1980) (Caruana, W 2007, pers. comm., 1 December). These were placed alongside Italian Renaissance and Baroque paintings and sculptures and were part of the introductory display that included Oceanic, African, Pre-Columbian American and Buddhist sculptures, as well as a contemporary Australian landscape painting by Fred Williams. According to Daniel Thomas, the first curator of Australian Art at the Gallery, 'this introduction to the collection was a strong statement by the inaugural director, James Mollison, that Australian art, including Aboriginal art, was of international quality' (Thomas, D 2007, pers. comm., 6 November).

The valuing of Aboriginal art was made particularly apparent in the Australian galleries. The original layout of the exhibition of Australian art (National Gallery of Australia 1982) shows: bark paintings from the Nabarrkidbarrkid people of West Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory (c.1910) alongside works by Australian Impressionists, E Philip Fox (1865–1915) and Frederick McCubbin (1855–1917), and opposite Edwardian figure paintings by Rupert Bunny (1864–1947) and Hugh Ramsay (1877–1906); a later bark painting by Djawa (1946) from East Arnhem Land alongside 1940s paintings by early modernist Margaret Preston (1875–1963); and several barks by Yirawala (1903–1976) next to works by Fred Williams (1927–1982). Thomas recalls, 'in a small room on the descent back to the overseas art on the main entrance level, contemporary Australian art climaxed with large canvases by Imants Tillers and a Western Desert acrylic [*Yala, Wild Potato Dreaming*, 1981] by Johnny Warangkula Tjupurrula' (Thomas, D 2007, pers. comm., 6 November). Thus, works made at a similar time by Aboriginal and white artists were placed together.

In 1989, the emphasis shifted from integration to highlighting Aboriginal work, when *The Aboriginal Memorial*, 200 burial poles from the Ramingining community, was installed in the prime location of the sculpture gallery. The burial poles, which had been commissioned by the National Gallery, had been shown during the Biennale of Sydney in 1988 to coincide with the Bicentenary.[12]

A significant impetus for the reassessment of Australian Aboriginal art came via interest generated internationally rather than from within Australia. During the 1980s, a number of major exhibitions that included or were solely made up of Aboriginal art were shown in Paris and New York. In 1983, *D'un Autre Continent: l'Australie le Rêve et Réel* was installed at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. The exhibition, curated by Suzanne Pagé with support from Leon Paroissien and Bernice Murphy, co-curators of the Power Gallery (later to become the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney), included work by urban artists Mike Parr, Jenny Watson, Bill Henson, Juan Davila, Peter Booth, Ken Unsworth, Dale Frank and Maria Kozic, amongst others. More particularly, people from the Warlpiri went to Paris and made a ground painting within the museum (Pagé & Paroissien 1983).

A cynical view of this development has been taken by Tony Bennett (1988), who noted that since the 1960s there has been a shift within museums receiving major government support towards the increased inclusion of Aboriginal and alternative histories into these public spaces and that this derives not from altruism but rather from a strategic decision to construct what he calls 'a new discursive space for the time-space co-ordinates of the nation' (Bennett 1988, p.9). Bennett is referring to the way in which the inclusion of alternative histories 'sever [Australia's] dependency on those of Europe and allow it to emerge as a free-standing

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[12] Today, *The Aboriginal Memorial* has gained an even higher priority having been installed along with paintings by Indigenous artists in the large room near the main entrance. Works by Indigenous artists continue to be inserted throughout the upstairs chronological display of Australian art (Thomas, D 2007, pers. comm., 6 November).

entity rooted in its own past' (ibid., p.9). The mechanism that is employed to achieve this end is '[t]he historicisation of a territory and the territorialisation of history ... the back-projection of the nation's history into the deeper history of the land and of nature so that it seems to loom out of an immemorial past' (9). In other words, the inclusion of Aboriginal work serves the nationalist agenda, conjuring a position of cultural equivalence through the impression that the nation has a deep history. Thus, Aboriginal art has given Australia an international profile and credibility, co-opting an ancient land as an alternative to a mere 200-year history. This has been made possible, to a considerable extent, through the support of this extraordinary arts practice by public art museums in a way that gives Aboriginal art equivalence to Western art from Europe or the United States of America. This process took a number of decades to become sufficiently entrenched, and it is worth considering that it has been achieved while Indigenous health and mortality rates remain alarmingly problematic. In other words, the embrace of Aboriginal art does not necessarily equate with economic improvement and social acceptance of Aboriginal people.

The harnessing of the public art museum to further nationalistic aims, be they altruistic in their intention or not, is evident. Of interest in the context of this research, however, is not so much that such controlling of the agenda may take place, but rather, how strategies of presentation help to expand paradigms or preserve the status quo. An examination of how exhibitions of Aboriginal work were articulated to the public will serve as a pertinent illustration.

THE MAINTENANCE OF MARGINALITY

In contrast to the difficulty that public art museums and critics had in dealing with conceptual/discursive art by white artists, there was recognition early on that the formalist paradigm was not an adequate framework though which to view and interpret Aboriginal art. The reason for this probably lies in the fact that before Aboriginal art entered the

public art museum it had been displayed in ethnographic museums where it was contextualised in terms of the way of life of the people rather than viewed as aesthetic objects. The catalogue to *D'un Autre Continent* clearly differentiates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal art in the way that each was presented to the public, as an examination of the catalogue reveals.

The catalogue to *D'un Autre Continent* is a substantial volume in a number of parts. The greatest proportion of this catalogue is devoted to essays and other information pertaining to the Aboriginal participation. Lance Bennett from the Aboriginal Cultural Foundation contributed, writing on behalf of the Warlpiri elders about the purpose and place of the work in cultural terms and as part of the exhibition:

> We have brought this painting to Paris because we want to show that our traditional ceremony life, which has gone on since the beginning of time, is still living today. We, the Warlpiri tribe of the central Desert, want the outside world to know that our traditions have **never** collapsed (Bennett 1983, p.48).

In other words, the Warlpiri were deliberately seeking to insert themselves into history and this required placing their work in the heart of Western culture – the public art museum and a European one at that. In doing so, adjustments were made to traditional practice, which would usually determine that the painting be removed as soon as it was finished. Adhering to tradition would have meant that only a few visitors to the gallery would see the sand painting. Therefore, the elders agreed that 'the painting can be left intact for the period of the exhibition, so that as many Europeans as possible can visit the Museum and recognise the fact of our living culture' (L Bennett 1983, p.50). In this instance, the work was made for an audience rather than as part of a long tradition. Furthermore, according to Jill Montgomery, the Aboriginal artists were very aware of the social and political implications of their actions and that their presence in Paris was a sign of their determination to 'enter History' (Montgomery 1984, p.8). The Warlpiri were engaging in a translation between their

traditional practice and Western art history and art museum presentation procedures. In doing so, their actions were not about the aesthetics of the object but rather a conversation with the audience about culture, that is, discursive practice.

Another section of the catalogue showed photographs of the landscape where the Warlpiri live, as well as images of a ceremony, which included body decoration and dance. There was also a comment by Klaus Rinke on learning to throw boomerangs during his visits to Australia. Lastly, an extensive essay entitled 'Art of the Desert', written by Nicholas Peterson, described the nature of the painting and translated its iconography. Peterson also discussed the way a viewer might endeavour to read the work. This is of particular significance for my purpose. Peterson writes:

> To the European eye, the art of the desert peoples is abstract, geometrical and schematised with its spirals, circles, lines and points but to the Aboriginal eye it stands in a representational relationship to the landscape. In contrast to European landscape painting, which is easily comprehended and relies on visual impact, the traditional landscape art of the desert peoples is complex in meaning and conceptual (Peterson, cited in Pagé & Paroissien 1983, p.66).

In other words, the catalogue provided direct information to assist the viewer, based on the assumption that they would inevitably experience some difficulty because the code required was not one with which they were familiar.[13] I would like to draw attention to the fact that similar decoding information was not provided for the work of any other artists in the exhibition. The non-Aboriginal artists' work was mentioned through generalised statements in the essays by Pagé and Paroissien and small artist statements that were added to the bottom of the artists' biographical details. These artists' statements were sometimes a line of poetry, a single sentence or, in the case of Robert Randall, a three-line cryptic conversation. Some artists, including Maria Kozic, didn't provide anything at all.

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[13]   In the catalogue to *D'un Autre Continent*, Meaghan Morris's essay entitled 'Jetsam' provided a critique of the tendency to universalise, romanticise and mythologise notions of Australian identity (Morris 1983, pp.33-40).

It may be that Paroissien already recognised that the burgeoning of a major international art movement and was therefore giving it the detailed attention he believed it required. Alternatively, it could also be argued that the approach to the Aboriginal work was undertaken in this way because the anthropological context in which such work had until recently been exclusively displayed was still considered to be an appropriate response. While this could be understood as a racist strategy, what is significant for this study is not so much the contextualisation of the Warlpiri work, but rather the lack of contextualisation of the rest of the work. From this perspective it could be argued that the concern for understanding that was shown to viewers seeking connection with the Warlpiri work was not shown to the same extent to visitors who may have had difficulty coming to grips with the work of the non-Aboriginal participants. In the case of the Warlpiri sand painting, almost no stone was left unturned in presenting the meaning, method and cultural background pertaining to the piece. For the non-Aboriginal art, contextualising information other than the artist statement and exhibition history was considered either unnecessary or inappropriate.[14]

A DISCURSIVE PARADOX

In 1989, an exhibition entitled *Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia* toured the country (Sutton 1988). According to Ian McLean, rather than select either traditional or contemporary work, this exhibition 'effortlessly presented Aboriginal art as a continuity of traditional and contemporary practices that engaged with Aboriginal relations to land in religious, colonial and postcolonial contexts' (McLean 1998, p.129). McLean notes that this exhibition was organised not by art curators, critics, theorists or historians, but through the anthropology division of the South Australian Museum under Peter Sutton. Again, substantial contextualisation was

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[14]   It is of interest to note that the catalogue lists these three Aboriginal artists, Malangi, Bungawuy and Milpurrurr, under 'A' for 'Aboriginal Artists from Arnhemland' rather than as individuals, as were the non-Aboriginal artists in the exhibition.

considered appropriate for this exhibition. In fact, the information on the exhibition was more a large glossy coffee-table book than an art exhibition catalogue. The six chapters considered Aboriginal art from a number of perspectives, with images identified as 'figures' dispersed throughout as illustrations of the essays rather than as autonomous colour-plates in an art catalogue.

Providing this layering of contextual material indicated that Aboriginal art could not be understood simply for its own sake or in aesthetic terms. The outcry that had met *'Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (Rubin 1984), held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 1984, had attested to this. Critic Thomas McEvilley expressed outrage that art by Indigenous peoples from around the world was placed in an unmediated and aestheticised framework (McEvilley 1984). In contrast, Aboriginal art was understood as a communion between the Aboriginal artists and the land; and the exhibition as a conversation between Aboriginal culture and the non-Aboriginal viewer.

In 1989, *Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Pompidou Centre (National Museum of Modern Art) in Paris, included work by Indigenous artists from Australia, Papua New Guinea, the Far North and Africa, as well as many well-known non-Indigenous artists from Europe and North America (Martin 1989). André Magnin, a researcher on the exhibition, describes it as:

> the first truly international exhibition to present artists and their contemporary
> works from all over the world and many different cultures on an equal footing; it
> was a capital and historic event in the history of Art (Magnin c.2005).

The exhibition created a furore, with many critics not able to place the work within a contemporary art context, or alternatively, doing so through a veil of enthusiastic, aestheticised hyperbole. With hindsight, American writer and critic Eleanor Heartney considers that 'the show is generally acknowledged as a landmark event that cracked the West's monopoly on

contemporary art' (Heartney 2000). The catalogue for the exhibition was an A3 full-colour folio of images of each artist's contribution, with a map showing where they were from. The artists' pages were prefaced by the curator's overview, five essays and what is described as a genealogy in the form of a visual and textual fable which marked the crossovers and connections between European and the Other (*L'Autre*) (Martin 1989). As part of the contextual information, the artists were invited to address a question on the meaning of art posed by the curator. The majority of the artists answered the question. The exceptions included Christian Botanski, Daniel Buren, Fransceco Clemente, Tony Cragg, Anselm Keifer, Per Kirkeby, Barbara Kruger, Richard Long, Mario Merz, Sigma Polke and Jeff Wall. The entries for Anselm Keifer and Richard Long were the most minimal, with only their name, place of origin and title of the work provided. One might speculate that the reasons for not participating were based on the belief that the work should speak for itself. In contrast, the six Aboriginal artists from Yuendumu used the opportunity to explain the Yam Dreaming and their cultural responsibilities as custodians.

The debate around the placement of Aboriginal art within a contemporary art context was pivotal to the subsequent development of art theory in Australia. The Euro-centric art world was made to question its position within a postcolonial context. Where *D'un Autre Continent* had provided a forum for Aboriginal people to make their presence felt on an international stage, it was difficult for many art critics to come to grips with the transfer from anthropological museum to art gallery. That aside, from these examples it can be seen that, whether the exhibition was generated from an art or an anthropological perspective, a high degree of contextualisation of the Indigenous practice was deemed appropriate.

Contextualisation has played a significant role in the perception and presentation of Aboriginal art. Contextualisation of Aboriginal art has empowered Aboriginal communities through acknowledgement of their art and their history. From an inverse perspective, however, it could be argued

that contextualisation retains the otherness of Aboriginal art. This argument is based on the tendency for Western art to continuously collapse any alternative practice into the formalist aesthetic and the silence of the contemplative moment. Despite seeming upheavals from time to time, this remains the dominant mode of presentation and reception. Contextualistion locates Aboriginal art in a different paradigm. However, rather than seek parity by absorbing Aboriginal art into the formalist aesthetic, an alternative approach is to consider the place of contextualisation in relationship to contemporary art in general. In doing so, it is relevant to ask whether the assumption that art 'speaks for itself' is the appropriate paradigm for contemporary art, especially given that much contemporary practice is seeking to be discursive and to operate beyond or even counter to the formalist aesthetic. The question becomes, therefore, why is contemporary art not contextualised in the way Aboriginal art tends to be?

In this chapter, it has been argued that the creation of a space for discursive art in the public art museum takes more than an individual artist's desire to make it so. Burn presented his work in *The Field* but it was not understood because the audience, including the interested art viewers, was not yet sufficiently aware of the code he was enacting. To engage with new paradigms, the appropriate code needed to be available and this did not come into being until there was a critical mass of practitioners and supporters able to recognise and use it. Once the work had a place in the artworld, public institutions could decide whether or not the art was appropriate for their purpose. This purpose tended not to relate to any intrinsic value of the work, but rather to the potential for the work to further more ideological objectives at either the institutional or national level.

The relevance of this discussion to the inclusion of the disengaged viewer is that despite the filtering of new art practices into the public art museum, gaining exposure to such art is not straightforward. Institutions control what is presented and how it is presented and thus determine to a

significant extent the degree to which discourse is promoted or the status quo is reaffirmed.

Rather than confront the difficulties that contemporary art might create for the public art museum through the provision of contextual support material equivalent to that provided in many of the Indigenous exhibitions, the actions taken tend to reduce contemporary art museum to that which supports the state or the institution's ideological objectives. The support for contemporary art spaces takes the pressure off the art museum to be the locus for contemporary practice. Interestingly, the tendency for contemporary art spaces to.refute the need for contextualisation reduces access to new audiences even further. In the main the audience self-selects and the paradigm of free choice deflects the elitism that is its corollary. In the next chapter the confrontation of elitism in the public museum is considered further, with a view to understanding the contribution that education and public programs are making towards breaking down barriers.

CHAPTER 3

THE DISCURSIVE MUSEUM

In the previous chapter it was argued that inclusion of new art practices in the public art museum is conditional and often focused on specific ideological outcomes rather than on the audience's general appreciation of contemporary art. The focus was on the way discursive practice has been used to define Australia's greater centrality on the world's stage, in comparison to its previous peripheral status, and the role that contextualisation, particularly in relation to Aboriginal art, has been coopted to this purpose. It was argued that overarching objectives can revealed though the way artwork is presented and contextualised. In this chapter, contextualisation and related possibilities as understood and used in museum education and public programs are examined. The discussion steps back from the art museum in the first instance in order to understand more fully the role that contextualisation plays in the museum in general. In particular, contributions from museum education are explored before being extrapolated into the public art museum setting.

THE LOVE OF ART

The call for the public art museum to be inclusive of the broader public has been an almost constant theme since its invention in eighteenth century Europe. Histories of the museum describe the belief that exposure to high culture could transform the lower classes into respectable and orderly members of society (Bennett 1995; McClellan 2003). In this scenario, the visitor was required to adapt to the paradigm of the museum. Since the 1960s, however, the situation has been inverted, with the expectation that the museum adapt to the needs of its visitors.

This shift has been informed substantially by the seminal research entitled *L'Amour de l'Art: Les Musées Européens et Leur Public*, conducted by Pierre Bourdieu and Alain Darbel in the 1960s (Bourdieu & Darbel 1966). Bourdieu and Darbel looked in detail at who went to museums and why they went. Their methodology took the form of a sociological critique of artistic judgement and the genesis of aesthetic taste. They concluded that differences in the cultural practices of various groups or classes determine differences in taste and value. While this would seem commonsense, Bourdieu took the analysis a step further, suggesting that the illusion of aesthetic legitimacy is brought about through the unconsciously acclaimed superiority of the view privileged by the dominant culture through which 'political mythology [is] realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable manner of standing, speaking and thereby of feeling and thinking' (Bourdieu 1984, p.93).

In other words, the set of behaviours and attitudes required in order to be considered cultured are those displayed by the dominant class but presented as if they are normal and natural. Thus, those people who display these behaviours have the capacity for good taste. Conversely, not having the prescribed disposition has the effect of excluding or diminishing engagement with the arts by those outside the dominant group. As a consequence, even those who are disadvantaged by it assume the dominant perspective is right. Bourdieu and Darbel's analysis revealed that there is

no need for an overt power struggle, because those who are excluded feel they have made a deliberate and free choice *not* to participate. Through this process, the belief that art is either representation or poetics striving towards transcendence from ordinary life has become the accepted wisdom, not only for the connoisseur of fine art, but also for those who do not profess an interest in art at all.

Bourdieu and Darbel's findings have been regularly reiterated and confirmed in studies of museum audiences ever since (Merriman 1989; Bennett & Frow 1991; Bennett 1994). Their observations and analysis have generated two major strands in new museology or what has become museum studies (Macdonald 2006). One strand focuses on the changes to policies and programs that increase the capacity for people of lesser education and varied social and cultural backgrounds to relate to museum content. The other strand seeks to expand the range of behaviours and experiences that are acceptable in the museum in order to break down the perceived exclusivity and elitism of the museum as arbiter of knowledge, taste and appropriate aesthetic response.

THE NEW MUSEOLOGY

Although Bourdieu and Darbel's findings were originally published in French in the pivotal year of 1968, the research was only translated into English in 1991. It is only from around this time that the study's significance began to influence the English-speaking museum environment (Hooper-Greenhill 2006, p.364). The translation, which was undertaken over a number of years by British curator Nick Merriman, provided the underpinning for the critique of museums that was consolidated under the term 'the new museology' in Peter Vergo's publication of that name in 1989. This collection of essays by museum practitioners and academics, including Merriman, provides a critique of the museum as a singular monolithic institution devoted to the articulation of the progressive history of civilisation. The book's overarching argument is that in a diverse social and cultural environment, the museum has a responsibility to be inclusive

in its policy towards its visitors and potential new audiences. As a consequence, there is a need to find ways to ensure that what is presented in the museum is relevant and accessible to people from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

Accessibility and inclusion focus on two aspects of the museum – the collection and the museum environment. These themes, I suggest, dovetail into the two features of Bourdieu's theory – the collection as the site for coming to grips with inequities in education and social status; and the museum as a physical entity providing a focus for considering attitudes and behaviours.

In *The New Museology* (Vergo 1989), one of the consequences of the museum becoming a site for inclusion is the questioning of who chooses what is displayed, and what stories are privileged. In the wake of the critique of the reductionist tendencies in modernism, the singular progressive view of history is replaced by multi-vocality through the telling of diverse and even contested histories.

For Vergo, implementation of the new museology means contextualising the collections in order to increase the chances of connecting objects with the lived experience of viewers.[15] Critical of the museum's reliance on the silent aesthetic and wary of the limitations of text-based interpretation, Vergo advocates offering viewers additional materials:

> ranging from maps and diagrams, the ephemera of daily life, illustrations and photographs, to slides and film showing, for example, an implement in use, as opposed to in a showcase, or the techniques employed in the creation of the objects or works of art on display (Vergo 1989, p.53).

In positing this list, Vergo reiterates Bourdieu and Darbel's conclusion that 'a museum will have a more diverse public ... the more it offers objects capable of attracting middle-class visitors' and, further, that interest in

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[15]   Contextualisation is the common thread for a number of contributors to *The New Museology*, including Charles Saumarez Smith and Ludmilla Jordanova (Vergo 1989).

'historic, folk or ethnographic objects, ceramics or furniture increases regularly and sharply with lower social class' (Bourdieu & Darbel 1991, p.86). In other words, it is not the object *per se* that should be central to the museum experience but, rather, the meanings the object is able to offer to the stories of people's lives.

The new museology did not come completely out of the blue. Since the mid-1980s concern about the accountability of the museum sector with regard to the existing audiences, new audiences and the broader public was being articulated. Evidence for this can be found in the plethora of publications, cultural conferences and government initiatives that sought to align cultural activity with issues of identity and inclusion (Macdonald 2006). Significant contributions relevant to museum practice have come from government agencies, the museum sector, education and even the United Nations.[16] The common thread is the commitment to greater public participation through recognition of the significance of ideological, psychological and educational factors.

From the mid-1980s the reassessment and critique of the museum was manifested in Australia through a number of significant publications and

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[16]   Reports relating to inclusion include: *The Problem of the Museum in Contemporary Art in the West* (UNESCO 1972); *A Common Wealth: Museums in a Learning Age* commissioned by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, United Kingdom (Anderson 1999); *Australians and the Arts: A Report to the Australia Council* prepared by Saachi and Saachi (2000); *Renaissance in the Regions: A New Vision for England's Museums*, prepared by Resource UK (2001); and *Culture and Creativity: the Next Ten Years* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport 2001). Contributions by professional museum associations include *Museums for a New Century* by the American Association of Museums (1984); *Museums Towards Tomorrow: Serving the Future Public*, the National Conference of the Museums Association of Australia (Moritz et al. 1991); and work by the UK-based Group for Education in Museums (c.2006).

In an Australian context, Sites of Communication (2003, 2005, 2007) is a series of biennial symposia, which have brought together experts, researchers and panel facilitators to consider the role of museums in fostering dialogue and 'how best to meet audiences halfway'. However, it is noted that the publicly accessible evidence of these symposia is limited to conference programs (Sites of Communication 2003, 2005, 2007), and podcasts of three of the 2007 conference papers that are not related to audience development (National Gallery of Victoria 2007).

events. In 1986, pre-dating *The New Museology* by three years, Donald

Horne, then Professor of Political Science at the University of New South

Wales, delivered a lecture entitled *Demystifying the Museum* (Horne 1990)

in which he considered how the language of the museum and its objective

and encyclopædic nature bestows privilege on the dominant social group.

Horne expressed the view that museums are hostage to what he referred to

as the 'tyranny of collection'. He also advocated considering museums in

political and moral terms, asking key questions such as: Why these

objects? What stories are being told? He believed in 'a plurality of

histories and museums', which would in turn create a 'cultural democracy'

(Horne 1986). Horne concluded that perhaps the word 'museum' gets in

the way and offered 'visitor centre' as an alternative.

In 1989, Museums Australia convened a forum entitled *Museums Towards*

Tomorrow: Serving the Future Public in Melbourne. Among the speakers

was George MacDonald, the first director of the newly revamped Museum

of Victoria, who outlined his vision for the new museum in terms of a

move 'from the periphery towards the centre of social life – pursuing the

model of cultural centre' (MacDonald & Alsford 1991, 3). In doing so, he

suggested that the model should be more akin to a shopping precinct than a

traditional container for precious objects.

A significant example of this change in emphasis within the visual arts

came with the *Extending Parameters Forum*[17] held in Brisbane in 1990 and

supported by the Australia Council for the Arts, the Federal Government's

arts advisory and funding body. Papers on aspects of the art museum and

its need to extend its reach to broader audiences were presented, with

contributions ranging from the theoretical reframing of the museum's role

to detailed possibilities for new approaches to museum practice.

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[17]   Ian Burn, whose work was the focus of the discussion surrounding *The Field*, was
        amongst those who presented papers at the *Extending Parameters Forum* (Burn
        1990). Burn is also author of *The Necessity of Australian Art: An essay about
        interpretation* (Burn & Stephen 1988).

At this forum Donald Horne, building on his earlier publication with the paper entitled 'Coming Out of the Cultural Bunker', noted: 'The visitor can feel like a person under suspicion, an intruder rather than the owner for whom all is held in trust' (Horne 1990, p.59). Horne also outlined a number of innovative alternative approaches to the audience experience gathered from museums in other parts of the world. These included: considering the collection from a feminist perspective; making the storage of the collection visible; focusing on the contextualising of artwork; and curating thematic exhibitions that were more exciting and more readily accessible to a broader audience.

Jenny Harper presented the New Zealand case, with particular reference to the plans being developed for Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum and art gallery, in Wellington. Harper described the intention to shift the museum's focus from a 'self-serving collections-based organisation to audience oriented' (Harper 1990, p.41). She suggested that museums could be testing grounds for new ideas and new ways of approaching accessibility (ibid., p.44). She talked about shifting 'the emphasis of art *per se*, to take a broadly cultural stand on the national collection' (ibid., p.43), believing that this could be achieved by acknowledging 'many ways of looking at art and issues which surround its production and reception' (ibid., p.45). Her final plea was, 'Let us really communicate about art' (ibid., p.45). Harper cited examples of alternative approaches to presenting art, including inviting specialists from other disciplines to add a variety of different political and social perspectives to their gallery tours. She also suggested presenting works in storage; showing the processes including conservation and hanging; and having artists demonstrate their practice in order to demystify making processes (ibid., pp.43-45).

Both Horne's and Harper's examples drew attention to the need to broaden the appeal of the museum by shifting the focus from the object to the visitor and expanding the accepted behaviours from passive reverence to active participation. The belief that the visitor was an active participant in

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the construction of meaning opened the way for the educational imperatives of the museum to play a greater role in the new museology.

Education, in fact, had been a priority of the museum since its inception. Tony Bennett (1995), David Anderson (1999) and others outline the historical high-minded aspirations to transform the lower classes into fine upstanding citizens through exposure to the best examples of high culture. As an institution concerned with moral wellbeing defined in terms of particular knowledge and aesthetics, there was little or no incentive to take the particularities of the viewer's perspective and experience into account. However, this 'fill 'em up' approach and the moral righteousness that encouraged museums to allow the attendance of the lower classes but only on the museum's terms runs counter to contemporary education theory. In its stead, practices that assist the individual to find their own identity reflected and confirmed through cultural representation have come to the fore.

FROM THE VIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

The methodologies for understanding what is meant by 'identity' in a museum context owe much to the discipline of visitor studies, which is an offshoot of business management and marketing that, along with all other disciplines, went through a paradigm shift from product-focus to customer-focus in the latter half of the last century when E Jerome McCarthy's 'four p's' of the marketing mix – product, price, place and promotion (McCarthy 1968) – was extended to five with the addition of 'people' (Yudelson 1999). The lessons gained from turning attention from the primacy of objects to the visitor's relationship to the museum experience have changed not only what objects and materials are presented and how they are talked about, but also the range of behaviours and responses that museum experience is willing and able to engage. This has changed the look of exhibitions, as well as the nature and purpose of the displays, and the activity of being in a museum in general. Visitor studies has contributed to these changes initially by considering visitor behaviour in quantitative

terms and more recently by looking qualitatively at why viewers behave as they do and what can be done to improve the museum experience from the viewer's perspective.[18]

It is interesting to note, however, that museum visitor studies has only recently developed as a specific area of interest. Hooper-Greenhill, writing in 2006, describes visitor studies in the museum as 'a rapidly evolving, controversial, and dynamic field' (Hooper-Greenhill 2006, p.362):

> There is a shift from thinking about visitors as an undifferentiated mass public to beginning to accept visitors as active interpreters and performers of meaning-making practices within complex cultural sites. In relation to the purpose of studies, there is a development from internal museum studies with operational or professional remits to broader policy-related work and deep studies based on a drive to understand and explain rather than (or as well as) to manage. (Hooper-Greenhill 2006, p.362)

Focusing on the experience of viewers began tentatively with the awareness that not everyone can understand equally what the museum has to offer. Today visitor studies are often concerned with the appreciation of the subjectivity of the visitor experience. This development is apparent in the shift in focus of the journals of the major professional organisation for visitor studies, the Visitor Studies Association (VSA). The VSA journal from 1986 to 1997 was *Visitor Behaviour* which was 'dedicated to the study of visitor behavior in exhibition-type facilities such as aquariums, museums and zoos [and including] various topics of visitor behavior such as visitor orientation and circulation, signs/labels/graphics, marketing and publicity, and visitor surveys'. This journal was replaced in 1998 by *Visitor Studies Today*, which focuses on 'research, evaluation, philosophy, and current trends in any areas related to visitors studies, including but not limited to exhibitions, public programs, visitor services, media and technology, interpretation, and museum education'. The current journal,

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[18] It is of interest to note, however, that at the beginning of 2007 Dr Jan Parker from the University of Queensland became editor of *Visitor Studies*, the journal of the Vistor Studies Association. This has provided additional impetus for examples of Australian practice in visitor studies to enter the professional arena.

Visitor Studies, has an international editorial board, including influential museum educator and author of *The Constructivist Museum*, George E Hein (Hein 1994). Further, articles that are being published in the journal indicate an increase in consideration of museum related issues. However, it cannot be concluded from this that visitor research is an integral part of museum planning. This is even more so for the art museum where the need to be accountable to a broader audience is often still contested on the grounds that it leads to dumbing down of art (Timms 2004; McDonald 2002). Nevertheless, some positive gains have been made in taking the viewer's experience into account.

PLAIN ENGLISH

As a first step, the issue of the relevance of the exhibits to the visitor and the capacity for the visitor to appreciate what is being presented has become a priority in the museum. The dominant mode of display in the museum is objects supported by written texts. Wall texts, room brochures and other explanatory material have become almost standard practice in the art museum too, at least in relation to historical collections and exhibitions. If a visitor-focus is the prerequisite, how well visitors can relate to the exhibits will be determined in part by their capacity to take in the supporting information. This includes factors such as the amount of text presented and its syntax. Such considerations are nothing new. Andrew McClellan, in *Art and its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (McClellan 2003), recalls George Brown Goode, who, in the late 1800s, sought to construct exhibitions that were 'well arranged, progressive and clearly labelled'. His description of Goode's approach suggests that it bordered on the obsessive, with labels often more prominent than the objects (ibid., p.15).

Museum labelling has been, and continues to be, influenced by the Plain English movement which was instituted in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of coming to grips with convoluted legalistic documents (Blunden 2007). Labelling has also been affected by concerns coming from

developmental education theory and the recognition that the capacity to engage in particular reading experiences is dependent on the developmental stage of the reader. In both cases, what is said and the way it is said are interdependent.

Museums' consultant Jennifer Blunden outlines the original guidelines for Plain English as follows: avoid archaic words; avoid or properly explain specialist terminology; avoid 'nominalising', that is the turning of other words into nouns; and pay attention to grammatical structures, the ordering of clauses and long, syntactically convoluted sentences (Blunden 2007, p.4). Blunden noted recently that over the years the principles espoused by the movement have been simplified even further, resulting in what amounts to a dogma that advocates short crisp sentences, everyday vocabulary and above all use of the active voice. These guidelines are almost ubiquitous in the museum sector and reflect the assumption that the reader's capacity to absorb information is proportional to the length of that information and its syntactical simplicity.

In the mid-1980s Margareta Ekarv developed an approach to labelling specifically for museums that supported this assumption. Referred to as 'Ekarving', the system was originally derived from education theory, having been developed in response to difficulties Ekarv perceived in the field of adult literacy (Ekarv 1999). Ekarv adapted her easy-to-read approach to the museum situation in which physical circumstances such as standing up and low light levels can impinge on the capacity of the reader to read effectively. Ekarv's technique is similar to Plain English in that it advocates conforming to specific principles: simple language to express complex ideas; short sentences; and normal spoken word order that reflects the natural rhythm of speech. She goes further than most, however, suggesting that the ideal form for writing museum texts is: one main idea per line, with the end of the line coinciding with the natural end of the phrase; lines of about forty-five letters; and text broken into short paragraphs of four to five lines (Ekarv 1999). While some recent research

supports the efficacy of Ekarving (Davies 2000), another study carried out by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London found that the short sentences on separate lines were registered as less easy to read unless the reader had high literacy skills (Victoria & Albert Museum 1999). Thus, it is questionable whether the length *per se* is an absolute indicator of readability.

Ekarv herself is keen to point out that while the approach seeks to make reading easier, the content should not be simplistic or boring. The underlying premise of her approach is that attention needs to be taken with writing in order to ensure the texts are well connected to the objects they describe rather than tacked on as afterthoughts.

Blunden (2007) comes to a similar conclusion. She notes that while the Plain English movement sought to make the imparting of information as efficient as possible, it is not only the legibility of the information but also the kind of information that is provided that is increasingly being reconsidered. Blunden, in her recent re-examination of Plain English, argues that in the simplification of the original principles of Plain English much of the more nuanced possibilities for meaning have been compromised. She is interested in reaffirming that there is a relationship between what is said and the way it is said – that the context in which ideas are embedded can make texts more comprehensible. Unlike Ekarv, however, Blunden argues that a reductive approach based on absolutes like numbers of syllables and word counts misses opportunities for tapping into a range of effective ways of writing, some of which might fail the brevity test. Louise Ravelli is also critical of Plain English, in particular its rejection of the passive tense. In her recent publication *Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks,* Ravelli (2006) demonstrates how different tenses shift the focus onto particular topics and add to the flow of the ideas. In other words, simplicity, brevity and an active tense are not guarantees of engagement in themselves. Rather, conjuring up appropriate contexts contributes significantly to meaningful reading experiences. Irrespective of

the specifics of the approaches, Ekarv, Blunden and Ravelli are sensitive to the needs of readers rather than focusing simply on imparting the knowledge of the writers.[19] What these authors are seeking are texts, which connect as effectively as possible to the experience of museum visitors. Finding meaningful ways to describe the museum collection is one practical manifestation of the new museology. However, while the effective use of words provides one of the key access points, reading itself is a limiting tool – not everyone is good at it or interested in doing it.

THE CONSTRUCTIVIST MUSEUM

A change in perspective, from the imparting of specialist knowledge to the experience of the visitor, parallels a shift from teaching to learning. This phenomenon is not particular to the museum but has become increasingly apparent in education theory over recent years. The two institutions – the museum and education – converge in the constructivist museum. It could be said that constructivism is the educational equivalent of the new museology.

Constructivist education is built on a number of major theories of learning which seek to acknowledge and empower the learner as an active participant in the construction of knowledge. The essential feature of constructivism is the belief that the individual constructs meaning through their engagement with the world. This implies that learning occurs in a social context and is contingent upon prior knowledge.

George E Hein gives a comprehensive account of constructivism and how it might be applied to the museum in *The Constructivist Museum* (Hein 1994) and *Learning in the Museum* (Hein 1998). According to Hein, who has had a long career in areas of curriculum development and museum education, the constructivist museum is based on the premise that:

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[19]   For a further recent contribution to the debate on clarity in writing refer to Mark Tredinnick's *The Little Red Writing Book* (2006).

> [T]he logical structure for any subject-matter and the way it is presented to the viewer depend not on characteristics of the subject or on the properties of the objects on display, but on the educational needs of the visitor. In such a museum, it is not assumed that the subject-matter has an intrinsic order independent of the visitor, or that there is a single way for the visitor best to learn the material (Hein 1994, pp.76-77).

To paraphrase Hein, the constructivist museum is recognisable by a number of factors: its lack of a predetermined sequence; the acknowledgement of multiple learning modalities; the presentation of a range of points of view which allow the visitor to make connections with familiar concepts and objects; and the encouragement of comparisons between the unfamiliar and the new through a range of activities and experiences that utilise their life experiences (Hein 1998, p.35; 1999, pp.77-78). This is the kind of museum advocated in the new museology.

Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences has been a principle resource in defining alternative approaches to learning. In his influential work *Frames of Mind*, Gardner (1983) initially discerned seven intelligences – linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal. Each intelligence exists in everyone and each is of equal value, with individuals manifesting the intelligences differently depending on their inclinations and cultural influences.[20] The theory of multiple intelligences enables diverse learning styles and ways of interpretation to gain a practical edge as it is often understood to mean that looking at objects and talking about them is insufficient.

Interestingly, Gardner does not single out a specific creative or artistic intelligence. Rather:

> each of these forms of intelligence can be directed towards artistic ends: that is, the symbols entailed in that form of knowledge may, but need not, be marshalled in an

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[20] In his 1999 publication *Intelligence Reframed*, Gardner added 'naturalistic intelligence' to the list, defining it as the intelligence involved in recognition and classification (Gardner 1999, p.52).

aesthetic fashion ... Whether an intelligence is mobilized for aesthetic or non-aesthetic ends turns out to be an individual or a cultural decision (Gardner 1989, p.171).

Gardner also rejects a sensory basis for defining the different intelligences (Gardner 1999, p.35). Nevertheless, in the day-to-day application of multiple intelligences, there is a tendency to equate the range of different intelligences directly with the range of senses – that is, multiple experiences are offered that include the visual, auditory, tactile and, on occasion, the olfactory and taste.

The principles that underpin the constructivist museum provide the justification for much activity within museums these days. Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who was instrumental in the establishment of Museum Studies at the University of Leicester after working as education officer at the National Portrait Gallery in London, and Elaine Heumann Gurian, who started her career as a kindergarten and primary teacher before becoming Director of the Boston Children's Museum,[21] are amongst the many educationalists that find the theory of multiple intelligences alluring (Gurian 1992, pp.183-184; Hooper-Greenhill 1999). In 2007, the European Union, through its Socrates Grundtvig Programme, published *Lifelong Museum Learning: A European Handbook* (Gibbs et al. 2007), in which constructivist theory is advocated as the desired model for the museum into the new century.[22]

PARTICIPATION

Irrespective of whether education programs are based on Gardner's multiple intelligences or a range of sensory experiences, educators agree that active participation is essential. In fact, the provision of learning

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[21] The Boston Children's Museum is known for its exhibition and program experimentation in enhanced family learning, therapeutic projects for at-risk youth, and programs for people with special needs.

[22] Refer also to *The Responsive Museum: Working with Audiences in the Twenty-first Century* (Lang et al. 2006).

options has perhaps most often come to imply the valuing of participatory experience, which also owes much to the work of Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner and Lev Vygotsky. While these theorists differ in their emphasis on independent exploration or social interaction, all value direct experience as the key to learning and the construction of knowledge (Lambert & Clyde 2000; MacNaughton & Williams 2004). The assumption is that we learn best by doing, and that merely supplying a range of experiences and supporting material for the viewer to look at is insufficient. As a consequence, active participation has become a primary focus for the design of learning experiences in the museum environment.

Participation comes in many forms. Gurian, for example, notes that '[t]here are many objects that could be better understood if the audience has a chance to participate in a process or an experiment' (Gurian 1992, p.184). Another strategy encourages visitors to handle objects from the collection. In *Lifelong Museum Learning*, a program from the British Museum called 'Hands On' is described:

> Every day, in very many of the galleries of the British Museum, eight or so small objects are placed on a table in the care of a 'Hands On' volunteer. The purpose is to enable visitors to have a direct and personal experience of the museum through touching and talking about the objects. Touching objects reveals something extra about their qualities which is not evident when they are behind glass (Gibbs et al. 2007, p.89).

Museum education programs often invite visitors to participate in activities relating to exhibition themes. These workshops can involve making things, as well as theatre, role-play and other performance-based activities that encourage participants to engage their imaginations in response to the ideas engendered in the exhibition. This is one area in which the art museum is active particularly with young people. Some art museums have specific education rooms that include studio facilities.

An example is a workshop associated with an exhibition entitled *Situation* that I attended at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 2005. The

workshop was for children between six and twelve years of age and was facilitate by the MCA's education officer, Jasmin Stephens, in the museum's education facilities. The children made artworks that were similar to works in the show by applying their own experience to the tasks of mapping their social network in the manner of participating artists Anne Kay and Jane Polkinghorne and reconfiguring plastic bags in the manner of Sarah Goffman. The assumption behind these activities is that by repeating the processes artists use, the children access the thought processes of artists which in turn informs and extends their connection to the world of art (Stephens, J 2005, pers. comm., 8 July).

Kids APT, which runs in conjunction with the Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, takes this approach a step further by having young people actually working in the gallery spaces, often amongst the exhibits rather than in specialist facilities. At APT 2000, I witnessed young people (and the not so young) writing, drawing, making wooden boats and writing in 'Chinese', amongst other things. The atmosphere was wonderfully energetic. These activities were not mimicking the artists' art practices as in the MCA example above but, instead, Kids APT extends the notion of participation by engaging artists to design artworks specifically to engage young audiences directly, and what the children produce is often integrated into the artists' artwork.

Another strategy involves non-traditional art makers providing the artwork for exhibitions. Student work, for example, is increasingly shown in public art museums. Examples include the annual *Artrage* exhibitions of Tasmanian pre-tertiary students' work, initiated by the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston and toured throughout the state; *designTECH*, secondary students' work, at the Powerhouse in Sydney; and *Artstart*, a project that 'showcases the visual art talents of students from primary schools', also at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery (2007).

Education kits and associated art making activities are ubiquitous today, as a cursory scan of the internet sites of major art museums attests. These programs conform to the constructivist principles of participation and contextualisation outlined above, and from the energy that is often palpable in the workshops, they are enjoyed and appreciated. This thesis is not the place to evaluate or criticise the efficacy of these projects, although increasingly research is being undertaken in this regard.[23] Suffice to say, these programs involve the viewers in the ideas about art and provide an awareness of art's multifarious possibilities.

As an adjunct to this practice, participation by people from diverse cultural backgrounds in developing exhibitions of cultural material relevant to them is increasing (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 2000). This strategy encourages those who may have felt excluded in the past because their culture was not represented (or not represented appropriately) in the museum, to gain a sense of recognition and ownership.

A Tasmanian example of such practice is *Strings Across Time* at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston. This permanent exhibition is a collaboration between the museum's curator of decorative arts, Glenda King, and women from the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. The exhibition brings together shell necklaces made by Tasmanian Aboriginal women over at least the past 200 years. The inclusive process undertaken in the development and presentation of this small but exquisite exhibition has provided a meaningful appreciation of this ancient and continuing tradition. (G King 2006, pers. comm., 10 August).

Practical activity for adults is offered less often and participation is more likely to involve verbal communication of some kind rather than actually

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[23]   Research relating specifically to art education can be found at the websites of Engage UK, the National Association for Gallery Education (www.engage.org); The Centre for Creative Communities (www.creativecommunities.org.uk); Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (www.gulbenkian.org.uk); and The Getty Foundation (http://www.getty.edu/foundation). Most major art museums also undertake relevant programs and research.

making things. Indeed individual and class discussion is also a primary tool of the educator's repertoire. Audio tours, tours with museum guides who can answer questions and engage the viewer in discussion, and talks by artists and curators where questions can be asked about the exhibition's purpose, content, meaning and value have become standard aspects of the museum's public programs.

Through this broad range of add-on activities, art exhibitions are used as catalysts for learning by providing creative challenges, new experiences and the opportunity to play with art materials and even with the art itself. In doing so, engagement of new audiences who prefer active participation can be enticed to engage with what the museum has to offer.

CONTEXTUALISATION

While constructivism is applied in principle across much of the museum sector, there are some particular implications for the art museum. Most often the constructivist approach focuses on diversity both in terms of the needs of the viewer, and the ways in which art objects can be interpreted. Further, the new museology holds that the meaning is not in the object *per se*, but rather in its context (Gurian 2006, p.45). As Gurian puts it, it is not the object 'but the associated history that informs the visitor' (ibid., p.39).

Hooper-Greenhill, Gurian and many others describe art museum experiences that are rich in contextual and interpretative materials. A primary conclusion, which these authors draw from their observations and experience, is that offering a range of opportunities will allow the viewers to find the path through the art museum that suits them best. Through connection to their prior experience they will be able to build their own interpretations and make new connections.[24] While this may be an admirable aim, contextualisation in the art museum is not straightforward. In fact, providing information of any kind has been a difficult hurdle to

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[24]   Refer also to studies undertaken by JH Falk & LD Dierking (1992, 2000).

overcome. For instance, Simon Wilson, while education officer at the Tate Gallery in London in the 1980s, by his own admission 'unsuccessfully urged the adoption of wall texts and captions' (Wilson, cited in Lord & Lord 1997, p.105). The negativity from within the Tate that he had experienced in response to this seemingly simple idea led to him 'finally going public' at the 1987 London conference of the Association of Art Historians with a paper entitled 'Curators ... and the myth of the self-evident art work'. In this paper, Wilson railed against the silent white cube and the dominance of the point of view held by museums staff who continued to advocate minimal support material on the premise that to do otherwise would disturb the integrity of the autonomous experience. Somewhat ironically, this is the same position taken in many of the contributions to *The Discursive Museum* (Noever 2002) published on the occasion of the MAK symposium of the same name held in 2001. James Cunos's lecture 'Against the discursive museum' is particularly relevant. He is adamant that discursivity generated by additional contextual materials takes the 'resonance and wonder' from the experience of the artwork (Cunos, cited in Noever 2002).[25]

Philip Wright, in his chapter entitled 'The quality of visitors' experiences in the Art Museum' in *The New Museology* (Vergo 1989, pp.119-148), pre-empted the difficulty that the contextual shift would pose on the art museum. He noted the resistance of the curatorial sector of the art museum toward interpretation and education as well as their pervading aesthetic, concluding that:

> A possible loss of mystery for some of the more connoisseurial visitors might be more than compensated for by a gain from contextualisation for those less knowledgeable (Wright, cited in Vergo 1989, p.141).

This situation is by no means resolved. Nevertheless, despite the persistence of the white cube, wall texts, room brochures and other

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[25]   Refer also to Furedi's argument that making things accessible to the art museum visitor has lead to the diminution of the purpose of art, in *Where Have All the Intellectuals Gone?* (Furedi 2004).

explanatory material have been seeping into art galleries and have become almost standard practice, at least in exhibitions of historical artwork. Acknowledgement of different ways of presenting ideas and information and the contextualisation of artwork is increasingly being applied. Art museum collections are being reframed and themed.

David Hansen's major exhibition *John Glover and the Colonial Picturesque* (2003), which he curated at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, provides one such example. The exhibition included: a biographical video of the life of the artist; a few works by contemporaries of Glover that placed his practice in art history; pertinent quotes on walls painted in colours to reflect phases in the artist's career; and audio guides alerting the viewers' attention to historical information, personal background and technical details. The exhibition had a public program that connected interested viewers to parallel experiences provided by the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery 2003). An extensive education kit was developed in which activities were designed to connect the artist's paintings to movements and techniques. The kit included activities which explored how the artist selected subject matter, how the picture plane was constructed according picturesque conventions, and what it is like to use particular art materials.

Picasso: Love & War 1935–1945, which was exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2006, provides a further example. This exhibition's presentation extended beyond the exaltation of particular masterpieces, tracking some of Picasso's works as they evolved and responded to the photography of Dora Maar and his personal relationship with her over a specific period, and made use of originals, images of the work, associated photographs by Maar, film footage and informative texts.

Raining Cats and Dogs at New Zealand's Auckland Art Gallery in 2004 provides an example of an exhibition that encouraged viewers to look at work that under usual circumstances they might not. This exhibition

brought together images of dogs and cats from all areas of the fine art collection, covering a wide range of media and a broad historical time frame. These were installed in a gallery with cartoons of dogs and cats drawn on the walls. The exhibition was obviously aimed at a young audience but also had adult visitors getting down on all fours to enter a kennel where contextual material – books with canine imagery – were available. The fine art elitism usually associated with the collection was transformed into recognisable and pleasurable everyday experience that each child (and adult) could relate to. This exhibition was also supported by an educational activity sheet that aimed to engage young viewers in a discovery hunt for ideas and information relating to images.

Contextualisation puts artwork into broader contexts in terms of history, politics and geography, emphasising the value of discussing ideas behind the artworks. Through these processes personal connections with objects and artworks are forged and meaning is constructed.

DIRECT EXPERIENCE

A limitation of the constructivist approach as it is applied in the art museum, however, is the degree to which the artwork is essential to this experience. There is a sense that the artwork is often used as a trigger to another learning experience rather than to an engagement with the artwork *per se*. In other words, the learning experience can be built on the wide range of materials, ideas and activities that surround the artwork rather than on the materiality of the particular artwork. The value of the art experience is seen as being located in learning in general and on the individual connections made by the learner. It is not important if their direct experience involves only the contextual object or the textual material, and the artwork is incidental. Irrespective of the value of such an experience and the learning that the contextual material may have generated, this is not an experience of the artwork. In fact, the artwork may not even need to be present at all except for providing the initial impetus.

From my observations, strategies that involve direct engagement with contemporary art are surprisingly rare. One exception is an innovative annual project undertaken by the Auckland Art Gallery that looks at art appreciation rather than the practicalities of making.[26] Each year a number of limited edition prints by New Zealand's major printmakers are selected and exhibited anonymously. The exhibition is specifically for children; in fact, people over the age of sixteen are not permitted to enter the exhibition space. The object of the exercise is not only to have the young people look at art independently, but also to have them purchase one of the high quality prints, all of which are for sale at the one exceptionally reasonable price. The ingenuity of the project is that the children make their choice without their parents being involved – in fact, the work cannot be collected until the end of the show. As a consequence, a particularly interesting off-shoot of the experience is the intense conversations between children and parents that are generated as the parents, who have no direct visual cues as to what the artwork is or who the artist is, endeavour to work out what they have paid for. While this strategy presumably does involve the young viewers looking at the artwork and making choices about what they like, there is no evidence that they are encouraged to go beyond aesthetic engagement with making their choices. So while it is an innovative program and further research could be edifying, it offers little in the context of this research.

An example of a program that has sought to evaluate the viewers' response is the experiment with viewers' interpretations conducted by interpretative planner and audience researcher Douglas Worts and his colleagues at the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO), Canada.[27] This contribution is particularly

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[26] On 4 December 2004 during a field visit to New Zealand, I learned about this project at the Auckland Art Gallery from parents who were waiting for their two children to emerge from the exhibition. I was able to listen to the subsequent conversation with their children about their selected prints.

[27] Worts's research paper was written in collaboration with Austin Clarkson, professor of music emeritus, York University, Toronto, Ontario, and a founder of the Milkweed Collective, a community of artists and writers who conduct workshops on creativity for children and adults (D Worts 2007, pers. comm., 15 July).

valuable because the researchers evaluated the approach over a considerable period of time. The experiment, 'Explore a painting in depth', was undertaken by Austin Clarkson and Douglas Worts at AGO between 1993 and 2003 (Clarkson & Worts 2005). According to the researchers, the purpose of the experiment was: to increase the time visitors spend in the gallery; to provide multiple points and methods of access to the collection; to increase viewer focus on the artworks; and to ensure that all interpretive devices were both unobtrusive and optional. Given the thoroughness of this experiment, its focus on viewer engagement, and that this kind of work is seldom undertaken, the experiment is examined in detail. Clarkson and Worts describe the experiment as follows.

> [It] consisted of a booth that offered seating for two visitors and, opposite them, *The Beaver Dam*, a 1919 landscape painting by the Canadian artist J. E. H. MacDonald. There were headphones and a touchpad for selecting among three audio programs. One program provided a three-minute curatorial introduction to the painting. A second offered a three-minute 'portrait of the artist' using the words of his friends and relatives. The third, the Exercise for Exploring, was the heart of the experiment. It lasted 12 minutes and engaged the visitor in a creative process with the imagery of the painting. After a simple relaxation, viewers were invited to use their imaginations to 'enter' the image and identify with colors and shapes (Clarkson & Worts 2005, pp.257-258).

While this sounds like a high-tech intervention, the analysis of the experiment reveals that the most engaging aspect was the 'Exercise for Exploring', in which viewers expressed personal narrative readings of the work. This part of the experiment was based on psychologist Carl Jung's notion of developing creative imagination (Jung 1967), as well as Maslow's notion of self-actualisation (Maslow 1968, 1970) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow experiences' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990). Although focusing on the individual's free imagination, it was, to some extent, a guided experience. The following extract is the description of the experiment. It is presented in full as it contains some elements that will be examined in further detail in this thesis:

> Viewers are asked to scan the painting slowly all over, then close their eyes and

'see' the artwork with the eyes of the imagination. Focusing the attention in this way generates an imaginative bond with the artwork, such that when viewers are asked to choose a spot in the picture and imagine going to that spot, they have no difficulty doing so. (This happens as readily with abstract as with figurative artworks.) They are asked to look around the picture from that spot and explore it. Various sense modalities are brought into play to further stimulate the imagination. The narrator asks whether visitors can sense the temperature, hear sounds, and feel textures. They are asked to choose a particular color, focus on it, and note the feelings they associate with it.

They are asked to focus on a particular shape and imagine becoming that shape and moving about as that shape. The exercise continues with an invitation to let the imagination play freely during the ensuing minute of silence. During this 'solo' period, images flow in that bring the creative process to culmination. When visitors report such images as original, surprising, and powerful, and that they have had a peak experience, we can describe this as the 'illumination' phase of the process (Clarkson & Worts 2005, pp.263-264).

At the end of the session, viewers were invited to relay their experience, thoughts and criticisms on special 'Share Your Reaction' cards (Clarkson & Worts 2005, p.258). These cards provided the data for the evaluation of the experiment and responses included writing, drawing and combinations of both. The researchers describe the results as follows: '[h]undreds of cards reported that the painting, which at first seemed dull and boring, seemed to "come alive" ' (ibid., p.268); '[i]n the intimacy of the booth, patrons found a place for a personal, reflective encounter with an artwork' (ibid., p.269); the exercise 'allows sufficient time for the imagination to bring forth personal images and felt meanings' (ibid., p.270); and '[a]ctivating the creative imagination may produce an intensity and depth of experience that many describe as spiritual' (ibid., p.271). These summations describe the way unleashing the creative imagination through contemplation can lead to a transcendent aesthetic experience.

Clarkson and Worts's research certainly shows that this approach has the capacity to enhance the visitor experience in the art museum. It is pertinent, however, that the artwork chosen for the experiment was an early

twentieth-century representational landscape, although the researchers note that the strategy applies 'as readily with abstract as with figurative artworks' (ibid., p.263). No consideration is given to other forms of art. The question that Clarkson and Worts's experiment does not address is whether the approach is transferable to the experience of discursive contemporary art.

The overall experiment adheres to the constructivist principle of multiple modes of learning by providing options for cognitive engagement through the mediation of alternative strands of information. The researchers claim that '[t]he team believed that the motivation to engage cultural objects, issues and ideas, which comes from intimate and intense experiences, can provoke the public to a dialogue about multiple forms of meaning – historical and contemporary, personal and collective' (Clarkson & Worts 2005, p.262). The dialogical aspect to the Clarkson and Worts experiment came from the range of approaches that were offered to viewers alongside the narrative exercise. In providing these options, the experiment can be understood as taking a constructivist approach to learning. However, no analysis was undertaken, or at least no evidence is provided in the article, on whether dialogical interactions between 'the multiple forms of meaning' actually occurred. On the contrary, the artwork is used to trigger the individual viewer's imagination through free-flowing idiosyncratic monologue rather than dialogue. Dialogue with the artwork is in fact actively curtailed, as viewers were asked to look at the work for a while and then close their eyes. It was in separating from the work and entering the individual's imagination that the nub of the experience was assumed to be located. This being so, I suggest that the capacity for the work to talk back to the viewer and argue its case is taken out of the equation. As a consequence, I contend that in this experiment the viewer has become active while the artwork has become passive and communication is therefore biased in one direction.

The researchers note in passing that '[t]he intent was to scan the cards into

a computer that visitors could then consult and in this way share their experience with others' (Clarkson & Worts 2005, p.276). However, this aspect of the experiment did not eventuate. This would seem to indicate that creating a conversation with others, which might be described as dialogical, was not considered a priority of the project. In the context of this thesis, the experience of the painting and the narratives that the exercise generated, related to the individual's imaginative journey. Acceptance of whatever the viewer sees as their narrative unfolds, while connected personally to the viewer, does not need to connect to the actuality of the work. In fact, once the work has fulfilled its function as the initial trigger, it is no longer necessary for the artwork to be present. I argue that one of the limitations of a relativist approach to artwork is that acceptance of anything and everything denies the voice of the artwork, and therefore the experience can be understood as monological and idiosyncratic rather than dialogical and discursive.

The 'Explore a painting in depth' experiment did encourage viewers to spend more time in the art museum, and that is a significant achievement in itself. However, there is a question about what constitutes direct experience of the artwork and whether the particularities of the individual artwork were really important to the process.

One approach that does aim to engage viewers directly with the work and to validate their claims by recourse to the particularities of the artwork is Visual Thinking Strategies, referred to as VTS.[28] VTS has been selected because of its stated aim to have students look at art first without the intervention of contextual material. VTS is a teaching program devoted to connecting directly with art and is considered in the context of my research because it focuses on keeping the viewers' eyes open. The program was

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[28]   Other programs in visual thinking have been developed though such institutions as Discipline-Based Art Education generated through the Getty Foundation, Engage in the United Kingdom http://www.engage.org; National Art Education Association <http://www.naea-reston.org> in the USA; and Art Education Australia http://www.arteducation.org.au.

developed at Visual Understanding in Education in New York and has been operating primarily in the United States since the 1990s. It is a collaboration between psychologist Abigail Housen and museum educator Philip Yenawine. Yenawine was Director of Education at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the early 1980s. While in this role, he became concerned about the kind of experience viewers were having in the art museum and saw in Housen's ideas 'a practical blueprint' to 'redress the disconnect of people from art' in a way that would allow them to 'operate independently and move towards self-sufficient viewing' (Yenawine 1999, pp.2-4).

VTS is based on Housen's five stages of aesthetic development (Housen 1983, 2002) and are paraphrased as follows:

1. Storytellers who weave what they see into stories.

2. Constructive viewers who determine value in terms of their sense of what is realistic.

3. Viewers who adopt the analytical and critical stance of the art historian (facts and figures on place, school, style, time and provenance) leading to explanation.

4. Viewers who experience a personal encounter with art though appreciation of the subtleties of line and shape and colour.

5. Viewers who know the ecology of a work – its time, its history, its questions, its travels, its intricacies.

The developmental stages which underpin VTS owe a lot to the work of Piaget as well as to Vygotsky's belief that thought is actually dependent on speech. Yenawine describes how this principle is used in the program as follows:

> One way to understand this concept is to suggest that the learner talks him or herself into understanding. Grappling with a phenomenon or issue verbally leads to understanding – an underlying principle of most psychotherapy. Vygotsky's theory

– and importantly, his evidence – convinced me to make greater use of verbalizing: get people to talk about art, actively constructing meaning from what they see. In this way, they will explore the art they are viewing and, at the same time, practice a process that develops both thinking patterns and concepts related to viewing more generally (Yenawine 1999, p.7).

VTS also incorporates Yenawine's observation that 'most engaging and expansive discussions result ... when all participants bring equivalent, albeit different, knowledge and experience to the table, and when all feel equally welcome to and capable of participating' (Yenawine 1999, p.7). In essence, VTS links peer interaction to the teaching of viewing through verbalisation using 'the non-directive interview' (ibid., p.8).[29] This form of interview is based on a series of specific open-ended questions: 'What is going on here? What do you see that makes you say that? What more do you see?' (Visual Understanding in Education 2001). Students answer these questions in response to looking at particular artworks and they assess their responses in terms of evidence that they find in the work. According to the program, looking at art is not only a means of enhancing the students' relationship with art, but also of simultaneously developing their skills in cognition and evaluation.

Some of the possibilities and pitfalls of direct engagement with artwork are revealed in a conversation between Yenawine and Danielle Rice, educator and director of the Delaware Art Museum in the United States, who has described educators of the VTS ilk as belonging to the 'anti-information movement' (Rice 2003). The conversation published in *Curator: The Museum Journal* in 2002, presents the case for two different approaches to learning in the art gallery – one is information-rich and the other information-free. Rice, who is in favour of an information-rich approach,

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[29]   The core of Housen's data collection is a non-directive, stream-of-consciousness interview, called the aesthetic development interview (ADI): 'The interviewee is given an image and asked to talk about what he or she is looking at. No directive questions are asked, thus ensuring that the interviewer does not influence the interview. The subject is simply invited to talk as if s/he were thinking out loud, talking about what is seen' (DeSantis & Housen 2000). Housen calls this 'thinking aloud' (Housen 2002).

sees Yenawine's strategy of eliminating information and focusing totally on the viewer's responses as missing the opportunity to 'seduce' the viewer into looking at things that they may not have otherwise. She also feels that the professional expertise of the museum educator in communicating a passion for objects and the arts is wasted in the VTS model:

> I don't think people's egos are so fragile that they can't handle knowing that they've misread something if this is done in the context of frank and democratic discussion in which a variety of perspectives is presented. (Rice & Yenawine 2002, p.6)

Yenawine, on the other hand, thinks information is a waste of time, as novice viewers do not have the capacity to take in what the expert is saying. He believes that '[o]ur thinking represents understandings and process that are beyond their natural ability in the way that skipping is beyond the capacity of a toddler' (Rice & Yenawine 2002, p.8). He questions the assumption that information can achieve what experts claim: 'when experts share their insights what they are hoping for is fast-tracking a process that took us many, many years' (ibid., p.3).

There are two important considerations embedded in this exchange that I wish to highlight. One is that where Rice sees the viewer as being 'not so fragile', Yenawine is saying that the initiating moment for the novice viewer is indeed fragile and needs to be carefully managed. The second is that where Rice seeks to seduce, Yenawine believes that if the viewer needs to be seduced to look at an object, then the wrong object has been selected to look at in the first place. Both of these elements point to the fact that Yenawine and Rice are dealing with different audiences. During the conversation they come to the realisation that Yenawine is focusing on beginners and Rice on those who have already made some commitment to look. Yenawine goes so far as to locate his viewers at stages one and two on Housen's scale of aesthetic development, concluding that they are only capable of making personal narratives. In contrast, Rice's viewers can be located at developmental stage three in that they 'are beginning to examine

art through a framework of artists' intentions, [and] of an interest in motivations, context, and technique' (ibid., p.8).

Once the incongruity in developmental stages is recognised, the division between Yenawine and Rice is not so clear-cut. In describing her process, Rice notes that she starts an art experience by asking viewers to respond to a particular work and in the early stages of a discussion only adds information that helps to confirm viewers' interpretations when they have come close to traditional readings. Therefore, while Rice and Yenawine conclude their conversation by saying that they both contribute to learning in the art museum and that there are many ways to learn, there is an unspoken agreement that good communication in teaching involves providing space for the viewer's response as a first step. While they do not come to this shared conclusion overtly, Yenawine's suggestion that giving the viewer 'the first bite' is part of good communication does seem to be a significant factor in both their strategies. Concomitantly, Yenawine is not against information *per se*. In fact, by the third stage of development viewers using VTS are becoming active seekers of information. Thus, the two approaches share more than they may appear to at first glance.

I argue that the limitation of VTS is not so much in its exclusion of information in the first instance but, rather, in the kind of artwork to which Yenawine believes the novice viewer should be introduced. A closer examination of Housen's developmental stages reveals that they could be understood as equating with the following five approaches to art appreciation – narrative, representation, formalism, self-expression and connoisseurship. Significantly, these approaches tend to predate the discursive shift that was outlined in the first chapter. What is more, Housen believes that adult beginners need to start their experience of art at stage one and as a consequence should only be shown artwork that is intentionally narrative, as she believes this is all they have the capacity to deal with (ibid., p.9).

Yenawine goes on to say, 'Many of the challenges that encourage beginning viewers to develop, present themselves through image selection rather than strategy' (ibid., p.11). In other words, VTS is a tightly managed process by which 'images presented gradually increase in complexity' (ibid., p.11). He defines complex artworks as follows:

> [They] contain either more information or notably less on which to base interpretation; subjects are less familiar, more complicated; more is implied and less concretely depicted; there are more contradictions; there is more symbolism or more levels of meaning; the works are more ambiguous; they are more taxing stylistically or more specialized in technique; they are narrower in focus; or they are more culturally distant. (Rice & Yenawine 2002, p.11)

This description would seem to rule out the capacity for viewers who may not be at the more advanced developmental stages to engage with discursive contemporary practice. It also could be logically concluded that an encounter with contemporary art outside the controlled environment of VTS is not possible.

This developmental aspect of VTS is problematic for discursive practice. However, it is relevant to note that developmental theory no longer has quite the caché in contemporary education theory that Housen and Yenawine assume. The rigorous application of Piaget's developmental stages is being debunked as it has been discovered that if children are in a supportive environment, they can engage in behaviours that were previously considered to be far beyond their developmental capabilities (Connor 2007). What is more, conflating developmental stages with a progressive view of art history and artistic styles is based on an assumption that needs further evaluation. As I will argue in a later chapter, there is often a considerable amount of familiar content in contemporary art that the novice viewer is well able to discern.

Nevertheless, while the stages of development in VTS may be questionable, the focus that it places on engaging the viewer to look intensely does meet the requirement for direct experience. The non-

directive interview that keeps the viewer focused on looking and verifying is a more discursive option for engaging contemporary art than the imaginative narrative of Clarkson and Worts's 'Explore a painting in depth' experiment. At the same time, however, given the limitations on the kind of artwork that novice viewers have access to in VTS, I suggest that the net impact of the two strategies on novice viewers' engagement with contemporary art is negligible. In both cases, contemporary discursive art practice is avoided.

A consistent line in both VTS and Clarkson and Worts's experiment is the constructivist belief in the importance of confirming the experience and identity of the viewer. The viewer of the 'Explore a painting in septh' experiment went on a personal journey, while the child or adult beginner in VTS is encouraged to find and verify personal narratives in response to selected artwork. Further, in the constructivist museum in general, the viewer is encouraged to find a personal route through the museum spaces and exhibitions. Both VTS and 'Explore a painting in depth' assume that this connection will derive from the viewer's response to being drawn to what they like and to that with which they feel comfortable.

A CONTRADICTION

I question the assumption that making the experience easy or self-directed is a necessary pre-requisite for effective viewer engagement in the museum. In this context, I will consider an example given by Gurian in her advocacy of the constructivist museum, which is worth consideration, although it is not directly art related: the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

In general, the constructivist museum that Gurian refers to has a number of specific qualities: it is a welcoming and safe space; it acknowledges social and cultural diversity; it offers multiple learning styles; and navigation through the space is handed over to the visitor. In her description of the Holocaust Museum, Gurian acknowledges that learning differences and

diverse forms of presentation that connect to the full range of senses have been utilised in constructing the experience. However, some aspects of what is offered run counter to the constructivist prescription. First, this museum does not allow the visitor to find their own way without 'a predetermined sequence' (Hein 1998, p.35) but instead imposes 'an optionless route' on the visitor (Gurian 2006, p.173). Second, rather than limiting the amount of text, there is 'seemingly endless text' (ibid., p.173). Nevertheless, Gurian notes that many people follow the prescribed route and read the texts thoroughly (ibid., p.173). Despite breaking these basic rules of the constructivist museum, Gurian describes this museum as extremely successful, stating that it is considered an essential place for dignitaries and tourists alike to visit, with repeat visits. Gurian, almost in passing, notes that these anomalies are dealt with because before they enter the museum visitors 'emotionally prepare themselves to come and take a journey of personal introspection' (ibid., p.173). In other words, visitors make a deliberate decision to undertake an extremely difficult experience. This would imply that it is not the difficulty itself that determines whether people are willing to take on an experience, but rather their capacity to *decide* to take it on. What is important is that visitors are aware of the paradigm they are entering. In the Holocaust Museum visitors make the choice to engage with difficulty.

Following on from this anomaly, I would draw attention to the fact that people often choose to do things that are frightening, difficult or unpleasant particularly with regard to sport and entertainment. However, when it comes to contemporary art, the possibility that visitors might choose to engage with difficulty is less clear.

INTRODUCING VISUACY

The recognition that the world is a frightening, difficult or unpleasant place
is one of the core assumptions behind the recommendations of *First We
See* the National Review of Visual Education (Davis 2008) that was
undertaken by Dianna Davis on behalf of the Commonwealth of
Australia's Department of Education, Employment and Workplace
Relations.[30] This review of the state of visual arts in education from
kindergarten to year twelve across the nation outlines the requirements
necessary for actively engaging with new technologies and the vast
increase in images with which we are constantly bombarded. It is of
relevance here not only as art education influences how art is presented to a
young audience, but also because the report proposes the art museum as a
pivotal conduit for the delivery of visual art education (ibid., pp.59-67).

In scoping visual education for the twenty-first century, Davis quotes from
Turning Point: A Strategy for the Contemporary Visual Arts in England, a
10-year strategy for strengthening the visual arts in England:

> The power of the image has never been more potent. In a world where the real and
> the virtual have become less distinct, the object and its meaning gain new value
> and meaning (Arts Council England 2006).

In the forward to *Turning Point,* contemporary art practice is seen as the
model on which visual education can be reformed:

> Contemporary art is the art of our time. It is more a way of seeing than a defined
> art form; the practice is often interdisciplinary with a range of media including
> photography, new media, moving image, art, crafts, design and architecture. It is a
> driving force in popular culture, nurtured through creative innovation,
> entrepreneurial risk, new curatorial processes and critical debate. While the
> dictionary definition of 'modern' is synonymous with 'contemporary', in art the
> modern has a period – arguably 1860 to 1970 – a style and a theory which is both
> absorbed and contested by the plurality of contemporary art. This breadth gives

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[30] At the time this research was commissioned the Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Relations was called Department of Education,
Science and Training (DEST).

rich opportunities for artists, audiences and organisations to respond to increasingly global contexts (ibid., p.5).

As background to the National Review of Visual Education Davis also quotes Catherine Regnier, speaking at *A European and International Research Symposium: Evaluating the Impact of Arts and Cultural Education*, held at the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2007, saying 'the complexity and ambiguity of ... artwork helps develop the capacity to construct and deconstruct chains of reasoning and argument' and, further, that thinking about art 'promotes a shift from a monolithic to a more complex vision, from a unique interpretation to multiple interpretations' (Regnier 2007, p.18).

Although Davis quotes these sources, the review does not make its definition of contemporary art clear. Rather, it is assumed that engagement with the visual is essential for the future of the contemporary world, and that the visual arts are in the pivotal position to take up this challenge.

This position is placed in contrast to previous models, such as discipline-based arts education emanating from the Getty Foundation in the United States, which sought to parallel visual arts with other disciplines within the curriculum, and perspectives that value the arts for their contribution to psychological wellbeing and self-esteem. The review argues that both these strategies have failed to prevent the marginalisation of the visuals arts within the curriculum (Davies 2008, 72-74).

Instead, the review's recommendations place the visual arts at the centre of the curriculum on a par with literacy and numeracy. To achieve this centrality, Davis invents the term 'visuacy' to define a space that goes beyond the notion of visual literacy that is the focus of programs such as VTS. In doing so, Davis seeks to stake out a territory that can stand on its own without reference to another form.

Visuacy is defined by inference as the capacity to develop visual acuity, leading 'to the capacity to stand atop the mountain of technological

sophistication rather than be mired in the trenches which surround it' (Davis 2008, p.212). The term 'visuacy' acknowledges 'societal, employer and policy concern about the need for 21st Century skills in those exiting from schools and the fact that the core of those [skills] relating to innovation and creativity emanates from visual education' (ibid., p.207).

The assumption that 'innovation and creativity emanate from visual education' requires further consideration. Davis acknowledges that much of visual art education is ineffective and that many teachers feel inadequate with regard to teaching the visual arts. This would suggest that best practice in art teaching is far from the norm and in fact conservative approaches are more prevalent. Therefore, in defining visuacy in terms of problem-solving, innovation and creative thinking are problematic. While these qualities *may* apply to the visual arts, they are not necessarily how art is enacted in education settings. In fact, these characteristics are more akin to the process of design than what many see as the free-flowing, intuitive processes of less functional approaches to art making.

The failure to come to grips with what is meant by 'contemporary art', and the conflating of all art under this umbrella, fails to expose the range of paradigms that are operating in the visual arts as described in the first chapter of this thesis – in particular that formalist aesthetics and discursive practices are quite different and opposing phenomena.

Interestingly, in the final paragraphs of the National Review, Davis invokes the words of Susanne Langer in order to justify placing visual arts at the centre of visuacy in education:

> Visual forms – lines, colors, proportions etc. – are just as capable of *articulation*, i.e. of complex combination, as words. But the laws that govern this sort of articulation are altogether different from the laws of syntax that govern language. The most radical difference is that *visual forms are not discursive.* They do not present their constituents successively, but simultaneously, so the relations determining a visual structure are grasped in one act of vision. Their complexity, consequently, is not limited, as the complexity of discourse is limited, by what the

mind can retain from the beginning of an apperceptive act to the end of it (Langer, cited in Davis 2008, p.211).

Davies deference to Langer in this way returns the paradigm to formalist aesthetics. The author has not recognised the impasse between Langer's non-discursive definition of the formalist aesthetic and discursive practice that shamelessly uses aesthetics for a multiplicity of purposes. Without acknowledgement of the difficulties in engaging these divergent paradigms, a concept such as visuacy is bound to maintain the status quo. The desire for inclusion of all perspectives has hidden, and unknowingly overridden, the inherent contradictions embedded in these perspectives.

The National Review proposes the development of a new approach to the curriculum modelled on what its author sees as the principles and tenets of creative practice – creativity and innovation skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and communication and collaboration skills. However, nowhere in the report is a clear connection made between this desire and contemporary art practices. Unlike *Turning Point*, which defines what it means by 'contemporary art' in terms of creative innovation, risk-taking and critical debate (Arts Council England 2006, p.5), in the first paragraph of *First We See* the author chooses to collapse all the possibilities of visual arts practice together and then to ascribe the values of contemporary practice to the whole spectrum of visual arts activity.

It is salutary to note that in the case studies of 'identified good practice' included in the review (Davis 2008, pp.121-167) risk-taking is mentioned in only three of the eleven cases, once in the context of students being encourage to take risks to extend their individual talent and potential (ibid., p.154); once in terms of the separation of art from the rest of the school which creates safe environment for taking risks (ibid., p.156); and once simply that 'boys are risk takers' (ibid., p.164). Problem-solving is not mentioned at all.

Only one example of identified good practice, Warners Bay High School in New South Wales, makes the point of highlighting the broader context for

art making:

> Working within the flexibility of the New South Wales Visual Art syllabus, students are taught to understand that meaning in works is not always obvious and that they need to develop the critical skills to interpret and discuss the different ways in which meaning can be made. Students raised the importance of their theory lessons and writing, and how this gave them enormous insight into the way concepts can be developed and extended in different ways by using and applying this learning to their art making (Davis 2008, p.146).

This is not to say that others may not value these characteristics, but the evidence is not provided in the case studies. Instead, the evidence in the case studies champions individual expression above collaboration and problem-solving or risk-taking in relation to ideas. So while contemporary art practice is valued as a potential tool for engaging with the challenges and needs of life in the twenty-first century, between this stated aim, its enactment in the classroom, and the National Review itself, the potential is diluted and the old paradigm is left unchallenged and unchanged.

Similarly, in the constructivist museum the paradigms or codes of art – representation, formalist abstraction, self-expression and discursive contemporary practice – are presented as a range of options that can be applied as the viewer chooses. This relativist approach to constructivism in the art museum setting tends to confirm the preconceptions that the viewer has before entering the gallery by allowing them to use codes of interpretation with which they are already familiar and comfortable. All responses and interpretations are deemed acceptable within the constraints of either free narrative or the evidentiary response methods. My concern is that if viewers engage the artwork as a personal narrative they may simply indulge in idiosyncratic meaning-making which could occur irrespective of the particularities of the artwork. If they engage the work from a purely formalist aesthetic perspective they may miss the opportunity for discursive interpretation. If the viewer self-directs their museum experience and engages purely with the surrounding context material they may not need the artwork at all. A desired goal is for the viewer to have

access to purposeful engagement with an artwork that is commensurate with the paradigm in which that artwork operates.

THE PERFORMATIVE ART MUSEUM

Giving viewers access to the paradigms in which different forms of art operate is the central point made by Danish educator Helene Illeris (2006) in her critique of the constructivist approach to learning in the art museum. In Illeris's view, the constructivist art museum, despite its best efforts and good intentions, still privileges some kinds of learners over others. While the constructivist approach encourages learners to engage independently and in accordance with their need to define and affirm their identity, Illeris argues that this paradigm is, ironically, a generator of exclusion. She believes that the desire for the individual to take total responsibility in relationship to learning in the art museum deflects attention from the cultural conditions in which the individual operates.

As the focus for her concerns, Illeris points to research revealing that many young people between fourteen and nineteen years of age 'generally act in a very competent manner in their encounters with complex, interactive art forms such as installation, interactive videos and site-specific art' (Illeris 2006, p.20). As such, some educators describe these young people as 'the perfect audience' (ibid., pp.20-21). She refers to research that has found that young people are taking responsibility for their own learning, and that not only are they independent learners but 'they actually *demand* to follow their own paths to learning by refusing to accept knowledge taught by an educator in any traditional way' (ibid., p.21). While this might sound like a victory for constructivism, in considering what she refers to as the 'unmarked side of the construction', Illeris suggests 'young people of today feel they do not have anyone else but themselves to blame if things go wrong ... [that they] have internalized the power structures of the educational process and see it as an individual problem if they fail' (ibid., p.21). Illeris therefore concludes:

> The desiring eye of contemporary learner-centered pedagogy has just as strong
> disciplining functions as the disciplined eye of the authoritarian pedagogy or the
> connoisseur's eye of the pedagogy of taste. (Illeris 2006, p.22).

In other words, the aspirations of constructivist learning may have inadvertently negative consequences. As a possible way out of this conundrum, Illeris discusses three ideas – metareflection, performance and empowerment (ibid., pp.22-23). Metareflection is a term from constructivist learning theory, which describes thinking about how people think, and from the descriptions of the constructivist museum considered previously it is apparent that advocates of constructivist education are very much engaged with noticing how learners learn. Illeris's addition to the discussion is 'that metareflection cannot be considered a privilege of the teacher alone'. What is required is 'transparency of *shared* metareflection where all participants are given the opportunity to understand, comment on and eventually change the preconditions for the learning situation from an informed position' (ibid., p.22). In other words, in a museum context, the constructivist educator needs to expose the methods they are employing to both themselves and their audiences if they are truly interested in empowerment.

Illeris suggests that a strategy that could be helpful is to frame the museum as a performance that 'emphasizes the theatrical, the play and the metacommunicative function' (ibid., p.23). She discerns three ways of performing in the museum – the disciplined eye, the connoisseur's eye and the desiring eye. Each of these can be played out in whatever way 'appears to be the most appropriate way to approach the situation' (ibid., p.23). She also suggests, quoting Australian professor of adult education Robin Ushers that 'teachers have to problematize their conventional role as "enlightened pedagogues" ' (Ushers, cited in Illeris 2006, p.23). This strategy, Illeris believes, will empower participants, including educators, to make 'informed choices by exposing, discussing and trying different positionings and possibilities' (Illeris 2006, p.23).

Applying Illeris's suggestions in the contemporary art museum means that as far as interpretative strategies go, all the codes – narrative, representational, formalist, self-expressive and discursive – need to be made apparent and available to all viewers including those viewers who have not yet had the inclination to look. To implement a strategy that does less than this assumes that the codes that are already available are sufficient. Reflecting on Bourdieu and Darbel's 1966 findings (considered in chapter three), such an assumption will favour the dominant perspective. In other words, without access to the codes, the viewer will tend to reinforce the positions already prescribed by those in authority, and those who do not have access to these codes will continue to be excluded without even knowing it. While narrative and aesthetic codes are familiar and operational in the art museum, the code for engaging the strange and unfamiliar is rarely made apparent. The exception is in the way the spaces are configured and in the form of the museums themselves.

The next chapter considers the museum space as a stage on which the discursive paradigm can be performed, in particular, how architects and designers have deliberately manipulated the physical environment in order to engage the viewer with the artwork in ways that seek to go beyond formalist aesthetics.

CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTING DISCURSIVE SPACE

The previous chapter considered how museums have sought to encourage more participation on the part of the viewer in the public art museum through the introduction of various participatory learning strategies. It was shown that the desire for an inclusion of diverse approaches to art practice requires an awareness of the discursive paradigm if formalist aesthetics is not to become the default position. This chapter looks at the role that architects and designers are playing in transforming the museums into a performative space and how such changes affect the viewing experience in the art museum, particularly in regard to activating engagement with discursive contemporary art. The long history of architectural determinism holds with the belief that behaviours and responses can be controlled through careful consideration of the way in which spaces are constructed.

THE WHITE CUBE AS CONTEMPLATIVE SPACE

Since the 1930s the stripped-down, minimalist hang in the simple, clear, uninterrupted space has become the dominant configuration for the presentation of artwork (Staniszewski 1998, p.62). It has been assumed by

many in the artworld that the single, unadulterated, silent, uncluttered, rectangular gallery creates the conditions conducive to singular contemplation. The geometry of the space is reinforced by absorbent or resonant acoustics that either suppress interference or exaggerate the sound of the footfall, engendering a discomfort that demands care and vigilance. Silent guards watch, enforcing the 'look, don't touch' imperative.

In *The Power of Display*, a history of the installation design for modern art, Mary Anne Staniszewski (1998) acknowledges Alfred Barr, the founding director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and Philip Johnson, the Museum's first curator of architecture, as the instigators of the white cube aesthetic.[31] Barr and Johnson had experienced the emergence of the linear, neutral hang during their travels in Europe together in the late 1920s, and were particularly impressed by the exhibition design of Alexander Dorner at the Hanover Landesmuseum in Germany. Dorner had installed much of the museum's collection as a linear, eye-level hang. This was in complete contrast to the multiple-layered format referred to as 'skying' that had been the previous convention. The change in aesthetic is manifested most dramatically between the 1917 and 1930 versions of the Dome Gallery at the Landesmuseum, in which the classical form of the building is completely obliterated by the insertion of the neutral cube within the space.

Dome Gallery, Hanover Landesmuseum, Germany, 1917
(Image: reproduced from Staniszewski 1998, p.19)

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[31] For background to modernist design in the museum refer also to *Alfred H Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art* (Kantor 2002).
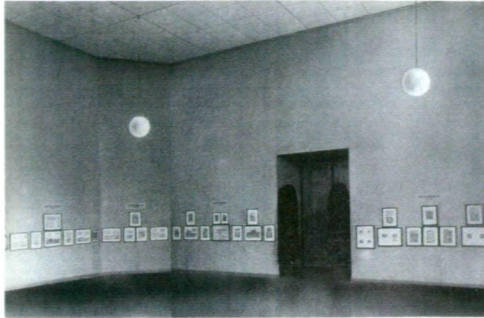
Dome Gallery, Hanover Landesmuseum, Germany, 1930
(Image: reproduced from Staniszewski 1998, p.19)

While Dorner applied this minimalist strategy to the presentation of the Landesmuseum's pre-modern collections, Barr transferred the method to the specific presentation of modern work at the new Museum of Modern Art when he installed its first exhibition, *Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh*, in 1929.

Gallery 44, MoMA, New York, c. late 1920s
(Image: reproduced from Staniszewski 1998, p.19)

Barr 'covered the walls with natural-colour monk's cloth and eliminated skying'. He also '[i]nstalled the paintings at approximately eye level … in spacious arrangements'. This configuration became increasingly common practice from then on (Staniszewski 1998, p.62).

The elimination of the frame was a further step in minimal presentation. Malevich had removed the frame from his work in the early 1900s (Millner 2000), although he maintained the skyed hang (Staniszewski 1998, p.62). From the 1960s it also became commonplace for modernist paintings to be displayed unframed. Some museums even removed existing frames from

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works in the collections. For example, in 1960 William C Seitz removed the frames from Monet's paintings for a show at MoMA (O'Doherty 1986, p.25) and James Johnson Sweeney undertook a removal policy also at MoMA (Glueck 1986, p.8). Subsequently, frameless work on the neutral wall became ubiquitous for the presentation of modern art, and until recently it has seldom been otherwise.

The rationalisation for this format parallels the modernist argument that only those elements essential to art should be present in an artwork. The elimination of distractions, including the interference from other artworks, is seen as imperative if the individual artwork is to be perceived in its singularity. To fulfil this prerequisite the space needs to be silent and autonomous. It wants for nothing else. It is complete; no questions are asked. It is in essence a *non-discursive* space.

DISRUPTING THE WHITE CUBE

Non-discursivity is the antithesis of what is sought by discursive contemporary practice, which is often, as has been discussed previously, a critique of the individualised, transcendent experience of modernist aesthetics. Instead, contemporary practice seeks to engage with and take on the reality, even the mundanity, of everyday life as it is lived. The sound of critique and questioning has disrupted the peace of the contemplative space. Questions demand answers. Ideas invite exploration. A plethora of alternative practices disrupts the quietude of the white cube generating noise, discord, contradiction, ambiguity and confusion. In the process, the silence of the white cube has been placed under scrutiny.

This transformation is described methodically in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of Gallery Space*, Brian O'Doherty's book of essays, which were originally printed in *Artforum* in 1976 and subsequently published in 1986 (O'Doherty 1986). O'Doherty argues that presentation informs the purpose of the work and the behaviour expected of the viewer:

> The way pictures are hung makes assumptions about what is offered. Hanging

editorializes on matters of interpretation and value, and is unconsciously influenced by taste and fashion. Subliminal cues indicate to the audience its deportment. It should be possible to correlate the internal history of paintings with the external history of how they were hung (O'Doherty 1986, p.24).

For O'Doherty, the white cube constructs the visitor, not as a normal person but, rather, as 'the Spectator' and 'the Eye' who, he says:

join us whenever we enter the gallery, and the solitariness of our perambulations is obligatory, because we are really holding a mini-seminar with our surrogates. To that exact degree, we are absent. Presence before a work of art, then, means that we are absent ourselves in favour of the Eye and Spectator, who report to us what we might have seen had we been there (O'Doherty 1986, p.55).

In other words, the visitor to the white cube is not present as themselves but, rather, are performing prescribed roles. At the same time, O'Doherty points out that not everyone relates to the gallery space in prescribed ways:

For many of us the museum still gives off negative vibrations when we wander in. Esthetics are turned into a kind of social elitism – the gallery space is exclusive. Isolated in plots of space, what is on display looks a bit like valuable scarce goods, jewelry, or silver: esthetics are turned into commerce – the gallery space is expensive. What is contained is, without initiation, well-nigh incomprehensible – art is difficult. Exclusive audience, rare objects difficult to comprehend – here we have a social, financial, and intellectual snobbery which models (and at worst parodies) our system of limited production. Our modes of assigning value, our social habits at large, never was a space, designed to accommodate the prejudices and enhance the self-image of the upper middle classes, so efficiently codified (O'Doherty 1986, p.76).

If the art museum is to become more inclusive, O'Doherty believes that something needs to change, and the white cube in particular needs to be rethought.

DESIGNING FOR THE NEW MUSEOLOGY

In a desire to counter the elitism of the art museum and to open the doors to the broader public, some architects and designers have turned their attention to alternative kinds of spaces for inspiration. In doing so, they

have constructed a more sustained critique of the dominant aesthetic of the white cube by disrupting the neutrality of the space in a more substantial and permanent way than a single exhibition or intervention can manage.

This is not as new an idea as it might appear. When Dorner instigated the comparatively sparse, linear hang at the Landesmuseum in the 1920s, he did so, not as an exercise in neutrality, but rather as part of visualising a context for the artwork in the museum's collection. Staniszewski (1998, pp.16-21) records that walls were painted in different colours, creating 'atmosphere rooms' in order to 'evoke the spirit of each period and to immerse the visitor as much as possible, in each specific culture', for example, grey and white walls for the Renaissance, and gold frames on red velvet for the Baroque galleries. Interestingly, while the increased spatiality that Dorner introduced became the template for the modernist hang, his designs for the display of the modern work at the Landesmuseum did not conform to this format. Instead, Dorner commissioned El Lissitzky and László Maholy-Nagy to design exhibitions that employed the most recent developments in visual culture of the period. Lissitzky created *Abstract Cabinet* (1927) and Maholy-Nagy *The Room of Our Time* (1930). These designs included displays with interactive components such as changing surfaces, push-button abstract lighting and moving screens that involved the viewer in selecting the work to be viewed.

El Lissitzky, *Abstract Cabinet*, 1927
(Image: reproduced from Staniszewski, 1998, p.17)

Staniszewski quotes Lissitzky as saying, 'If on previous occasions ... [the visitor] was lulled by the painting to a certain passivity, now our design

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should make the man active. This should be the purpose of my room'
(Staniszewski 1998, p.20). Dorner also emphasised the historical context in
which the art was made by hanging the work chronologically and
displaying catalogues in the galleries that outlined the history of Western
civilisation (ibid., p.16). In other words, both the spaces in which the work
was hung and the history of art were part of a strategy for active audience
engagement rather than a mute background for silent contemplation.

O'Doherty says of Lissitsky's radical design:

> Lissitsky [altered the public mind] through an inspiration that doesn't seem to occur
> to idealists and radical social planners. He acknowledged the bystander, who became
> the involved spectator. Lissitsky, our Russian connection, was probably the first
> exhibition designer/preparator. In the process of inventing the modern exhibition, he
> also reconstructed the gallery space – the first serious attempt to affect the context in
> which modern art and the spectator meet (O'Doherty 1986, p.86).

However, while Lissitsky may have created a space for modernist artwork,
his way of doing it acknowledges the space in an overtly discursive
fashion. Therefore, it could be argued he is not so much the inventor of the
modern space as the postmodern space. It is towards this kind of
Lissitskian space that some contemporary gallery designers and architects
are turning in search of a discursive vocabulary that can counter the silence
of the white cube.

In his chapter in *The New Museology,* Merriman considered the effect of the
physical environment on the visitors' experience of the museum, noting that:
'[t]he more frequently respondents visit museums, the more likely they are to
associate it with a library; the less frequently they visit, the more likely they
are to associate it with a monument to the dead' (Merriman 1989, p.155). He
notes also that irrespective of the visitors' relationship to these institutions,
the library image is understood in terms of:

> a place of quiet learning and contemplation, rather than a place of enjoyment and
> entertainment ... The overall image of museums amongst both active visitors and

rare or non-visitors is still predominantly one of quietness, studious for the first group and deathly for the second (Merriman 1989, p. 155).

Such perceptions reflect how the physical environment is seen to affect and limit behaviour in specific ways that may be at odds with inclusion, as some types of spaces are felt to be more conducive to certain behaviours, and these behaviours are in turn the predilection of specific social groups. Such considerations have led to the provision of more comfortable, colourful places where the café, shop and other facilities are as important as the exhibits and often take pride of place within the museum building. A recent, extreme example of this phenomenon is the National Gallery of Iceland where tired visitors have access to a special room complete with a bed, sheets and pillows (Gibbs et al. 2007, p.98). The logic goes that by creating more comfortable and familiar environments for those unaccustomed to the physical form and ethos of the more traditional cultural spaces, the public will be encouraged to come to the museum. Thus, many contemporary art museums have become venues for meeting friends, hanging out and for community meetings that may not have anything specific to do with art museum exhibits. The public art museum is just another place to go that has comfort and amenity.

Designing relaxed physical environments is one of the outcomes of a focus on youth in the art museum's agenda. Recent research conducted in relation to New Zealand's Auckland Art Gallery by David Mason and Conal McCarthy (2006) found that young people tend to reject the museum on the grounds that they are boring places for old people and the elite. The researchers conclude that this could be resolved with more colour, more street art, graffiti and fashion, and more examples of young people's art. The underlying premise of this change is that providing people with what is familiar will mean they will come to the museum.[32] As a consequence,

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[32] For further consideration of architecture and design in the art museum refer to the essays in *Reshaping Museum Space* (MacLeod 2005).

museums that take their references from shopping malls, amusement arcades and fun parks have become increasingly prevalent.

Perhaps the most notable example of such an enterprise within a regional context is Te Papa Tongarewa, the national museum of New Zealand. The drama that followed the opening of the museum, in particular that which surrounded the display entitled *Parade*, highlights some of the issues involved in designing discursive space for the display of artwork.

Parade exhibition. Fridgidaire, McCahon and Pakuranga
(Image: Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Reference MA_I.015747)

The purpose of Te Papa Tongarewa is to tell the comprehensive histories of the diverse peoples of New Zealand, most particularly the biculturalism of New Zealand's Maori and European histories (Message 2006).[33] The museum took a radical approach to the presentation of the country's stories, cutting across disciplines and juxtaposing different kinds of cultural material including artwork.[34]

Paul Williams provides a comprehensive critique of Te Papa in his doctoral research, which is a critical review of the museum's policies and practices, and in particular the way it refigured the national collection (Williams 2003). Williams focuses attention on *Parade*, one of Te Papa's main emblematic displays of the collection which featured a range of objects including two vehicles, a modernist painting by New Zealand's most well-known artist Colin McCahon, a fridge, and a television. Williams says of

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[33]   Kylie Message's publication *New Museums and the Making of Culture* (2006) provides a critical examination of Te Papa Tongarewa's bicultural policy.

[34]   While other museums such as Museum of Australia have engaged similar strategies, the fact that Te Papa is both the nation's museum and art gallery heightened the concern from an art perspective. Critics of the Museum of Australia have tended to come from perspectives more aligned to history than the visual arts.

the selection that it 'utilises a broadly postmodern exhibition aesthetic that seeks to de-emphasise the hierarchies of taste associated with traditional art museums' in the interests of expressing New Zealand identity (Williams 2001, pp.2-3). His concern is primarily for the reinterpretation of the display of the national art collection, and the move away from forms of presentation 'long associated with the maintenance of hierarchies of taste, into some form that illuminates for "customers" something about their identities'. In creating a 'vivid customer *experience*', Williams is concerned that the 'auratic dignity' of the collection is disturbed 'through a shift in viewing practices from quiet contemplation to immersive sensory engagement' and in doing so, 'the national art history is open to revision' (ibid., p.7). While he understands that the 'orchestrated clutter' of *Parade* 'encourages multiple viewing', Williams also notes:

> [The viewer's] attention is drawn from one object to another, encouraging [them] to repeatedly circle the exhibits rather than pause at each in turn. The visual restlessness of the space appears intentionally designed to interrupt [the viewer's] gaze, drawing it between objects representing vastly different economies of value (Williams 2003, p.86).

Williams is not convinced that this form of attention allows works of significance, especially Colin McCahon's *Northland Panels* (1958), to be appreciated in the depth that the work deserves.

In defending the approach taken at Te Papa, Ian Wedde, the concept leader of *Parade*, whom Williams describes as a 'self-professed bricoleur, plagiarist and eclectic', explains the presentation strategy in these terms:

> Experience has convinced me that most people are similarly content to channel-surf, and that a rich playground offers plenty of opportunity to stop and attend if the time and material seem right. Out of this subjectivity developed an intersubjectivity: a project on material culture that was eclectic, with unresolved shifts in value and meaning, broadly historiographic but with architectural and narrative sightlines that constantly took you off the track (Wedde, cited in Williams 2001, p.9).

The space described is not conducive to quiet contemplation. On the

contrary, it asks questions, which are sometimes implied and sometimes stated overtly. For example, one text panel reads: 'Is it treasure or junk? Everyone has an opinion. Is it art? Decide for yourself'. This example indicated that Wedde's intention was to create a dialogical rather than a contemplative experience.[35]

Despite the popular appeal of *Parade*, the artworld was less than complimentary. It was affronted by the placement of art treasures within what was described as an ethnographic space (Williams 2003, p.303). After damning critical appraisals and questions from New Zealand's Prime Minister about the quality of the museum's research and displays, significant concessions were made towards a more traditional approach. *Parade* was closed, a conventional gallery space for the national art collection was enlarged, and a revised presentation, curated by the new Director of Art and Visual Culture, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, installed (Williams 2005, p.82). The result is *Toi Te Papa: Art of a Nation 1940–Today*,[36] an exhibition of paintings and some customary Maori art. This exhibition conforms to familiar hanging conventions, with the pre-1960 works placed in a room that is painted deep red with timber barriers and the more recent work in white rooms with white barriers. Some works have explanatory extended labels, others follow the minimalist art museum convention of title, artist's name, medium and date of purchase. While the multi-faceted mode of display that *Parade* exemplified continues as a dominant design option in other parts of the museum, attempts to redefine a discursive space in which art is one of the voices have been largely eliminated. In other words, it is the museum rather than the art gallery that has advocated the strategy of opening up the space to multi-vocality from other disciplines.

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[35]   While creating a dialogical experience is the intention of this particular exhibition format, Andrea Witcomb argues that the introduction of dynamic interactive displays does not necessarily guarantee active engagement and that in fact such presentations can be a source of confusion for viewers (Witcomb 2003).

[36]   *Toi Te Papa* is due to run until 25 September 2009.

ARCHITECTS OF COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION

While the Te Papa experiment failed with respect to the display of its art collection, architects have been seeking solutions to the issue of presentation of discursivity through the manipulation of the space. In fact, Te Papa is only one step in a process that extends back to the 1970s. The intervening decades have witnessed an explosion of new art gallery projects throughout the world. Much of postmodernist architectural practice since Robert Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (Venturi 1977) and Charles Jencks's *The Language of Post-Modern Architecture* (Jencks 1977) has been a critique of the absolutist values embedded in modernism. Such projects as James Stirling's eclectic postmodern Clore Gallery at the original Tate in London in the early 1980s, and IM Pei's space-age glass pyramid at the Louvre in Paris in 1989, show how architects have been working in ways that run counter to the formalist logic of what might be considered the archetypal art museum – namely the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In *Towards a New Museum*, Victoria Newhouse describes what she sees as a new and promising direction in the transition of the contemporary museum from 'a passive to an active container' (Newhouse 1998, p.220). Newhouse poses the question: should the architecture be a background or a foreground for the museum's contents? She notes how the shift in architecture from the 1980s 'harks back to ways in which Russian Constructivist architecture of the 1920s and 1930s broke the rules of classical composition' and, paraphrasing Mark Wigley's essay for the 1988 exhibition *Deconstructivist Architecture*, she continues, 'Constructivism broke down the condition of enclosure so that form followed deformation instead of function [with] skewed, irregular geometries; the absence of hierarchies within a unified whole; and the displacement of structure' (ibid., p.225).

The use of discontinuity to articulate dialogical space has become a familiar strategy. The philosophical approach of Daniel Libeskind's

extension to the Jewish Museum in Berlin in 1998 engaged notions of 'between the lines', 'a 'discontinuous void', fragments, 'tortuous lines', asymmetry and incisions in order to articulate a 'feeling of dislocation' (ibid., pp.235-239). In the design for the Kunsthal in Rotterdam in 1993, the Dutch architect, Rem Koolhaas, also sought to create a 'culture of congestion' (ibid., p.233) that would '[contrast] with the serenity of the exhibitions spaces' (ibid., p.233). For Newhouse, 'the Kunsthal's unique and surprising spaces encourage a fresh vision of what they contain' (ibid., p.234). Perhaps most famously, Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao with its computer-generated anything-but-rectilinear composition, has defined this perspective.

Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao
(Image: reproduced from Newhouse 1998, p.245)

In Newhouse's opinion, Gehry's museum for Bilbao best expresses this new vision in the relationship between art and architecture, describing it as a space that is welcoming to both visitors and art (ibid., p.250). Newhouse credits the design with increasing the active participation of the visitor through 'architectonic theatricality,' through which '[t]he new museum attempts to make art once again a vibrant part of life and a powerful aesthetic experience rather than a didactic tool or a remote object of veneration' (ibid., p.260).

Newhouse's understanding of the relationship between the building, and the art that it is designed to house is useful in defining the issues that are

wrapped up in the architectural contribution towards creating space conducive to discursive art practice. According to Newhouse, Gehry talked with artist Daniel Buren about the design, and Buren, whose artwork engages the discourses of the art museum, was adamant that the museum 'should not be a neutral box' (ibid., p.260). In meeting this requirement, the galleries for contemporary art are described in terms that conjure Pirenasi's fantasies (ibid., p.252) and Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (ibid., p.250).

Boat Gallery, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao
(Image: reproduced from Newhouse 1998, p.251)

Newhouse also uses expressions such as playful, sensuous, delight, 'sleight of hand' and 'defiance of classical norms', which she infers constitute 'a whole new language'. Newhouse believes that these varied forms of gallery create 'energized space in constant dialogue with the calmer gallery spaces' (ibid., p.250).[37]

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[37]   The phrase 'calmer gallery spaces' refers to the fact that the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is not devoid of relatively neutral boxes. For the modern art collection the architect designed what Newhouse calls 'serenely classical' rectangular galleries and what the architect refers to as 'stodgy galleries' (Newhouse 1998, pp.252–253).

A 'calmer gallery space' at Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao
(Image: reproduced from Newhouse 1998, p.254)

However, there are critics who are less enamoured, perceiving the museum as inhospitable to art. Marlene Chambers believes that 'the main gallery [the Boat Gallery], at 430 feet long, swallows up the works displayed in it, draining them of presence and scale' (Chambers 2006). Deborah Solomon, in an article in the *New York Times Magazine* based on an interview with the architect Frank Gehry, records that the architect was concerned about the vastness of this space and designed partitions that would create a more art-friendly environment (Solomon 2002). Solomon notes that it was the museum's director Thomas Krens who decided not to install partitions, preferring the grandeur of the architecture to dominate. Newhouse defends Krens's 'unprecedented large spaces' and the 'fun and surprise' such spaces can add to the experience. She suggests that grand spaces are as important as exhibiting art (Newhouse 1998, p.247). To counter some of the negative criticism of the overwhelming gallery spaces, Solomon notes:

> [T]he belief that art is pure and needs to be contemplated in rooms untainted by any vestige of life, except, perhaps, for a potted plant … is nonsense. Historically, art has required viewers to squint, crane their necks and sneeze from the dust. One has only to recall the friezes on the Parthenon, or the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel, to know that countless masterworks have conveyed their magic despite the distractions of architecture (Solomon 2002).

In other words, the drama of the new art museum space is warranted because it reinstates the aura of the art experience. In harnessing this aura, the lesson from Bilbao is that culture can be a catalyst for economic

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development or what has come to be referred to as 'the Bilbao effect' or 'the Guggenheim effect' (Guasch & Zulaika 2005). Simultaneously, the drama of the architectural possibilities becomes a strategic move in generating new forms of art and articulating new ways of seeing.

The public art museum that perhaps best exemplifies this phenomenon in an Australian setting is the National Gallery of Victoria's Ian Potter Centre at Federation Square in Melbourne.

Federation Square, Melbourne (exterior)
(Image: reproduced from NGV n.d.)

The fragmented and fractal form of the façade at Federation Square counters the reductive geometry of modernist functionality. However, the approach to the design taken by Peter Davidson and Don Bates, collectively known as Lab Architecture Studio, while sharing Gehry's intention to provide a dramatic and innovative edifice, is more certain about taking an active role in the display of, and encounter with, art.[38] The designers boast the absence of right angles as a deliberate strategy whereby the spaces throughout the building converge and are punctuated in order to disrupt the resolution of the white cube in a way that for them is commensurate with contemporary art (Lab Architecture Studio n.d.).

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[38] This philosophical stance is reinforced in *Nearamnew*, Paul Carter's fragmented and layered interpretation of the history of the site embedded in the paving of external space at Federation Square (Carter 2004).

Federation Square interior/gallery
(Image: reproduced from NGV n.d.)

Federation Square interior/gallery
(Image: reproduced from NGV n.d.)

In reviewing the galleries within the Federation Square precinct, Kevin Murray, arts writer and director of Craft Victoria, describes the Centre as follows:

> In this their first commission, Lab have departed radically from the conventional modernist white cube. Galleries are designed with multiple visual planes. On entry, visitors are granted views not only of the work in their immediate space, but also of art from neighbouring rooms exposed through niches and orthogonal walls. On entry into one space I counted up to thirteen different visual planes. This is not a conventional gallery experience. 'What is going on?' According to the architects, their design was about 'giving air to visuality' and providing visitors an opportunity to 'get inside the look' of the artist … In this scheme, space is not a neutral container for art, it is rather the structure that gives it meaning (Murray 2003).

In other words, the architects are taking on the artist's eye and acknowledging the discursivity of contemporary practice by disrupting the white cube and the expectations that it is assumed to carry. Murray continues:

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This is not a space conducive to what Robert Hughes claims as the ritual of art devotion – the 'long look'. Instead, it is a space for the restless contemporary eye, seeking constantly changing views and connections (Murray 2003).

In this respect, the design for the galleries at the Ian Potter Centre, as with the Guggenheim in Bilbao, harks back beyond Barr's interpretation of the gallery space at MoMA to Lissitzsky's *Abstract Cabinet* in 1927. This is the kind of space that was also conjured in an exhibition/forum entitled *Can Buildings Curate?* at the Architectural Association (AA) in London in 2005 (Newbetter 2005), in which many of the most recognised and innovative contemporary architects collaborated with artists, curators and art institutions in 'unorthodox ways'.[39] The exhibition space in which the work was displayed is described as '[a] mobile exhibition design dedicated to the memory of a "white cube" gone wrong' (Newbetter 2005):

Fabricated lightweight, secondary construction items culled from the unconscious of modern galleries and minimalist art, the 'miscreant cube' tampers with the AA gallery by colonising its idiosyncrasies (Newbetter 2005).

Despite the architects' description of the dialogical space in terms of distortion and idiosyncrasy, a closer look at the particularities of the contemporary gallery spaces is warranted. Marlene Chambers' review of Newhouse's publication clearly differentiates between the stated intentions for viewer engagement and the insistent ubiquity of the contemplative paradigm. Chambers points out that despite the rhetoric, the gallery space still 'privileges the pedantic knowledge and the formalist design principles of modernism' (Chambers 2006, p.399). She notes that Newhouse is critical of displaying artworks in a way that interferes with their individual

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[39]   *Can Buildings Curate* was curated and designed by Newbetter, a group of architectural theorists and practitioners – Shumon Basar Joshua Bolchover, Tom Cooms and Parag Sharma. The exhibition was held at the Architectural Association in London in 2005 and included works by the following artists, architects and curators: Drabble + Sachs with Isa Stürm; Dee Ferris; Neal Rock; Mathieu Copeland with David Cunningham; Décosterd + Rahm; OMA/Rem Koolhaas; Diller+Scofidio, SANAA (Sejima/ Nishizawa); RßSie; AS-IF; Hirsch/Müller; Zaha Hadid; Michael Asher; Davide Bertocchi; Goshka Macuga; Cerith Wyn Evans; Cai Guo-Qiang; Barbara Vanderlinden (Roomade, Brussels); and Igor Zabel (Moderna Galeria, Ljubjana) (Newbetter 2005).

appreciation, preferring instead that the works be suitably separated from competing distractions in 'the ahistorical limbo conferred by an expanse of blank, preferably white walls' and that if works of art are not seen individually they are in danger of being corrupted into 'archeological evidence' (Newhouse in Chambers 2006, p.403). Both here and in her other publication *Art and the Power of Placement* (Newhouse 2005) Newhouse reveals the assumption that underlies her criticism – that the artwork will 'speak for itself'. In making a counter claim, Chambers argues that if the artwork could speak for itself, it would not matter where or how the work was displayed, and its meaning would not be vulnerable to, or impinged upon by, external factors.

Boat Gallery, Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao
(Image: reproduced from Newhouse 1998, p.252)

Thus, the discursive trend in the design of architectural space is counteracted by the insistence that works are presented in individual uncluttered isolation from one another, usually in relation to a white wall, albeit sloping, punctuated or curved. In other words, while the external form of the museum may have changed and the spaces within may not conform to the usual angular geometry, the relationship between the visitor and an individual artwork is little altered. The minimalist isolated moment still dominates and, if anything, is perhaps increased by being mediated through the architecture's orchestration of awe. [40]

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[40]   In *Learning from the Bilbao Guggenheim* (Guasch & Zulaika 2005), Keith Moxey argues that there is potential for the external form of the Bilbao Guggenheim to inflect the viewer's experience within the more traditional internal spaces, suggesting that 'the museum is transformed into an aesthetic space where aesthetic questions should be asked, rather than answered' (Moxey 2005, p.176).

ARTISTS CONSTRUCTING DISCURSIVE SPACE

If nothing specific in the design of the space can determine discursivity in relation to the artwork installed within it, what else might facilitate the viewer's experience in this direction? The art experience privileges a particular way of being that is determined by cultural conditions. O'Doherty concludes that engaging the discourse as it is manifested through the white cube is the responsibility of the contemporary artist:

> With postmodernism, the gallery is no longer 'neutral.' The wall becomes a membrane through which esthetic and commercial values osmotically exchange. As this molecular shudder in the white walls becomes perceptible, there is a further inversion of context. The walls assimilate; the art discharges. How much can the art do without? This calibrates the degree of the gallery's mythification. How much of the object's eliminated content can the white walls replace? Context provides a large part of late modern and postmodern art's content. This is seventies art's main issue, as well as its strengths and weaknesses (O'Doherty 1986, p.79).

Since the 1970s, a number of artists have chose to remove themselves and their work from the white cube almost completely. Richard Long, Hamish Fulton, Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria and Andy Goldsworthy were amongst those who moved out of the gallery and into the drama of the landscape, although documentation of their exterior practices did find its way back to the white cube. Some artists have chosen to articulate the suspicion of Douglas Crimp that the museum is 'an outmoded institution, no longer having an easy relationship to innovative contemporary art' (Crimp & Lawler 1993, p.287). As a consequence, they have chosen less sublime interventions, performing their art on the bus (Adrienne Piper's *Catalysis IV*, 1970) and in the operating theatre (Orlan's *Emergency Surgery*, 1979); colonising the public spaces of advertising (Barbara Kruger's *Your Gaze Hits the Side of My Face*, 1981); directly addressing authority (Wodiczko's Swastika projected onto the South African Embassy in London, 1985); and literally hanging out in public open spaces (Stelarc's *Body Suspensions with Insertions into the Skin*, 1976–1988).

Other artists have chosen to work from within the art museum (McShine

1999; Putnam 2001).[41] Of these, some work overtly with the phenomenon of the art museum, undertaking an institutional critique by playing with or subverting the space in order to expose and highlight the ideology embedded within it, using the traditional museum as a site for interventions involving collecting, categorisation, cataloguing, conservation and reproduction of art works and museological objects (Fraser 2005). These artists include Lothar Baumgarten's extensive list of verbs that describe the museum's use of objects entitled *Unsettled Objects* (1968-69); Marcel Broodthaers' installation of storage crates in *Musée d'Art Moderne* (1969); Robert Filliou's *Dust to Dust* (1977), in which he cleaned a number of works surreptitiously placing the dust and cloth in boxes; Sherrie Levine and Allan McCollum's reproduced *Plaster Surrogates* (1982-89); Hans Haacke's exposé of power politics and corporate sponsorship; Michael Asher's *Michael Asher's Lobby* (1983) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, highlighting the vanity of benefaction by naming the gallery after himself; Fred Wilson's revealing of what is not on show; photographer Gary Winogrand's observation of the exhibition opening; Christian Boltanski's foregrounding of the museum as archive in *The Archive of the Carnegie International 1896-1991*; and Asher again, with his list of works deaccessioned by MoMA since its founding (1999). Putnam observes:

> [Artists] tend to be more interested in making viewers aware of rigid systems of interpretation, thus encouraging them to question rather than passively accept the 'official' version of things. The concept of a supposedly neutral viewing environment in museums has led artists to investigate how works of art are read, appraised and valued (Putnam 2001, p.90).

Of particular interest, in the context of this thesis, are those artists who focus on the meaning of the white cube. The ubiquity of whiteness is

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[41] For an illustration of the extent of artists' interventionscritiquing the white cube and the museum in general, refer to Kynaston McShine's *The Museum as Muse: Artists Reflect* (McShine 1999), published to coincide with a survey exhibition of the same name that he curated, as well as James Putnam's *Art and Artifact: The Museum as Medium* (Putnam 2001). Refer also to *From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art* (Reiss 2000).

manifested in Christo and Jeanne Claude's 1968 proposal to wrap the Museum of Modern Art in New York with white cloth, thereby inverting internal space and absorbing the white cube into itself. While the New York project was not realised, a similar project was undertaken at the Kunsthalle in Berne Switzerland in 1968.

Christo & Jeanne Claude
Model for *The Museum of Modern Art: Project for New York*, 1968
(Image: reproduced from McShine 1998, p.126)

Other works ask: what is the 'appropriate' activity for the viewer in the art museum? In contradiction to the art museum as a place of contemplation, artists have installed alien interventions. Hans Haacke's *MoMA Poll* (1970) was an invitation for visitors to MoMA in New York to vote on Nixon's policy of involvement in Vietnam. In this work, Haacke asked the viewers for their opinion, thereby turning the gallery into an overtly political space and inverting the conventional position that requires the gallery to be removed from politics and daily life.

Hans Haacke
MoMA Poll, 1970
(Image: reproduced from Putnam 2001, p.29)

In the same year, Vito Acconci in his work entitled *Service Area* (1970) had his mail redirected to the MoMA. He would drop by regularly and collect any letters and bills, and in the oddness of this intervention demonstrated the difference between the art gallery and home.

These interventions deal with the museum as a whole. A notable example that focuses attention on the white cube is Daniel Buren's *Photo-Souvenir: 'A partir de là'* (1975), in which he plays with the narrative of the exhibition space by removing a number of de Chirico's paintings from their usual places and then painting the gallery in his signature stripes, leaving blank wall where the works had been.

Daniel Buren
Photo-Souvenir: 'A partir de là', 1975
(Image: reproduced from McShine 1999, p.151)

As a counterpoint, Buren then placed de Chirico's paintings in a purpose-built replica of the gallery in another part of the museum. In another intervention Buren placed his signature stripes on the staircases of the Art Institute of Chicago in *Photo-Souvenir: 'Up and Down, In and Out, Step by Step'* (1977).
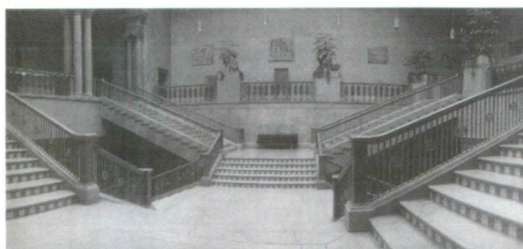
Daniel Buren
Photo-Souvenir: 'Up and Down, In and Out, Step by Step', 1977
(Image: reproduced from Putnam 2001, p.27)

In both works, the artist highlights the dependence the artwork has on the walls of the white cube where they *should* be and thus brought attention to the qualities of this hallowed space through the displacement of its purpose.

Louise Lawler's photographic work *Pollock and Tureen* (1984) juxtaposes seemingly incongruous items as they are displayed at the collector's home, suggesting 'that the owner might have chosen to arrange the display according to purely decorative criteria' (Putnam 2001, p.98). Such a statement relies on the contrast with the aesthetic of the white cube as the ideal form for display in order to reveal the incongruity of the owner's choices.

Louise Lawler
Pollock and Tureen, 1984
(Image: reproduced from Putnam 2001, p.98)

The issue of appropriate art museum behaviour is taken up by Gillian Wearing in *Western Security* (1995), in which a gun-fight complete with corpses seems to be taking place in the gallery, the action captured on the surveillance monitors (McShine 1999, p.168). The gallery is converted into a place for live action rather than contemplative remove.

Gillian Wearing
Western Security, 1995
(Image: reproduced from McShine 1999, p.169)

In 2000, a group of performance artists known as Twentieth Century presented *System Addict*, an unauthorised dance performance at the National Gallery in London. While not strictly in the white cube, this performance interrupted the contemplative stance of the aesthetic space and 'aimed to introduce an element of mischievous humour into normally restrained surroundings' (Putnam 2001, pp.174-75).

Twenteenth Century
*System Addic*t, 2000
(Image: reproduced from Putnam 2001, p.174)

In similar vein, Acconci invaded the visitor's space by standing too close, disrupting the usually prescribed private isolation of the contemplative space.

In an extreme example of disrupting the contemplative space, Johannes Wohnseifer invited skateboarder Mark Gonzales to display his expertise at Städtisches Museum Abteilberg, Mönchengladbach in 1998. Putnam notes that '[d]espite Gonzales' proficient skating, this activity was dangerous and shocking in the context of the more contemplative space of the art museums' (Putnam 2001, pp.176-77). In other words, the museum is not a place for the intrusion of regular outdoor activity or real fear.

Johannes Wohnseifer and Mark Gonzales
Städtisches Museum Abteilberg, Mönchengladbach, 1998
(Image: reproduced from Putnam 2001, pp.176-77)

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These works play with the behaviour and sensory expectations of the art museum, throwing conventions upside-down and inside-out in order to make the point about the particularities of the conventional views of the institution and who is included. These examples seek to confound the expectations of the audience in the hope that they will think about the values and the aesthetics that surround art in a more critical and discursive way. They present behaviours that appear to be out-of-place, implying in the process that there *are* behaviours that are deemed to be appropriate – that it is not appropriate to treat a gallery like home, as a political arena, as a theatre, as a playground. These works challenge the accepted behaviours head-on.

THE NECESSITY OF THE WHITE CUBE

There are artworks, however, that simply sit awkwardly in the gallery space. In 2005, Simon Starling won the Turner Prize for his work entitled *Shedboatshed (Mobile Architecture No 2)*, 2005.

Simon Starling
Shedboatshed (Mobile Architecture No 2), 2005
(Image: reproduced from Tate Britain 2005)

Starling's work is the result of a process that involved dismantling a shed, turning it into a boat, loading it with the remains of the shed, paddling it down a river, transporting it to the gallery and reassembling it. It can be seen as a treatise on the everyday possibility for transformation 'against the pressures of modernity, mass production and global capitalism' (Tate Britain 2005). Curators at Tate Britain praised Starling's skills in model-

making, boat-building and engineering. However, Jonathan Prynn of the *London Evening Standard* quoted Charles Thomson, co-founder of the Stuckists and critic of the choice, who dismissed the work as being worthy only of 'the … DIY prize … It's the sort of thing I had to do when I was in the Scouts. Starling should get his craft badge 1st class, not the Turner Prize' (Thomson, cited in Prynn 2005).

Tracey Emin provides another infamous example. Emin is one of the most well-known contemporary artists in the UK, having orchestrated a public fascination with her work through her media persona as a brash, shocking celebrity-victim (Emin 2006; Malor 2000). Emin is also acknowledged by the artworld, being short-listed for the Turner Prize in 1999 and representing Britain at the Venice Biennale in 2007. One of her major works, *My Bed* (1998), consists of an unmade bed surrounded by, amongst other things, a pair of slippers, discarded underwear, empty cigarette packs, vodka bottles, condoms, contraceptives, Polaroid images and a soft toy.

Tracey Emin
My Bed, 1998
(Image: reproduced from Saachi Gallery n.d.)

What is expected of the viewer in response to these works by Starling and Emin? Whether the audience finds them intriguing or not, they fail miserably as autonomous moments of aesthetic contemplation. There are few aesthetic cues to inform the viewer of the works' meaning or purpose. Turning attention to the space in which the work is placed, it is significant to note that it is in fact the white cube. However, this is not a neutral space.

For artwork such as Emin's and Starling's, the white cube is essential. If these artworks were collapsed back into where they might seem to belong, that is, the bedroom and the backyard, the works would disappear. All that holds *My Bed* and *Shedboatshed* in 'art' *are* the white walls. Without them they would easily slip into oblivion.

It is interesting to note that while Emin's *My Bed* as reproduced above, was exhibited at Tate Britain in London, the commercial gallery that represents her is called White Cube. According to Sarah Kent, editor of London's entertainment magazine *Time Out*, White Cube is not only one of the newest galleries in London, having relocated to the West End towards the end of 2006, it is also the 'hippest'. Kent describes MRJ Rundell and Associates' design for the gallery as being 'like a ship that has inadvertently docked on dry land. Covered in white-painted render, the tall, narrow building has few windows – to provide as much uninterrupted wall space as possible' (Kent 2006). Emin's choice of gallery would seem to confirm the necessity of the white cube. In this instance, however, the pristine space is redefined as an overt statement rather than an implicit assumption.

Daniel Palmer considers this precise issue in an essay 'Beside the White Cube' which examines the work of Daniel von Sturmer, one of Australia's representatives at the Venice Biennale in 2007.
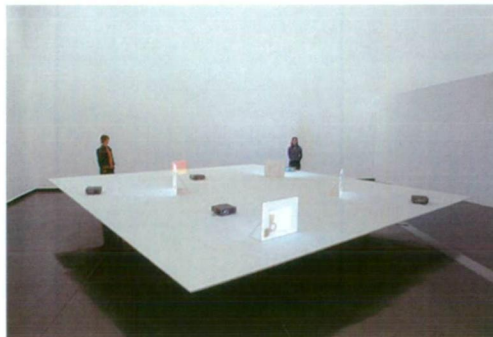
Daniel von Sturmer
The Truth Effect, 2003
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
(Image: reproduced from von Sturmer n.d.)

Palmer notes that 'a good deal of art production begins with the premise that the gallery is not a neutral receptacle for the work of art but is part of a network in which objects are actively framed and produced for reception as "legitimate" works of art' (Palmer 2001). He continues: 'Like many post-conceptual artists, Daniel von Sturmer utilises the space of the white cube as part of his art practice ... a presence in the work rather than an abstract container ... one material among others'. In doing this, Palmer sees that '[t]he subject of this work is the contextual relationship between the viewer and the art event; a relationship, of course, which is mediated via the gallery-going experience' (Palmer 2001). He goes on to claim that 'von Sturmer produces a hyper-aware viewer by questioning the embodied habits of gallery-going and subtly transforming the habitual time of lived experience' (Palmer 2001). In other words, it is intended that the relationship between the work and the space will set up the dynamic in which the viewer will engage the artwork as an event and thereby notice their own behaviour. What Palmer is suggesting is that the white cube has been transformed from contemplative space into discursive place.

The architectural cues for both modern art and contemporary art can be the same – both the aesthetic moment, and the context that reveals the absence of that moment. The meaning of the artwork or its purpose for being is in the conversation between the notion of white cube and the degree to which the work should or could be somewhere else. Therefore, I argue that the white cube is not the architectural solution to the practical design problem of creating neutral space but, rather, a player in a discursive game. Cutting it up, punching holes in it, removing all right-angles, makes no difference at all. As O'Doherty predicted:

> If the white wall cannot be summarily dismissed, it can be understood. This knowledge changes the white wall, since its content is composed of mental projections based on the unexposed assumptions. The wall *is* our assumptions. It is imperative for every artist to know this content and what it does to his/her work (O'Doherty 1986, p.80).

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Artists like Emin, Starling and von Sturmer are fully aware of their dependence on the white cube. These artists, and many more besides, understand O'Doherty's evaluation that:

> For better or worse [the white cube] is the single major convention through which art is passed. What keeps it stable is the lack of alternatives. A rich constellation of projects comment on matters of location, not so much suggesting alternatives, as enlisting the gallery space as a unit of esthetic discourse. Genuine alternatives cannot come from within this space. Yet it is not the ignoble symbol for the preservation of what society finds obscure, unimportant, and useless. It has incubated radical ideas that would have abolished it. The gallery space is all we've got, and most art needs it (O'Doherty 1986, pp.80-81).

Concern for the viewers' relationship to art is the thrust of Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud 2002), a particular kind of art practice that is becoming an increasingly significant phenomenon. Relational aesthetics invites the direct participation of the viewer through more than just looking at the work. For Bourriaud, the power of relational aesthetics is in the capacity for 'modelling possible universes' whereby we might learn 'to inhabit the world in a better way' (ibid, p.13). Relational art, according to Bourriaud, takes as its theoretical horizon 'the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space'. In doing so, he believes it 'points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art' (ibid, p.14).

As far as the art space goes, Bourriaud says, 'it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through ... It is ... a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion.' Further, relational aesthetics 'takes being-together as a central theme, the "encounter" between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning.' Bourriaud also sees that art is well-positioned for this kind of encounter because it is already located in the public arena and is all there at once, unlike literature that requires private consumption over an extended period of time. He believes these qualities set up the condition for

'immediate discussion' (ibid, p.18). As such he argues, '[a]rt is the place that produces a specific sociability' (ibid, p.18); further, art is therefore not about objects in space but, rather, '[a]rt is a state of encounter' (ibid, p.18).

Bourriaud admits, however, that, '[t]he most common criticism to do with new artistic practices consists ... in denying them any "formal effectiveness", or in singling out their shortcomings in the "formal resolution" (ibid, p.21)'. In other words, the previous formalist code is not up to the task of dealing with relational art. He suggests that an alternative is to move from form to formations:

> [U]nlike an object that is closed in on itself by the intervention of a style and a
> signature, present-day art shows us that form only exists in the encounter and in the
> dynamic relationship enjoyed by an artistic proposition with other formations,
> artistic or otherwise (Bourriaud 2002, p.21).

In saying this, Bourriaud assumes that '[w]hen the aesthetic discussion evolves, the status of form evolves along with it, and through it' (ibid, p.21). This assumption requires closer examination.

In 2005, the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in Sydney presented an exhibition entitled *Situation: Collaboration, Collective and Artist Networks from Sydney Singapore Berlin.* The exhibition, curated by Russell Storer, brought together networks of artists who are concerned about the inhospitable character of the white cube (Storer 2005). Within the white cube of the MCA were inserted examples of work that invited visitor participation; in fact, the works were made, to a greater or lesser degree, through the participation of the visitors. In the catalogue that accompanied the show, Storer refers to the writings of Bourriaud and relational aesthetics, noting:

> During the 1990s, a number of artists, primarily in Europe, came to prominence
> organising social interactions and events within or sponsored by museums and
> galleries. This form of practice ... [relational aesthetics] ... was critical of the

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commodification of human relationships, offering utopian proposals for new forms of social organization (Storer 2005, p.11). [42]

Insight into a limitation of relational aesthetics came about during the exhibiting of *Situation*, when I was invited to undertake an interpretation workshop about the exhibition with the MCA guides responsible for engaging with the public. The purpose of the workshop was to work with the guides on some strategies that took into account the difficulties experienced by some viewers in relation to the more taxing aspects of contemporary art practice. As a focus for the workshop, I asked the guides to choose the work from *Situation* with which they had most difficulty. They chose Lisa Kelly's work *Long conversation-working notes-studio situation*, which consists of bits and pieces of building material, cardboard tubes, newly plastered walls prepared for painting, and unresolved electrical conduit, amongst other things.

Lisa Kelly
Long conversation-working notes-studio situation, 2004
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
(Image: courtesy of MCA)

The guides were perplexed about what the work might mean, given that there seemed little that they could see that made sense as art. Given this difficulty was experienced by people who have regular and informed

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42   During the exhibition *Situation* at MCA in 2005 Nicolas Bourriaud was a keynote speaker at the Art Association of Australia and New Zealand annual conference *Transforming Aesthetics* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, thus highlighting the connection between *Situation* and relational aesthetics.

contact with contemporary art, it begs the question: what of the less informed viewer?

In another work in *Situation,* artist Elizabeth Pule provided the visitor with an opportunity to record their thoughts for others to replay. From my experience of the work very few people actually spent the time to either make their own recording or listen to others. Bourriaud assumes that the new way of looking that is afforded by relational aesthetics will simply 'evolve'. However, is it quite so straightforward? Is immersion enough? Bourriaud himself, in *Postproduction* (Bourriaud et al. 2005), argues that as the art gallery converges with life, mnemonic cues disappear:

> The gallery space is a place like any other, a space imbricated within a global mechanism. A base camp without which no expedition would be possible. A club, a school, or a street are not 'better places,' but simply other places (Bourriaud et al. 2005, p.65).

From the experience of the gallery guides it would appear that while artists working with relational aesthetics have the best interests of the non-arts viewer at heart, art which is so much like ordinary life runs the risk of not being registered as art at all.

In order to experience art, we need to experience it *as* art. The viewer needs to engage with the 'artness' of a particular artwork, even though this may not be definable in any particular way. While this might sound tautological, it simply means that if we don't accept that we are looking at art then to all intents and purpose it is not art to us at all.

To summarise the argument presented in this chapter, the white cube has changed its purpose without changing its look. Attempts to change its look have not been very helpful in coming to grips with contemporary discursive art. Much contemporary artwork is so much like life that only the space it is in provides the clue to its 'artness'. This space needs to be the white cube or, at least, have the imprimatur of the white cube. The problem is that, for many, the white cube still appears to stand for an aesthetic contemplative response. The viewer often does not register the

work as art at all because it doesn't behave as a work fit for aesthetic contemplation should. If the fact that the work is in the gallery is taken as the only available cue for it being art, then the work is often judged simply as rubbish and not worthy of consideration. O'Doherty noticed: '[m]ost of the people who look at art now are not looking at art; they are looking at the idea of "art" they carry in their minds' (O'Doherty 1986, p.82). As with the notion of constructivist education discussed in chapter three, the viewer may well be involved in some other activity. If the viewer cannot hear what the artwork is talking to them about, if the space seems to be staying silent, and if attempts to make the experience part of real life seem to make the art disappear, how are viewers going to find out what is possible and what they are expected to do? The next chapter is an examination of some aspects of art theory that may provide assistance in dealing with this conundrum.

CHAPTER 5

THE VIEWER IN DISCURSIVE THEORY

The previous chapter concluded that a discursive space cannot be created simply by reconfiguring it architecturally. Something else is required in order for the public to know when they are in discursive space, and to give them clues as to what they are supposed to do. In this chapter, consideration is given to theories and practices concerning the interpretation and reception of art. Further, attention is paid not just to the ideas embedded in theory but also to how theory affects behaviour. My aim is to locate some practical strategies that non-arts viewers can usefully apply to the experience of discursive artwork. The focus is on theories derived from a range of disciplines that have contributed to the shift from the disinterested gaze upon the autonomous art object, to the active role of the viewer in the construction of meaning. A consequence of these theories is the recognition that the act of viewing has become pivotal to the process of art rather than functioning as an extra activity that comes after art.

THE ARTIST'S INTENTION

Prior to the 1970s, dominant theories of interpretation focused on the author's intention, as exemplified by educator and academic literary critic ED Hirsch in *Validity in Interpretation* (1967). Hirsch states that '[a]ll valid interpretation of every sort is founded on the re-cognition [sic] of what the author meant' (Hirsch 1967, p.126), and that '[a]n interpretative hypothesis is ultimately a probability judgment that is supported by evidence' (ibid., p.180). In other words, interpretations should be determined through the application of rigorous scientific methodology. While Hirsch claimed that there is no one particular methodology that could be applied to all situations, he believed 'there can be a ruthlessly critical process of validation to which many skills and many hands may contribute' (ibid., p.207).

From Hirsch's perspective, there is a sense that if the art historian could just get a handle on all the relevant information and evidence then they would be able to retrace the artist's thoughts and recognise, or as Hirsch puts it 're-cognise', the source, thereby revealing the artist's intention. From this perspective, the role of the traditional art historian has been as a detective accumulating the facts in order to describe the-past-as-it-really-was – the original truth. In this scenario, each verifiable speculation made in evaluating the evidence along the way will make the interpretation increasingly valid, and by building up enough facts the historian will eventually uncover the definitive meaning. Obviously, not all of the information that is needed in this investigation is readily available. Few people today, for example, can read the iconography of religious imagery or the symbolic meaning of flowers and animals. Nevertheless, much of this information is available in bodies of expert knowledge, and can be tracked down and deciphered in order to solve the puzzle if required. As Hirsch understood it, if the historian is unable to unpack the original intention completely, then it is just because some details of the puzzle have

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not been found yet. While the meaning might be incomplete, the potential for completion is still the goal (Hirsch 1967, pp.17 and 207).

DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

In opposition to Hirsch, German philosopher and interpretation theorist Hans-Georg Gadamer, in *Truth and Method* (1975), rejected scientific methodology's capacity to reveal the complete and transparent truth. Instead, Gadamer brought the interpreter's prejudices into the understanding of the past. Borrowing from Heidegger, he argued that the task of interpretation involved the concept of 'unconcealment'. Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas, who has written extensively on Gadamer, summarises his approach:

> The revealing of things is, in fact, always dependent upon other things being simultaneously concealed (in much the same way as seeing something in one way depends on not seeing it in another). Truth is thus understood as the unconcealment that allows things to appear, and that also makes possible the truth and falsity of individual statements, and yet which arises on the basis of the ongoing play between unconcealment *and* concealment – a play that, for the most part, remains itself hidden and is never capable of complete elucidation (Malpas 2005).

Gadamer thus understood the historian's task as 'dialogic, practical, situated activity' (Malpas 2005). This means that understanding is interpretative rather than based on the search for absolutes. What is more, the concerns and interests of the interpreter affect interpretation. As Gadamer himself puts it: 'To understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves' (Gadamer 1975, p.359). Malpas reiterates this idea and explains further:

> The prejudicial character of understanding means that, whenever we understand, we are involved in a dialogue that encompasses both our own self-understanding and our understanding of the matter at issue. In the dialogue of understanding our prejudices come to the fore, both inasmuch as they play a crucial role in opening up what is to be understood, and inasmuch as they themselves become evident in that process. As our prejudices thereby become apparent to us, so they can also become the focus of questioning in their own turn (Malpas 2005).

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This implies that understanding involves an awareness of our prejudices in relationship to the matter under consideration rather than the uncovering of prior objective truth.

The impossibility of deciphering original intention is also one of the realisations behind Roland Barthes' momentous phrase, 'the death of the author' (Barthes 1967; 1995, pp.125-130). Barthes takes the view that works of art have a kind of 'unconscious', which is not under the control of their producers. To all intents and purposes, the author is 'dead' in the sense that it is impossible to recover their intention, and that the work that has been produced is irrevocably severed from its origins. Between the prejudices of the interpreter and the death of the author, the possibility for an artwork to be understood as an autonomous object with a single definitive original meaning is refuted. Instead, the artwork becomes a text and the role of the viewer is as co-producer of meaning.

Raman Selden describes this phenomenon in his overview of literary theory:

> [The] author is stripped of all metaphysical status and reduced to a location (a cross-road), where language, that infinite storehouse of citations, repetitions, echoes and references, crosses and recrosses. The reader is thus free to enter a text from any direction; there is no correct route (Selden 1985, p.75).

THE END OF JUDGEMENT

The elevation of the role of the reader has implications for the viewer of art, not only for *what* is considered, but also for *how* such consideration is undertaken. In Gadamer's approach to the task of art interpretation, the question and answer approach of traditional historical investigation in which the historian seeks the answers to the question is inverted. Instead of asking about the origin of the work or its intended meaning, Gadamer posited the notion that the object of an interpretation is the answer and the task of the interpreter is to find a question that would make sense of that answer. As he explains:

> [T]he hermeneutical phenomenon also contains within itself the original meaning of conversations and the structure of question and answer. For an historical text to be made the object of interpretation means that it asks a question of the interpreter. Thus interpretation always involves a relation to the question that is asked of the interpreter. To understand a text means to understand this question …
>
> Thus a person who seeks to understand must question what lies behind what is said. He must understand it as an answer to a question. If we go back behind what is said, then we inevitably ask questions beyond what is said. We understand the sense of the text only by acquiring the horizon of the question that, as such, necessarily goes beyond what is said in it. The logic of the human sciences is, then, as appears from what we have said, a logic of the question (Gadamer 1975, 333).

A significant implication of ascribing an artwork with the qualities of the answer to a question is that it requires acceptance of the artwork as it is. Judging some elements in a work as wrong or in need of improvement becomes meaningless. The possibility that there can be something 'wrong' about the image is replaced by the acceptance that the work is as it needs to be. Interpretation is therefore not about evaluating the work against some ideal criteria but rather finding an interpretation where the work in its entirety make sense, noting, of course, that 'entirety' is contingent upon the prejudices of the interpreter.

Accepting the Work

The shift from judgement to acceptance as a methodological strategy is evidenced in the interpretations of contemporary art historians. An example of this approach is the interpretation of Hieronymus Bosch's *Paradise and Hell* (1510) by American art historian Keith Moxey (1994, pp.115-118).

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Moxey scans the surface of the image and asks how it acts in the world in order to give the artist what they want. In doing so, he notices that Bosch's characters are not the fine humanist forms of Renaissance draughtsmanship but strange, upside-down creatures often engaging in unspeakable acts. Most interpretations of Bosch's work focus on symbolic decoding and place his work in a category stylistically disconnected from the Renaissance. In contrast, Moxey's interpretation focuses on difference itself, which, he argues, is a defining quality in Renaissance art. Rather than passing judgement on Bosch, he accepts that the artist deliberately chose to do something that was, above all else, different. In practical terms, this involved taking images that had decorated the margins of manuscripts and placing them in the centre as the subject of his work. Moxey argues that Bosch did this, not because he was ignorant of the developments in art practice during the heady years of the Renaissance, but because he knew he could not compete with Dürer, Michelangelo or Raphael. At the same time he was acutely aware that innovation was the measure of an artwork's

merit. By transforming something traditional (the margin sketches) into something new (the fantasy painting), Bosch met this requirement.

Similarly, Australian art historian Ian McLean avoids being judgmental in his analysis of Albert Namatjira in *White Aborigines* (McLean 1998, pp.98-104). Namatjira was the first Aboriginal to be widely acknowledged as an artist as he painted in a European form as illustrated by works such as *Mount Sonder, MacDonnell Ranges* (c.1957-59).
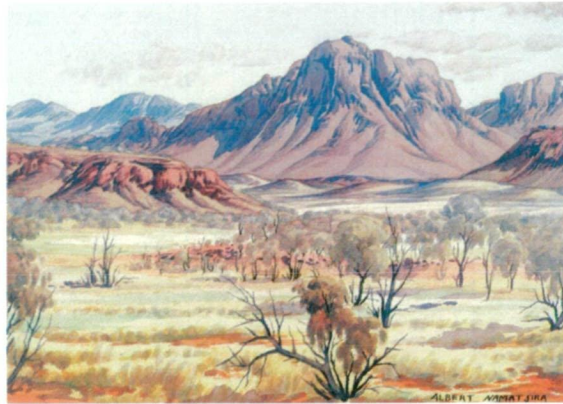
Albert Namatjira
Mount Sonder, MacDonnell Ranges, c.1957-59
(Image: reproduced from National Gallery of Australia Collection)

While McLean does not refer to specific paintings by Namatjira, he notes that interpretations of the work of Namatjira tend to divide into two opposing camps. On one side, he is seen as a copyist of artists such as Hans Heysen and therefore an example of the possibility for the Indigenous population to learn European ways and assimilate. On the other, white people who were sympathetic to Aborigines were keen that the Aboriginal people should not lose their traditional practices and therefore perceived his 'copying' as a denial of his authenticity. This group saw Namatjira as 'a turn-coat who betrayed the sensibility and pure expression of art latent in Aborigines' (ibid., p.100). McLean proposes an alternative stance. He believes Namatjira chose to make his work in a way that mimicked European landscape painting but in this mimicry he was not *being* a European landscape painter. McLean bases this assertion on the understanding that 'the mimic parodies rather than repeats its origin' (ibid.,

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p.104). In McLean's opinion, in mimicking European art Namatjira manages to 'ironically encode difference' (ibid., p.104). Therefore his work is neither European landscape nor traditional Aboriginal art. McLean argues that Namatjira was not the hapless victim 'lost between two worlds'; rather, his way of working represents 'his ability to make an ideology from the ambivalence of Hermannsberg[43] – to map the new coordinates of its third diasporic space which was neither Aboriginal nor European, but somewhere in between' (ibid., p.104). As a consequence McLean believes Namatjira's work foregrounds the Aboriginal arts movement and the role which art has consistently played in articulating land rights claims ever since. McLean acknowledges the agency of the other and in doing so makes deeper sense of actions that were previously assumed to be ambivalent.

The interpretations of Moxey and McLean are built on the premise that what artists do is the result of choices they make in order for them to achieve in a particular social and cultural milieu. Withholding aesthetic judgement and acceptance of the work is critical to this interpretative process.

Attentive Reading

Accepting that the artwork is 'right' changes the stance of the viewer considerably. It focuses attention on the specificity and materiality of the work. Rather than the aim being to look beyond or below the surface for what may have been intended, the image is read as a text, with every element having relevance to the reading. There is a sense that at each minute juncture the artist had a choice to do one thing or another. As a consequence, no detail is too small or too incidental to count. Reading an image as a text in this way involves paying attention to everything that is in the image.

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[43] Hermannsberg is an Aboriginal mission on the traditional land of the Arrernte people, 125 kilometres west of Alice Springs in Central Australia. The mission, established by German Lutheran missionaries in 1877, was returned to the traditional owners in 1982.

The interpretations that engage this method involve reading the images, not in order to reveal what is hidden but, rather, by simply noticing what is available to be seen. Instead of judging elements of a work as wrong or out-of-place, seeming incongruities become pivotal. The following interpretations exemplify the interpretative potential of such attentive reading.

JohannesVermeer
Art of Painting, c.1666
(Image: reproduced from Janson 2005)

In *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (1986), art historian Svetlana Alpers considers Vermeer's *Art of Painting* (c.1666), firstly in relation to the map that is shown in its entirety and dominates the background of the image, noting that 'we are meant to see it all because we are meant to see it in a different light' (Alpers 1986, p.122). She then speculates that 'in juxtaposing two different kinds of pictorial images – one, the figure of a young woman as Clio, an image replete with meaning calling for interpretation; the other the map, an image that functions as a kind of description' that the artist is posing a question: 'How does an image comprehend the world, through an association of meaning (art as

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emblem) or through description (art as mapping)?' (ibid., p.166). In other words, Alpers reads the way the image is put together as purposeful and beyond representation.

Nicolas Poussin
Et in Arcadia Ego, 1638-39
(Image: reproduced from Marin in Bryson 1988, p.64)

In another attentive reading, Louis Marin, in his consideration of Poussin's *Et in Arcadia Ego* (1638–39), counters Panofsky's translations of the meaning of the epigraph as 'Even in Arcadia I am' and 'I too was born and lived in Arcady', with the observation of the tomb, noting that there is a crack in the stone which 'splits the inscription' and '*divides e/go*' (Marin 1988, p.84). Marin accepts this detail, which could be overlooked as a matter of realistic representation, as a sign for cancelling out and, in doing so, is able to speculate that the subject of the image is absent rather than present, as Panofsy's translations imply. While Marin takes his interpretation a step further to suggest that the subject is 'absent from that blissful place that is nothing else than the painting itself' (ibid., p.87), the capacity to read this detail as a negation is available to, and decipherable by, any attentive reader with some knowledge of Latin.

Dutch cultural theorist Mieke Bal and author of *Looking In: The Art of Viewing* (Bal 2001) is also alert to the seemingly insignificant. In closely examining Rembrandt's *Lucretia* (1664), she notices that the earring the subject of the image is wearing does not hang vertically (Bal 2007, p.54).

Rembrandt van Rijn
Lucretia, 1664
(Image: reproduced from Bal 2007, p.54)

This slight angle leads Bal to the recognition that Lucretia is moving her head, not violently but more to avert her eyes from the viewer, 'preferring isolation to remaining an object of their voyeuristic gaze' (Bal 2007, 55). In this gesture, Bal sees the viewer being implicated in Rembrandt's drama.

Bal's interpretation of Vermeer's *Woman Weighing Pearls* (c.1662–64) provides one of the simplest examples of attentive reading and the potential for accepting the artwork in its entirety as an interpretative method (Bal 2001).
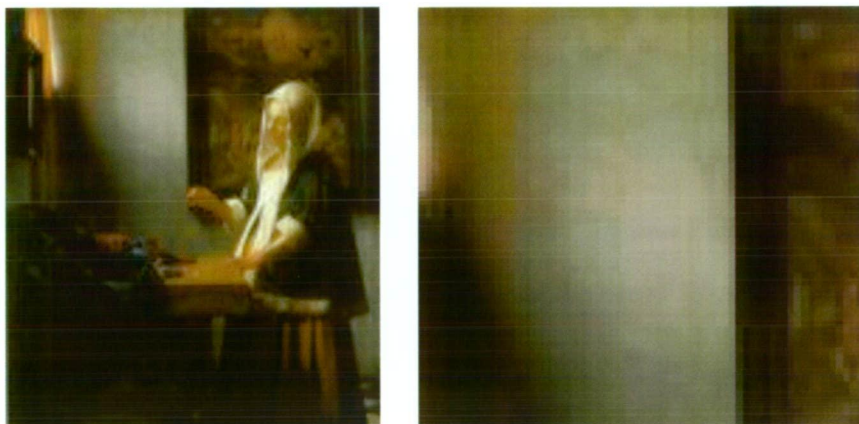
Johannes Vermeer
Woman Weighing Pearls, c.1662–64
(Image: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC)

In Vermeer's image, a woman stands at a table by a window. In her hand she has a set of scales with which she is ostensibly weighing pearls. On the rear wall is a painting of the Last Judgement. Bal does not go searching for biographical connections and psychological justifications for the work but, instead, looks intensely at the surface of the image, extracting meaning from minute observations. In this instance, she simply notices a tiny, seemingly insignificant detail – a nail hole in the plaster wall to the left of the painting. She recognises that a nail hole means that something has either been moved or removed. The choice to place this detail in the painting is a manifestation of the duality of harmony and imbalance, and serves to locate and verify the work's meaning.

It is not the purpose of this research to establish the efficacy of the interpretations outlined above. Rather, what is valuable is noticing the practical activity that these theorists have undertaken in going about the business of interpretation. While they may have recourse to scholarly texts and collegial dialogue which can assist them in defining their lines of enquiry, what they actually do in front of an image is what I wish to discern. Although the questions asked and the outcomes achieved may reflect a range of different perspectives, I believe they share a number of specific characteristics. The two that have been considered so far are the acceptance of the work as being 'right', and close attention to reading what is actually available on the surface of the image. These two methodological strategies are very different from the aesthetic and formalist codes that focus on the formal aspects of works of art rather than their content. What is more, we can all know what a nail hole stands for. The problem for the viewer is not a matter of the capacity to understand such detail, but rather, the capacity for the viewer to acknowledge that what can be noticed is worth noticing.

While all of the examples described above are in response to pre-modernist, representational artworks, this does not mean that they do not have a discursive content. I suggest that what attentive reading does is open

the discursive space. As a consequence, the viewer may encounter alternative and even oppositional interpretations to those generated by formalist aesthetics or representational narratives. I argue that given that this attentive approach can inform non-contemporary works, the potential to inform contemporary works that are actively seeking to engage discursively would seem to be a logical and useful possibility.

Doubling the Text

In effect, through this intensive but surface investigation, the interpreter rewrites the work. Jacques Derrida's notion of 'doubling' is relevant here. I understand doubling to mean that in order to see what is in front of us we need to re-present it in some way, that it is not enough just to look. Derrida sees this as an essential step in deconstruction:

> Deconstruction must, through a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, put into practice a reversal of the classical opposition and a general displacement of the system. It is on that condition alone that deconstruction will provide the means of intervening in the field of oppositions it criticizes and which is also a field of non-discursive forces (Derrida in Culler 1982, pp.85-86).

For Derrida, doubling is more than copying. In effect, doubling involves rewriting the work, thereby bringing into view the dynamics between what is there and what is not. In Derrida's own words:

> [T]he writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quantitative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should produce (Derrida 1976, p.158).

Academic J Douglas Kneale describes Derrida's method:

> Derrida's deconstructive method proceeds by means of slow and ingeniously detailed close readings of texts, focusing on those points where a binary opposition

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(e.g., signifier/signified, presence/absence, nature/culture, literal/figural, outside/inside), a line of argument, or even a single word breaks down to reveal radical incongruities in the logic or rhetoric. Unlike ambiguity, irony, or paradox, these incompatibilities cannot be harmonized in the service of textual 'unity' or 'integrity,' terms that for Derrida would be synonymous with 'self-presence.' Instead, the contradictions expose the text to the force of its own difference, its displacement from a univocal center of meaning. They show that what a text says and how it says it do not converge but simultaneously strive toward and defer convergence. Deconstruction always reveals difference within unity (Kneale 1997).

In other words, the process of doubling an artwork brings into view details and relationships that were not accessible at first glance because the semblance of coherence concealed them.

Engaging the Strange

In the examples presented above, each art historian has written extensively on their chosen subject and produced insightful and fascinating readings that forge new understandings of artists and their work. In doing so, they accepted the artworks at face-value and inverted the apparent 'out-of-placeness'. All of the examples share one thing that cuts across their diversity, that is, the capacity to engage with the seemingly incongruent or strange.

This is nothing new, particularly within the literary discipline. From a structuralist determination it is believed that we read by negotiating relations between what is and what is not. American philosopher Richard Rorty describes the phenomenon of engaging the unfamiliar:

[W]e learn to handle the weirder bits of native behavior (linguistic and other) in the same way that we learn about the weird behavior of atypical members of our own culture. Such members include quantum physicists, metaphysicians, religious fanatics, psychotics, Oscar Wilde, Mrs Malaprop, and so on – all the people who express paradoxical beliefs and desires in (mostly) familiar words of our mother tongue... [W]e guess what she might be saying, check our guesses by responding to what we thought she *ought* to have said, and so gradually pick up the knack of understanding her without conscious puzzlement of inference (Rorty 1991,pp.107- 109).

Similarly, French literary critic Michael Riffaterre states in *Semiotics of Poetry* that:

> Faced with the stumbling block of ungrammaticalness, the reader is forced during
> the process of reading, to uncover a second (higher) level of significance which
> will explain the ungrammatical feature of the text (Riffaterre 1978, p.119).

Australian cultural theorist Andrew Benjamin extends the notion of incongruence in an art context in his text *Disclosing Spaces* (Benjamin 2004) Benjamin suggests that dissensus is 'an inherent part of that which is proper to art as art' (ibid., p.19). In other words, dissensus is not just the means of reading art but the nature of art. Benjamin invents the verb 'to incomplete' to describe the means by which an artwork works (ibid., p.8). Both these concepts, dissensus and 'to incomplete', signify a necessary disjuncture through which meaning is generated. The interpreter sees, experiences, notices or perhaps just suspects, something 'other'. The nature of the other is multifarious and infinite but the direction of the offer is of a similar order – an encounter with the strange.[44] This defines a significant break between formalist aesthetics and more recent theories of discourse analysis. In the former, the viewer is affirmed in the judgements they make; in the latter the viewer is invited to move towards the other. Such a diametric shift in what is expected is not so easily accommodated. This is especially so for the public viewer struggling with contemporary art.

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[44] For further reading relating to theory embracing the strange or the other include the invisible invoked by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1968); the abject of Julia Kristeva (1982); the unconscious brought forth by Michael Fried (1967/1992); the uncanny of Jacques Lacan as cited by Martin Jay (1994); and lack, forgotten, absence and erasure retrieved by Elizabeth Grosz (1994). Some interpreters seek to do more than collapse the oppositions, showing interest in opening up a between space. Body-related forms include the skin (Merleau-Ponty 1968), the navel (Bal 2001), the hymen (Derrida 1987); the rhizome (Deleuze, cited in Boundas 1993; Guattari in Genosko 1996). These words reference a 'both/and-ness' – being simultaneously one thing and another or inside and out. Territorial references are made with the words boundary, border and frontier. Nikos Papastergiadis collapses dualities with hybridity and diaspora (1998; 2005).

LOOKING AT PAINTING

One publication that endeavours to offer the stranded viewer a way into contemporary art is *How to Look at a Painting* by New Zealand curator and art historian, Justin Paton (2005).[45] This small, easy-to-read volume encapsulates the author's desire to extend his personal approach to looking at paintings to those who may be struggling. The title of this publication suggests that looking at painting is not as easy as the simple act of looking might imply. Paton stresses that looking at a painting is not about instant response but, rather, takes time and effort. At the same time he feels that one of the main misconceptions people have concerning art is that 'art is unavailable to you unless you're in on all its hidden meanings'. Instead, he suggests that '[m]uch that painting has to tell is already right there, in its body language' (Paton 2005, p.27), by which he means, the way the paint is applied, how controlled the paint is, and 'what is the painting's attitude to its frame' (ibid., p.28).

Between these two states – things being available to see and the viewer needing to do work – Paton presents a ten-step guide for looking at paintings. These steps are: respect the thing; take time; see as many paintings as you can; ask, what did I notice rather than what do I think; try turning doubt into a question; seek out writing about the context; imagine who the work is for if it is not for you; wade through art's lows; trust your impressions; and trust the painting (ibid., pp.110-111).

In many respects, Paton's ten steps reiterate the interpretative methods that have already been described above. His suggestion that before answering the question 'What do I think?', which is a judgement, the viewer could try asking 'What did I notice?', which equates to attentive reading. He advocates acceptance of the work by trusting the painting and imagining who the work is for. He also engages in deconstruction by asking the

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[45]   Another publication that sets out the interpretation process and which could form
        the basis of this analysis is *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering, and
        Responding* (Barrett 2003). I have singled out Paton's version because it is directed
        at a more general audience.

sceptical viewer to turn doubt into a question. Perhaps this thesis could be concluded at this point, with Paton's steps offered to all gallery visitors as the primary solution to the problem of engaging with contemporary art. However, there are aspects of Paton's description of what he does when he looks at a painting that he does not disclose.

A limitation of Paton's utility is inherent in his statement that '[w]hen something is puzzling or beyond belief, what we most want to do is look' (Paton 2005, p.21). That viewers actively seek to dispel puzzlement is an assumption that is far from universal. While some viewers may choose to follow through when faced with difficulty, many others do exactly the opposite and run away or reject what is not readily within their expectations. To suggest that everyone has a desire to come to grips with the strange or with what is outside their comfort zone is far from the regular state of affairs, and yet it is this strangeness that is often the crux of the contemporary art experience. It is not that Paton is unaware of the strangeness in artwork. He notes, for example, in his discussion of an exhibition of work by New York artist John Currin at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2003, 'that everything was fractionally "off" ' and that the artist 'wrapped odd emotions and iffy politics in a seductive painterly skin' (ibid., p.41). My criticism is that Paton doesn't deal with the acceptance of the 'off', the 'odd' or the 'iffy' sufficiently. For him this reference to the strange is a passing observation. I believe that while Paton does suggest turning doubt into a question, the conditions that have enabled him to do this need closer consideration.

MAY 9. 2004
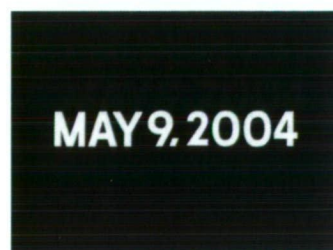
On Kawara
9 May 2004, 2004
(Image: reproduced from Paton 2005, figure 3)

Paton's description of his experience of On Kawara's major works *One Million Years (Past)* and *One Million Years (Future)* highlights the significance of this dynamic in the context of this study. Paton describes these works as '40 small, mostly black, tombstone-shaped paintings' of an ongoing series of at least 2000 similar images each made within the timeframe of a particular day. The project was begun in 1966. Paton tells us that he was in a rush when he came to the exhibition and was 'a little irritated by the long row of dates and their no-comment demeanour' (Paton 2005, p.54). He bought the catalogue and left. It was through the images in the publication that he subsequently discovered the intensity of the work. He uses this example to conclude that looking at art takes time. In doing so, he invokes what he calls 'The Rule of the Third Impression' [46] which he outlines as follows:

> The first encounter with a painting establishes terms: What kind of work is this? What set of rules is it playing by? The second steadies or unsettles those terms: How are those rules opened out and adapted? How subtle, how distinctive, are its plays? By the third impression it's usually clear whether the engagement is going to last: Does the painting have the necessary patience and stamina? Is there something in it that refuses to be explained away and keeps you coming back? Does it hold on to some of its secrets? (Paton 2005, p.53).

Returning to the On Kawara example, what Paton fails to take into account is the fact that he almost missed the work himself because his first impression was one of irritation. It was his habit of buying catalogues that saved the day. So while Paton is seeking to arm the viewer with a strategy that might enable them to encounter contemporary art, his decision to ignore the issue of 'why bother' in the first place means that in the end he is preaching to the converted, those who have a firmly entrenched love of art that outweighs any major negativity of the first encounter. The question is, what can be done if the viewer doesn't get past the first impression?

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[46] Paton's 'rule of the third impression' can be compared to Althusser's notion of 'hail' as considered by Floodsky in his contribution to another easy-read book entitled *Art: What is it good for?* (Floodsky 2002, p.18). This publication is also aimed at unpacking contemporary art practice.

Paton assumes that we start by being drawn towards an image. However, this does not take into account that repulsion is a significant aspect of much contemporary art. It is by gathering the faults, the problems and the unfamiliar, as Paton was able to do once he had the time to linger with On Kawara's images, that the keys to an engagement with the work of art have provided. Paton's subjective faith in the value of art in its array of manifestations fails to take into account the incapacity of some viewers to recognise art when they are presented with it. He does not consider the necessity for viewers to realise they are in an art experience and that to get anywhere they need to keep going. He makes a false assumption that this mindset is a given.

Paton is adamant that time is the essential ingredient for positive engagement. He suggests sketching or taking 'good company' and 'settling down [with his students] in front of [a work] for an hour to see what could be made of it' (Paton 2005, p.58). I would argue that through remaking the work and talking about it Paton is advocating a form of 'doubling'. However, while the strategies do seek to visualise or verbalise the experience of looking, he assumes that such remaking provides a direct line to understanding. He fails to take into account that it is moving towards the strange that needs to be made visible or audible in some way, rather than enacting aesthetic confirmation. As I understand it, instead of the viewer *trusting* their impressions, as he suggests, what is required is for us all to *notice* our impressions and in doing so, notice what is strange that we might prefer to avoid.

While Paton engages in the meta-reflective activity of watching himself reflect as doubling requires, he does not appreciate the mechanism he uses to do this. Paton is not alone in this. None of the interpreters considered in this chapter do either. They all miss the fact that in doubling the artwork they all actually write down what they notice and/or vocalise their thoughts within a collegial environment.

While Paton says it is good to go to the gallery with 'good company' and that the time he spends talking about art with his students is very rewarding, this is an additional reward rather than essential to his process. From my perspective, the book itself is evidence of the activity of rewriting or speaking what he sees. Each chapter is rich with descriptions of how his eyes move over an image and what he is able to notice as a consequence. It is also important to note that Paton buys catalogues and reads interpretations by others that support or extend what he is able to notice. What interests me is that Paton does not link these *looking at* and *reading about* activities. For him, the looking is understood as the primary action, with reading as an extra that is available to the interested viewer should they so choose. Paton returns again and again to the idea that looking at painting is a silent, individual and private experience. And there is logic to this. It has already been argued that direct experience of art is what is being aimed for. However, while looking at art is an individual experience, this does not mean that the individual is totally responsible for creating the conditions in which this experience is made possible.

Paton's ten-step approach to looking at art does not recognise the degree to which his environment and cultural milieu supports his capacity to perform the role of interpreter of contemporary art, despite the fact that his background is a strong element in many of the examples he presents. Neither is he aware of the degree to which he has normalised his capacity to choose to 'wade through art's lows' and 'tease out significance of what you've already seen, rather than fretting about unseen meanings' (Paton 2005, p.9). In other words, he knows that the viewer needs to engage with the strange, but he is unaware of the conditions available to him that enable him to do so – that he lives, works and plays in an environment which is conducive to this engagement. What is missing from Paton's constructive list of suggestions for the ordinary gallery viewer, who might not readily choose to play the game of looking at art, is how to create the conditions in which it is safe for them to do so.

A PSYCHOANALYTIC POSSIBILITY

The discipline which actively seeks to construct safe space in order to promote encounters with the strange is psychoanalysis. While many art theorists have employed Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory in their interpretations of art, what I am interested in are the behaviours that are relevant to the psychoanalytic process, in particular that process attributed to Jacques Lacan. To this end I refer to the observations made by Stuart Schneiderman in *Jacques Lacan: The Death of an Intellectual Hero* (Schneiderman 1983). In this publication Schneiderman, who was a student of Lacan in the 1970s and underwent psychoanalysis with Lacan himself as part of his training, outlines what occurs in the day-to-day operations of the psychoanalytic session, describing the difference between psychoanalytic and regular forms of conversation. In doing so, he considers in particular the analyst's mode of listening; the analyst's mode of speaking; the beginning of analysis; and the end of analysis. In the following section, Schneiderman's observations will be applied to the experience of both the expert interpreter and the less informed viewer of contemporary art. Suggestions will also be made as to how these behaviours could be translated into an art museum setting.

The Mode of Listening

The practice of Lacanian psychoanalysis is enacted through a particular way of listening whereby the analyst hears what is being said but also tries to notice what is not being said or what is being said indirectly. Schneiderman recalls that Lacan applied this same principle in his teaching. Lacan called himself a Freudian; however, his teachings of Freud were 'not strictly critical enterprises; they involved learning how to listen selectively rather than how to write criticism' (Schneiderman 1983, p.32). In other words, Lacan did not see his task as imparting Freud's theory to his students but rather of engaging them in a listening activity through which they could hear what Freud was saying between the words. This notion of listening is central to the Lacanian method. It operates in a

completely different way from having to know about the patient's background as a point of departure. Instead, what is important is revealed in the specificity of the conversation. Analysis is a specific mode of attention to the speaker that focuses totally on what the speaker says.

In an art museum context, one mechanism for listening to viewers is the comment book in which viewers are invited to write down their responses to the museum or a specific exhibition. Comment books are relatively common practice, providing feedback from audiences and evaluating programs. While the museum visitor might feel free to say what they like by way of comment, psychoanalytic listening is not just gathering what the audience says. It also requires acceptance of what has been said. This already happens in the art museum to some extent, although as I hope to show, some apply it deliberately and others use it unknowingly.

The Visual Training System (VTS) considered in chapter three is an example of a special form of conversation that accepts the responses offered by all participants. Furthermore, in VTS the teacher does not add content but rather reflects the students' observations back for their verification and clarification. I do not wish to undertake an analysis of VTS in order to understand the degree to which it undertakes a psychoanalytic form of listening. However, a general observation is that if responses to listening lead to relativist outcomes that confirm each individual's preconception, it is unlikely that psychoanalytic listening has taken place. This is because the outcome of psychoanalytic listening is towards an encounter with the other rather than confirming what is known. In other words, it needs to be understood that the psychoanalytic form of listening is not simply to repeat what is being said but, rather, the analyst's task is to allow the patient to hear what they were not able to or what they were avoiding. In the museum setting, this means that it is not only what the viewer says that counts but also the reflective response from the museum that opens the possibility to access what was previously

inaccessible. To achieve this the psychoanalytical conversation also requires a very particular kind of speaking.

The Mode of Speaking

The psychoanalytical mode of speaking, while premised on listening and reflecting, is not a repetition of what the patient said but a reflection of what was said that the actual words did not quite carry. Interpretation reflects what is heard 'between the lines', or what is not being said. In other words, interpretations involve an attempt to make visible what the patient cannot see. This is sometimes referred to in therapeutic circles as 'active listening'.[47]

This kind of speaking has nothing to do with illuminating the analyst's theory on what is wrong with the patient or how they might go about getting better. In fact, the analyst must let go of any particular concerns or knowledge. If the analyst enters into normal conversation by explaining, advising, telling anecdotes, sharing experience, criticising or analysing, this input will become a point of resistance and the possibility for moving into a new position will be lost (Schneiderman 1983, pp.79-80). A personal relationship with the analyst is not what is being asked for. On the contrary, the patient wants the 'analyst to mind his own business, to be interested in the things that concern [the patient], directly or indirectly' (ibid., p.113). Thus, the analyst is not present as a 'real' person. On the contrary, '[t]he analyst's business is transference', that is, to become the voice of the other (ibid., p.113).

In the art museum setting, active listening is employed as a means of soliciting responses and opinions particularly from young viewers. As has been mentioned previously in chapter three, the technique is used by

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[47]   Cognitive therapy programs developed over recent decades employ methods that parallel psychoanalysis. Effectiveness Training as devised by Thomas Gordon (1975) is one such program. 'Active listening' is the primary mode of engagement in this program.

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educators to ensure that viewers' thoughts and ideas are clarified and understood.

The Beginning of Analysis

The beginning of the psychoanalytic process is simultaneously very specific and absolutely dependent upon the patient. When the patient comes to the analyst it is not some abstract notion of symptom or condition that is considered in the first instance but, rather, engagement is with whatever the patient brings, no matter how 'strange' or seemingly inappropriate it might be. This point cannot be over-emphasised. If this moment is not acknowledged, there will be no opportunity to begin the listening process and the conversation will not happen. As Schneiderman observes, when we encounter things that have the quality of strangeness or otherness, the usual response in Lacan's view is that we make a diagnosis or a judgement (Schneiderman 1983, p.15). The dilemma with diagnoses and judgements is that after we have invoked them we cease to listen, as the process appears to be complete and there is nothing more to say or there is no framework left in which to say it.

According to Schneiderman, while reaction to strangeness or otherness may result in some ugly behaviour and odd statements on the part of the patient, this is in fact only the beginning. Acknowledgement of this response is the point of entry into the process. If the analyst leaps in with an interpretation or 'press[es] forward too quickly', in order to 'eliminate the suffering … the desire will be eliminated with it' (Schneiderman 1983, p.114). That is, if the analyst does not focus on what is happening at that particular moment, however threatening or uncomfortable it might be, the opportunity will be missed. As Schneiderman understands it, any behaviours, however bizarre, are a product of the 'unconscious [which] is structured logically' (ibid., p.96) – this implies that what might seem bizarre actually makes sense.

Applying this in a gallery situation indicates that endeavouring to fix the discomfort that a disinclined viewer might be experiencing, by providing explanations about what the art means before the viewer has asked for it, is unlikely to lead to further engagement. Ironically, the spoken or written interpretations of expert historians, curators and artists may well contribute to making matters worse if such information does not reflect what the viewer is presenting. At the beginning of an art experience such information can act as an interjection rather than a salve.

If the equivalent of a psychoanalytical conversation is to be enacted in the art gallery, the viewer's utterances are the *only* content that can be engaged. Interjecting with additional information is the equivalent to saying that what the viewer is experiencing is wrong or giving them advice as to the right way to behave. This does not mean that galleries should not provide information at all; rather, such information can only be effectively engaged at the point when the viewer voluntarily seeks such information.

Some artworks will confirm the viewer's notion of art and cause no concern or alarm. On the other hand, some disinclined viewers can be antagonistic or dismissive even before any art is looked at. If the viewer is confused, angry or even abusive about art in general, then this response needs to be acknowledged before anything else. To do otherwise, including trying to fix the problem for them, will bring the possibility for engagement to an abrupt, and sometimes even aggressive, end.

It becomes clear that engaging with art cannot be forced upon anyone, neither can the viewer be convinced to engage through learned argument or passionate conviction on the part of museum experts. The desire must come from the viewer. In psychoanalysis 'the most the analyst can do is to offer a treatment' (Schneiderman 1983, p.94). In the gallery situation, all that can be done in the first instance is to make potential viewers a genuine offer. This means making it very plain that disinclined viewers are truly invited in. This involves more than a welcoming smile or providing free

admission. It is about being welcomed in a way that recognises the potential threat and discomfort that entering might encompass.

VISITOR STUDIES AND LISTENING DATA

Understanding the needs of the visitor is the focus of the museum's marketing department, which is responsible for selling what the museum has to offer to the outside world. Interestingly, it is from the visitor studies sector that much of the research into how visitors relate to museums and exhibitions, and what visitors learn from these experiences, has been undertaken.

Visitor studies research is based however on thinking in business management that stretches back at least to the first half of last century and parallels the shift from an institutional and product-led approach to a people-focus that has occurred across a multiplicity of disciplines considered throughout this thesis. Peter Drucker, founder of modern management believed that '[t]he most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said' (Drucker 1961, 1989).

Despite Bourdieu and Darbel's contribution to this principle within a museum context in the 1960s, the concept of visitor studies has only become a regular aspect of museum management over the past twenty years (Black 2005, p.9).[48] In the art museum the time frame is even shorter. The application of visitor studies to contemporary art in remains particularly scant.[49]

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[48]   While the first visitor surveys took place at the Royal Ontario Museum in the 1950s, the first annual visitor studies conference was not held until Jacksonville, Alabama, in 1988 (Black 2005, p.9). The Visitor Studies Association in America was established in America in 1987; the American Association of Museums' Committee on Audience Research and Evaluation (CARE) in 1989; and the Visitor Studies Group UK and Museum Australia's Evaluation and Visitor Research Special Interest Group (EVRSIG) both in 1998.

[49]   The Journal of Visitor Studies Association has been published since 1997. Articles and reviews focus on museums, visitor centres, nature centres and tourism. In three volumes in 2007 and 2008, of the twenty-two articles and eight reviews published, only two relate to the art museum. These are 'Visitors' Motivations to Attend

Nevertheless, the dominance of quantitative research on attendance and visitor demographics is increasingly augmented with more qualitative practices that seek to understand the complexities of the segmented market and the specific needs of target audiences. Data is sought to provide more detailed and nuanced understandings of what visitors enjoy and barriers they experience; what works and why; and where improvements can be made. The methods for obtaining such data include interviews and focus groups.

In relationship to the present discussion, one method that is increasingly being employed in visitor studies – the strategy of listening to visitors' responses as a data-gathering device – is of particular relevance. In such studies, visitors agree to talk aloud about what they are doing and thinking as they walk around the museum or exhibit. This has become a relatively common practice despite the labour-intensive data collation and processing required in evaluating the results.

This approach is articulated in *Museums Actively Researching Visitor Experiences and Learning (MARVEL): A Methodological Study* (Griffin et al. 2005), a study that specifically examines the efficacy of this method of data-gathering in two major museums in Sydney. The study compared two primary tools of data-gathering – visual observation of visitors' behaviour and listening to visitors talking about their experiences. In comparing the difference between the two, the study concludes:

> [V]isual observation data tells [sic] us *that* people are learning and aspects of *how* they are learning. It gives a good indication of the extent and nature of visitors' use of hands-on exhibits. It also provides information on a number of behaviours which do not involve talking such as reading, manipulating and looking at objects etc. Listening data tells [sic] us more about *how* they are learning as well as some information about *what* they are learning. It gives a much deeper understanding of

Special Events at Art Galleries: An Exploratory Study' by Megan Axelsen from University of Queensland (2007); and 'Empathic Dramatic Engagement as a Metaphor for Learning in the Art Museum' by Herman du Toit and Brigham Dye from Brigham Young University Museum of Art in Utah (2008).

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the learning that is taking place, how visitors are relating what they see to other experiences, how the exhibits stimulated discussion which is not always directly related to what they see (Griffin et al. 2005, p.13).

While the conclusion that listening to visitors talking tells more about their learning than observation might seem obvious, no mention is made in the study as to the relationship between learning and the method of talking aloud. In a study carried out at the Wolverhampton Art Gallery in the United Kingdom by Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri (2001) in which visitors voiced their responses to the interviewer, the researchers do consider the effect of their method on the visitors' responses. This study concludes:

> Although we realized that the interviewer would be bound to have an effect on the visit, we considered that this effect would not change the interpretative repertoires that visitors carried with them. They might perhaps use the repertoires more extensively than usual, that is, make a longer visit and talk more than they would if they were visiting on their own, but as the object of the study was to identify thought patterns, this extension would be a positive aspect, and would produce more data (Hooper-Greenhill & Moussouri 2001, p.4).

Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri appreciate that in talking to the interviewer, the viewer's engagement was of a longer duration and higher intensity. This positive outcome, and the fact that museum staff are familiar with this method, has efficacy as a model for interpretative strategies. However, there is one aspect of this intervention that the researchers did not take into account, that is, the relationship between thinking and speaking. Hooper-Greenhill and Moussouri conflate thinking and talking and in doing so assume that there is symmetry between the two – that what we think and what we speak are the same thing. From a psychoanalytical perspective, this is not the case; on the contrary, the dynamic of psychoanalysis is in noticing the difference and incongruence between what is thought and what is said.

The nature of the psychoanalyst's interpretation of what the patient says has particular qualities. The psychoanalyst's role is not to teach the patient

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about the origins of this particular bank of stories, but rather to present an interpretation that resonates with the patient's unconscious. While Lacan may have chosen to use allegories from Greek mythology, interpretations can take on other forms. In fact, the specific content of an interpretation does not matter as long as it is generated by the analyst listening to what the patient is saying 'between the lines'. Interestingly, this does not mean that an interpretation has to be accurate; indeed, inaccuracy is part of the method. The analyst needs to be wrong, or as Schneiderman put it: 'It is essential for the analyst to permit himself to be duped by the unconscious' (Schneiderman 1983, p.95). Schneiderman explains the necessity of error by saying that psychoanalytic interpretation:

> is clearly dialectical and it works because there is an opposition established, a conflict between patient and analyst. Some will say that this means that he should not have interpreted at all, but it is clear that his inexact interpretation, firmly grounded in the material he heard, was precisely what permitted the patient to bring forth the new material that gave them both a clearer picture of the structure in question (Schneiderman 1983, p.93).

In other words, the relationship between thinking and speaking is not symmetrical, as mistakes are inevitable and necessary. Moreover, it is through recognising the mistakes that the chance to make adjustments arises. Thus, articulating thought, rather than just thinking it, is fundamental to discursive interpretation. Ignoring the dynamic between speaking and hearing misses an important aspect of interpreting art, the potential for an encounter with the other.

To enact a psychoanalytic stance in the art museum means focusing on the viewer's speech and reflecting back what is being said between the lines. This means that the experience is not silent. The viewer's response needs to be vocalised either by speaking aloud or, as experts often do, by reading in the process of writing. Further, in order to hear the mistakes in what is said, a voice standing in for the analyst needs to reflect back what the viewer has said between the lines. As has been noted, this approach to listening is often used in the art gallery, as a technique in effective

teaching. Difficulties, however, arise in the context of discursive art practice. If the museum educator, as active listener, does not have the capacity to hear the discursive code, they will not be able to fully hear the viewer's responses. Making the discursive code apparent in the art museum is therefore a necessity if a genuine offer is to be made.

MAKING THINKING VISIBLE

The realisation that thinking requires the articulating of thought is behind the data gathering strategy referred to as 'making thinking visible'. While the origin of the concept is uncertain, the approach has become ubiquitous in education, management and marketing sectors. In some market research processes, this concept is taken literally, with all ideas written down and displayed for the whole group to see, reflect on, order, extend and rearrange. Lynda Jones, Associate Fellow of the Australian Marketing Institute and organiser of institute's annual national conference in 2005, describes the purpose of making thinking visible as:

> We make thinking visible so the speaker knows their ideas and thoughts have been correctly captured and the audience is given the opportunity to question or clarify what is said. Thinking that is not visible is open to the interpretation of both the recorder and the audience who are tempted to write and think what they thought they heard which may or may not be what was meant. Visible thinking creates boundaries for intent, meaning and interpretation (Lynda Jones 2005, pers. comm.,13 May).

Large sheets of paper and Post-it notes abound in Jones's workshops. An application of this approach to visitor studies in the art museum comes from Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, a UK-based marketing research and audience development consultancy. This company has devised a number of audience development tools that have been adopted in some of the United Kingdom's major cultural institutions, including the British Museum, the National Gallery and the Tate Modern. In 2005, the Australian Council for the Arts invited company members Andrew McIntyre and Gerri Morris on a national tour of Australia, presenting a seminar series entitled *Walk a*

Mile in the Visitor's Shoes.[50] To illustrate the applicability of their

approach to market research, McIntyre described a project at

Wolverhampton Art Galleries in England, in which members of the non-

gallery going public were invited to participate in a focus group with a

view to developing more inclusive programs (McIntyre 2005, pers. comm.,

24 November). Amongst other things, the group was asked to consider the

modern art collection. The method involved participants recording their

responses to aspects of the display on Post-it notes that they placed around

the gallery. Instead of requiring participants to make public statements, in

this approach all responses are recorded in a less confrontational manner,

and the grouping and prioritising processes are undertaken by the whole

group using visual means to do so. In this approach, speaking does not

need to be auditory.[51]

The session was undertaken out-of-hours in order not to interfere with the

normal running of the gallery. Many of the comments were very negative,

in the main indicating that the artwork was incomprehensible and the vast

white space too alienating. Rather than being defensive about the responses

or indeed endeavouring to explain the exhibition in the hope that the

participants would change their minds, the gallery chose to invite the

participants to redesign the exhibition. In initiating this process the

participants were made aware that the gallery would do whatever they

could to respond to the group's ideas, and this included a willingness to

remove works from the exhibition. In handing over this responsibility to

the participants, the gallery made apparent that the offer it was making was

genuine. The changes that resulted from this interactive consultation were

surprising. Despite the initial criticism of the artworks, in the end no works

were removed from the exhibition. In order to provide the uninitiated with

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[50]   I attended this seminar in Hobart on 24 November 2005, with the support of a
        small research grant from the Tasmanian School of Art at the University of
        Tasmania.

[51]   The approach can be aligned to Dr Edward de Bono's parallel thinking strategies,
        which eliminate confrontational and adversarial behaviours in favour of everyone
        in the group working together towards solutions that meet the needs of all
        stakeholders (de Bono 1995, 2004).

the socio-cultural context, the works were arranged chronologically and a chronology recording significant historical events ran under the works. In addition, headphones provided popular music relating to the time the works were made and explanatory texts were placed next to each work. Interestingly, the chronology was applied in subtle text so as not to overly interrupt the white space and the explanatory texts were placed not directly on the wall but in partially concealed slots. As a consequence, each aspect of the solution catered simultaneously for those who were looking for additional information and those who did not like the idea of information impinging on the aesthetic experience.

This case exemplifies aspects of the active listening process outlined above. The museum made a genuine offer to the participants; the participants responded openly; the museum listened; and finally, the museum showed it had heard by changing its behaviour in ways that took the participants' perspectives into account. In the process the participants were able to articulate and clarify their responses, and they also gained insight into different ways of viewing artwork, which they were then able to incorporate into their solution.

PLAYING THE ANALYST

Interpretation of art belongs to the viewer. Nevertheless, as with the patient in psychoanalysis, the viewer cannot encounter the strange on their own. It was noted previously that expert interpreters of art operate in a collegial environment in which they speak, are listened to and are acknowledged. The expert interpreter can reflect on the gaps and mistakes in the interpretative conversations in which they are immersed. Once they are skilled in this dialogical process, interpreters such as Paton are able to present themselves as independent operators. I argue that this is an illusion. Because this process has become second nature to them, they are unaware of their use of, and need for, this support. Paton misses this point. It is a mistake to think that serving up the expert's interpretation to counter the viewer's puzzlement will achieve results that are equivalent to the making

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of the interpretation in the first place. It is not sufficient just to think about art or let someone else fix it with information. Discursivity needs to be performed by the viewer in the presence of the artwork. Therefore, rather than relying on an expert interpreter to do the work, the circumstances need to be created in which the viewer can initiate their own conversation.

I believe that the principles of the Lacanian psychoanalytic conversation parallel what contemporary art theorists do in making their interpretations: they accept the work as it is presented; they listen to it; and they engage in a reflective conversation with it.[52] What is more, they do it all in an environment in which they can speak and be heard by what could be described as their 'collegial analyst'. If the viewer is to have access to the methods used by expert interpreters, there is a need for the role of such an analyst to be enacted in the art museum setting. Curators, education and public program officers, guides, attendants, and even marketing personnel are all in positions where engaging with viewers is already part of their job description. Each or any of these positions could be readily extended to incorporate the role of the analyst. However, as has been described, this role is very specific and those who take it on will need to be trained in ways that may be unfamiliar or even contrary to their regular ways of working. They will need to be able to make genuine offers of invitation and to perform the role of active listener if their visitors are to perform their role as discursive viewers. In other words, the role of the museum moves from expert speaker to expert listener. This will require the capacity to hear and reflect the discursive code.

In the next chapter, consideration is given to a case study that I have undertaken, in which the principles of the Lacanian psychoanalytic conversation have been applied to the relationship between the art museum and the viewer's experience of contemporary art.

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[52]   Schneiderman makes the connection between the psychoanalytic perspective and the perception of art in 'Art and symptom' (Schneiderman 1990, pp.207-222) in which he writes: 'The work of art is not the original symptom but a sufficiently credible facsimile for there to exist between symptom and art what psychoanalysis calls a transference' (ibid.,p.220).

CHAPTER 6

ENACTING DISCURSIVITY

In previous chapters of this thesis a number of key principles have been discerned with regard to actualising a discursive space in the public art museum for the viewer. In the first instance discursive artwork needs to be made available. Second, the public art museum needs the political will to place such work in the centre of their exhibitions program. Third, the gallery needs to make it clear to the visitor that the formalist aesthetic approach to viewing discursive work is inadequate for, if not contrary to, discursive engagement. Fourth, to ensure a genuine offer to participate is made to the visitor, the invitation to engage discursively needs to be enacted in between the outside and inside of the exhibition. Finally, to show that the visitor has been heard by the public art museum and to provide the visitor with the opportunity to hear themselves, the visitor's response needs to be made visible.

In this chapter these principles are enacted in an intervention in association with an exhibition in a public art museum, and the visitors' responses to this intervention are evaluated.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological rationale for this research has been generated from an examination of the literature in light of the aim of evaluating visitors' responses to the enactment of a strategy specifically designed to increase discursivity in the public art museum setting. What follows is an explanation of the qualitative research methodology known as the 'instrumental case study' that is enacted in a 'naturalistic setting' using 'purposeful sampling'. Also outlined is the concept of 'open coding', which is employed in the statistical analysis of the data. Each of these concepts is described in relation to its suitability to this particular research project. In addition, how each concept is applied in this specific study is presented.

While Denzin and Lincoln acknowledge the diversity of definitions applicable to qualitative research within various historical frameworks, they offer this generic definition: 'Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.3). Qualitative research is often placed in opposition to quantitative research, with the latter seen as capable of eliciting greater objectivity, based on the assumption that the reduction of phenomena to quantitative terms gives rise to increased certainly and generalisability because the observer is seen as being outside the situation. Increasingly, the possibility of objectivity has been scrutinised. Simultaneously, awareness of the observer as integral to the methodology has become accepted. Qualitative research methodology acknowledges the observer's role in research processes and seeks to incorporate this consequent lack of objectivity into the research processes. Instead of objectivity, qualitative research methodology recognises the value of interpretation. As a consequence, according to Denzin and Lincoln:

> [Qualitative research methodology] consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews,

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conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.3).

Qualitative research methodology therefore allows for less seemingly concrete and subjective materials to be valuable assets in the research process. Qualitative research methodology means that researchers can 'study things in their natural settings, attempt to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.3). Therefore, this study is undertaken in a naturalistic setting. Naturalistic research 'occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life' (ibid., p.378). As the purpose of the study relates to the response to contemporary art in a public art museum setting, the research is undertaken in a public art museum in which such an exhibition has been installed within the normal operations of the institution. The potential participants in the research are therefore those who in the normal course of events would visit the exhibition. The activity that the participants undertake in order to generate data for the study is what could be expected to occur within this setting. The participants engage in the study without awareness of it being in an experimental environment. As a consequence the participants are able to respond 'naturally' to the situation being offered.

The research takes the form of a case study. Robert Stake describes a case study as 'the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (Stake 1995, p.xi). The application of the case study is appropriate in situations where there is a particular question that needs general understanding, and where it is considered that the study of the particular case may provide insight into that question (ibid., p.3).

Stake suggests that the purpose of the case study is to 'maximise what we can learn' (Stake 1995, p.4). It follows that some cases will achieve this better than others. A particular case is therefore selected in order to

optimise understanding of the question posed. The purpose of the case study is not to provide a form of sampling research in order to be able to make generalisations, but rather, to understand this one case (ibid., p.4). However, Stake points out that the case study can lead to the querying of assertions and can 'perhaps even modify generalizations' (ibid., p.4). In other words, the study examines a particular case, but what is revealed may be useful in a broader context or in consideration of a broader question.

The particular question investigated in the body of this thesis relates to the enhancement of the experience of discursive art in the public art museum. It is hypothesised that providing the opportunity for the viewer to 'double' their thinking by articulating their thoughts about particular artworks and placing these thoughts in the public arena will have an effect on the viewer's responses. In the light of this, it is also hypothesised that providing a circumstance or stimulus through which viewers might overtly articulate their thoughts could constitute the case to be studied. This contrasts for example, with the kind of study in which participants are selected for questioning about their responses, which are described as an adjunct to the experience rather than integral to the experience itself. As Stake says: 'an innovative program may be a case' (ibid., p.2):

> It need not be about studying the particular people involved but rather providing the means for understanding something else. Hence the case study can be instrumental in moving towards this understanding (Stake 1995, p.2).

In summary, the case selected for consideration in this investigation is the enactment of a particular engagement strategy applied to a particular set of public viewers during a particular art exhibition in a particular public art museum.

THE SPECIFIC CASE

This section takes the principles that have been discerned in the previous chapter and uses them into construct three strategies that are considered in the case study.

Principle 1: Discursive Art Practice

To undertake a case study required locating an exhibition of discursive art practice as defined in the first chapter of this thesis. In Tasmania, there are few opportunities for public art museums and contemporary art events to coincide. The two major public art museums, the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) in Hobart, while having dedicated art galleries, have complex programming requirements as a consequence of their extensive colonial, modernist and decorative arts collections. Neither institution has dedicated space for contemporary art. Fortunately, interest in this research project was shown by the Coordinating Curator of Art at TMAG, Craig Judd, and I was able to undertake a visitor intervention in response to the exhibition *Register: Tasmanian Artists 2006* as part of the museum's public education program. The exhibition brought together the work of ten artists working in Tasmania. The work was selected by Judd and Michael Edwards, the Director of Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST), the State's leading independent contemporary art space, and was chosen as a sample of contemporary arts practice in Tasmania (Judd & Edwards 2006).

The exhibition was presented in the usual museum format – individual works well-spaced on neutral walls and with minimal labels. A copy of the catalogue was available for use in the gallery if required.

Principle 2: The Will of the Public Art Museum

In order to satisfy the principle that the public museum is supportive of contemporary practice, it was necessary to find an exhibition that was not marginalised but, rather, installed in primary gallery spaces.

The layout of the TMAG consists of a number of permanent and temporary display spaces. The spaces are designated as either museum display spaces or as art galleries. There are five art galleries on the ground floor of the

complex dedicated to the presentation of temporary exhibitions and there are additional galleries on the upper floor. There is no entry fee to the museum, and visitors are free to enter and exit the gallery spaces at will. The ground floor galleries are entered through a major natural history display area. The museum shop is adjacent to the first of the five art galleries. As a consequence, visitors to the space may either be coming specifically to the art galleries or may be drawn in inadvertently as they wander to and from other museum exhibits and the museum shop.

The exhibition that is the focus of this study was located in two of the five downstairs galleries. At the time of the study, a major annual exhibition, *The Hobart Art Prize*, was being held in the three adjacent art galleries. Both the art prize and *Register* exhibitions were accessed though the same foyer. A large sign in the foyer area directed visitors to the art prize exhibition. In contrast there was no signage for *Register*. This may have resulted in some viewers coming to the exhibition unintentionally. However, as the purpose of the study is not about particularities of the visitors' inclinations, and as all visitors were presented with the same potentially ambiguous circumstances, this was not considered problematic. Of more significance is that the case under consideration represents the unmediated practice of the public art museum, and that the exhibition was located in prime museum space.

Principle 3: Making the Discursive Code Apparent

In order to make the discursive code apparent, two approaches were taken – one with me presenting the code verbally, the other through the presentation of a written statement of the code.

In the first strategy, I undertook a number of short information sessions at which the discursive code for engaging with contemporary art was described. Arts administration, multimedia and music education students, and gallery guides from the museum, enrolled for the sessions. These sessions, held in one of the exhibition galleries, consisted of a short

presentation in which different ways of addressing artworks – that is, as representation, aesthetic experience, and as ideas or triggers for conversations in relation to 'the other' – were considered. In particular, the explanation focused on noticing what is deemed to be wrong, out-of-place or unfamiliar within an image, and it was suggested that utilising that awareness in making interpretations was important. No background information or explanation of the actual works was given.

Following the sessions, sheets on which the discursive code was reiterated (Discursive Comment Sheets) were distributed, and participants were asked to complete them in response to a particular artwork. No interaction or prompting was offered to the participants during this process.

The text on the Discursive Comment Sheet read:

> The meaning of an artwork is often about finding ways to bring together things that we like or are familiar to us and things we don't like or look out-of-place. Please choose an artwork, write your thoughts in the space below and drop it in the box. Thank you.

The second strategy took into account the constraints on museum staff's time and the desire to maximise inclusivity by providing the code in written form only. This was done by placing Discursive Comment Sheets in the two galleries and providing a box in which visitors could place their responses.

Principle 4: Making a Genuine Invitation to Participate

To make it clear that all viewers were being invited to respond, not only was the discursive code provided, indicating that the viewer might not already be familiar with it, but an invitation was also placed on the gallery walls along with pencils to make it easy for visitors to participate.
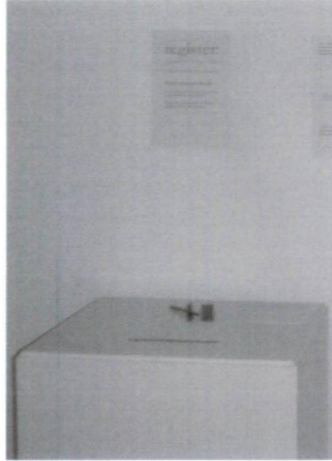
Invitation to Respond, *Register*
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2006

Principle 5: Making Thinking Visible

Making a genuine invitation to participate requires giving the viewer some evidence that their responses are accepted. Writing down comments goes part way to making thinking visible; however, taking what is thought beyond a personal space into a discursive space requires achieving a degree of remove. Therefore, to ensure that thinking was made visible, a 'comments wall' was introduced in the gallery as a third strategy. This changed the invitation from making comments as feedback to the institution to making comments for display in the public arena. *All* comments that were received were placed on this wall. It is the acceptance of all comments that also helps to constitute a genuine invitation.

Viewers at the comments wall during *Register* intervention
Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, 2006

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In a pre-test undertaken to assess the utility of the comment sheet for the intervention, it was found that the quality of the respondents' handwriting was often difficult to read. Taking into consideration the institution's aesthetic and security concerns in relation to the novelty of the project, I realised that care needed to be taken to maintain the aesthetic standards of the museum and to minimise the threat that visitors might place their comments too close to the artwork. It was therefore decided, in consultation with the curator, that the handwritten responses would be digitally rewritten and printed. This provided the opportunity to present the responses in a font size that conformed to the access guidelines operating in the museum. In order to deal with conservation concerns regarding the security of the artwork, it was decided that the cards would be placed on the walls by the researcher or the curator rather than by the visitors themselves. As the purpose of this study is to find ways to work with the institution, this decision conformed to the study's overall objectives.

The word-processed cards generated from the completed Discursive Comments Sheets were placed on the walls at regular intervals throughout the exhibition period.

No other research data was sought, although conversations with gallery attendants suggested that viewers were spending more time in the space looking at the work, reading the comments by other viewers and writing their own comments. An unanticipated outcome was that gallery attendants found the comments illuminating.

DATA ANALYSIS

The methodology employed in the collation and analysis of the data is based significantly on the concept of 'grounded theory' (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Strauss and Corbin define grounded theory as 'theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed though the research process' (ibid., p.12). However, in grounded theory the researcher

does not employ a preconceived theory in this analysis, but rather 'allows for the theory to emerge form the data' (ibid., p.12).

Strauss and Corbin argue that, as a consequence, grounded theory involves both critical and creative thinking, with the analysis being the interplay between the researcher and the data. 'It is both art and science' (ibid., p.13). In this regard, the application of a grounded theory methodology does not propose to be objective. Instead, the aim is to maintain a balance between an objectivity which allows the researcher to stand back from the data, and sensitivity in which the researcher '[responds] to the subtle nuances and cues, to meaning in the data' (ibid., pp.42-43). Strauss and Corbin define objectivity in grounded theory not in terms of controlling variables but rather as an 'openness, a willingness to listen and to "give voice" to respondents' (ibid., p.43). While Strauss and Corbin stress that there are no rigid procedures in grounded theory that should be followed dogmatically, the means by which the balance between objectivity and sensitivity is attained is through 'systematic inquiry' (ibid., p.8). Kathy Charmaz (2003) is more circumspect in relation to the potential for objectivity, acknowledging that the researcher's interpretation is in turn a construction.

Nevertheless, the application of 'open coding' provides a useful tool in classifying the data. Open coding involves the microanalysis of data in a line-by-line analysis through which 'data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences' (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p.102). This examination generates properties and dimensions and suggests relationships among categories (ibid., p.101-121). According to Miles and Huberman, 'coding is analysis' (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.56).

The data, in this case the responses received on the comment sheets, were transcribed verbatim. Each response was examined phrase-by-phrase and coded with a name. In some cases, the naming was prompted by the words as the respondent wrote them in the texts. These are referred to as 'in vivo

codes' (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p.105). Other naming codes have been placed on the text by the researcher as a response to 'the imagery or meaning they invoke when examined comparatively and in context' (ibid., p.105). Categorising involved extracting the phenomena in the coded data and finding appropriate names for these categories. The categories were in turn developed in terms of the properties they held.

As this research aims to evaluate particular engagement strategies, it was necessary for some comparisons between cases to be made. Stake (1995), however, is suspicious of direct comparison, believing 'it diminished the opportunity to learn from [the singular case]' (Stake 1995, p.241). Therefore, it is not considered necessary to compare the case with an objective, randomly selected control group as '[s]eldom is there interest in how a case without the phenomenon is different because there are too many ways to be different' (ibid., p.242). As this study is an analysis of a particular situation in which the engagement strategies are enacted, the comparison is made within data collected in the same setting using similar samples. The primary difference between the comparative samples is that participants in one sample were not provided with the strategy under consideration and thereby provide the control or reference case. The contrasting sets of data provide the possibility to compare similarities and differences in order to isolate possible causes and effects.

A comparison in terms of demographic data has not been undertaken in this research. The research concerns a particular phenomenon in general terms, rather than the effect of that phenomenon on different categories of people. Therefore the social, educational or economic background of the participants is not relevant to the findings in this particular research. However, it is acknowledged that the way people from different social and economic backgrounds relate to the engagement strategy would be a valuable subject for subsequent research.

Given the specific focus of this research, the decision was made to work with purposive samples rather than random samples. Miles and Huberman state that '[q]ualitative research must characteristically think purposively and conceptually about sampling' (Miles & Huberman 1994). A purposive sample does not claim to be representative, nor does it aim to lead to generalisations. What is sought is 'understanding of the conditions under which a particular finding appears and operates: who, where, when, and why it carries on as it does' (Miles & Huberman 1994). According to Denzin and Lincoln, a purposive sample 'seek[s] out groups, setting, and individuals where (and for whom) the processes being studied are most likely to occur' (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, p.202). As a consequence, the samples in this case study are derived from those who, in the course of their usual activities, would come into the gallery space.

Furthermore, the purposive samples are self-selected in that they are constituted by those choosing to participate in the strategy. That is, those who chose to write down a response using the instrument as described above. This selection procedure is consistent with the phenomenon under consideration, in that it relates to the individual engaging directly in the experience of contemporary art. In this regard, the initiating moment needs to be activated by individual viewers in their own way. The stimulus for the encounter can only take the form of an invitation. As a consequence, the approach reflects that which is taken in the psychoanalytic conversation in relation to initiating a conversation with a potential patient, whereby the desire to take up the invitation for engagement must come from the patient. In this case study, as the essential factor under consideration is what the viewer might do in response to the strategy involving the discursive code, it was considered inappropriate to undertake sampling procedures that would interfere with this initiating moment and run the risk of contaminating the data. Thus the intervention is both the discursive strategy and the data to be evaluated. The purposive samples were constituted by those who chose to write down their responses.

ISSUES OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Qualitative research, with its reliance on interpretation, is often criticised for its necessary subjectivity. While agreeing that this is problematic, qualitative researchers are at pains to develop strategies through which the data can be validated in order to ensure that interpretations are arrived at logically and that any claims made can be appropriately supported.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), validity testing can be achieved through processes of peer validation. In my investigation the data was distributed to a colleague for categorisation of properties and the results were compared with mine. Most of the classifications were found to be consistent. Where discrepancies were found, the classifications were re-examined. Amendments were made in collaboration with the validating colleague in order to enable more consistent results to be forthcoming.

In line with accepted practice, all study materials have been retained to maximise transparency of the procedures followed (Miles & Huberman 1994, p.439) creating 'an audit trail' (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p.273). These materials include transcripts of all of the responses received, as well as the applied coding and classification of properties. The complete coded transcripts are included as Appendices A and B.

STRATEGY 1: VERBAL EXPLANATION OF DISCURSIVE CODE

In the first strategy groups of gallery guides, students of arts administration and multimedia from TAFE, and university music education students were given short presentations in which the discursive code was described. Following the sessions the groups were asked to complete Discursive Comment Sheets. From forty-nine (49) participants, forty-five (45) responses were received, that is, ninety-two percent (92%) of those attending the sessions wrote a response. Thirty-nine (39) responses related to a particular artwork and six (6) to the general experience of the exhibition and the writing exercise.

The following material lists the viewer responses as they relate to each artist's work. As the purpose of this exercise is to establish the capacity of viewers to enact the discursive code on their own, these responses are placed in relationship to the curators' written statements about the work in the catalogue essay (Judd & Edwards 2006), and therefore, the curators' statements were also coded. The viewers were not given access to the catalogue. To facilitate the analysis of the data, the ten (10) curators' statements constitute Sample 1 and the forty-five (45) responses of those who attended the explanatory sessions constitute Sample 2.

The responses in both Sample 1 and Sample 2 were examined and coded according to the parameters of open coding described above. The category of 'applying the discursive code' as described in the information sessions was discerned. The properties that pertained to this category are listed in the following table.

DISCURSIVE PROPERTIES	
The response relates to an opposition. [opposition]	O
The response is in the form of a narrative based on elements found in the image. [narrative]	N
The response describes something that is strange or out-of-place. [strange]	S
Terms including formalist aesthetic used discursively rather than for description. [used]	U
NON-DISCURSIVE PROPERTIES	
The response is based on formalist aesthetics. [aesthetics]	A
The response contained oppositions but their possible significance is not recognised. [unrecognised opposition]	UnO
The premise of the exercise is rejected on the basis that art should be aesthetic rather than interpretative or gave a judgement instead. [reject premise]	R

Table 1: Coding Schedule of Discursive and Non-discursive Properties

The following are all the responses received, prefaced by the curators' statements about each artist's work.

MATT CALVERT

Matt Calvert
Three Friends, 2004
Automotive enamel, reflector lens 120 x 240 cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	
Matt Calvert's sculptures are slippery. They are like trophy shields commemorating some long lost battle or event. **[narrative]** They are also ironically simple and folkish in their references. **[opposition heroic/folkish]** Calvert builds accretive forms with the detritus of car culture – windscreen glass, reflector plastic, rubber seals, automotive paints and panel templates. **[strange]**	N/O/S

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	
About motor vehicles accidents. Flowers, death in motor vehicle. Making something beautiful out of something horrible, tragic. **[opposition beautiful/horrible]**	O
There is a strength in the work. The connect between the 3 entities is strong. At an outward glance they seem perfect, but are broken and hold great tension. **[opposition perfect/broken]**	O
Three people in a red car (red goes fast). They crash and die! Flowers represent their funerals. **[narrative]**	N
Individuality in a structured environmental setting. **[opposition individual/structured]**	O
This work confused me at first glance – I wanted it to be beautiful and smooth to balance or compliment the shine factor but up close it was jagged, raw, dangerous – unexpected. When I thought about memento mori I felt like the work hit home. It has a powerful conflict: the colour drew me in, the threatening shards repelled me. **[opposition draw in/repel]**	O
The materials that Matt employs have a common origin. The automobile. The pristine quality of the enamel paint versus the redundancy of the brake light and indicator fixtures. **[opposition pristine/redundancy]** The flower motif, in this case 'three' is suggestive of an elegy, possibly to a real life incident or a … theatre born from an aesthetic decision; a poetic remedy for a formal problem. **[opposition]real life/aesthetic]**	O
That the aesthetics of gleam and shine and colour and symmetry have this other meaning: death. **[opposition gleam, shine/danger, destruction]** So	O

all the traces of danger and destruction and injury can be reassembled. That is the meaning of transcendence.	
The artist is commenting on road fatalities. Homage to 3 friends that he lost due to fatal road accidents. The imagery of the flowers (funeral wreathes) fragments collected along the road. After the wreckage is towed away and the ambulance has taken away the bodies and the police have gone; all that remains to make the spot of the accident is the pieces of reflector – fragments too small to bother picking up. Each fragment is from a collision. Homage to all the accidents that have taken place. **[narrative]**	N

AMANDA DAVIES

Amanda Davies
Anodyne, 2006
oil on plastic 120cm x 120cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Amanda Davies' paintings play with the nature of representation **[uses representation]**, that is, how illusion is created **[uses illusion]** and the dominant role of photography in contemporary culture. There is an air of risk **[strange]** about the making of these works. Often painting in reverse on plastic surfaces **[opposition]**, and inspired by caches of found photographs **[uses representation]**, Davies asks audiences what makes an image indelible.	U/O

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
21st century – innocence lost in what was once a sweet time someone's life – childhood. **[narrative]**	N
The feeling of hospital, antiseptic, disinfectant, including the smell. No context – maybe anaesthetic is still working. No blood. **[narrative]**	N
The plastic appearance of the paint is perfect for the subject matter. **[strange]**	S
I find interpretation to be irrelevant, although it is obvious the two paintings dwell on the nature of disease or illness. For me, I find myself attracted to the vivid bright colours utilised with what really is a fairly	UnO

traditional form of representational painting. They're alive, fun and distinctive and that is what intrigues me. **[unresolved opposition]**	
This is a painting of a family dressed up for some special occasional maybe church. The use of colour on children creates a contrast to the black and white 'forest' scene. Sick child in bed feels like a family of well-wishers seeing brother before church. Almost a hospital scene, juxtaposed against black outdoor background. Formal, rigid. Children would rather be playing outdoors than being 'dressed up'. White border across bottom gives depth, sense of standing behind something. Child's hand encroaching into white adds perspective. Olden days, family unit is important, large number of children. Definite family resemblance. Contrasting orange and greens, vibrant. Feel of togetherness. Importance of family unit. **[narrative]**	N
I like this piece for its feel. It has a very colourful pop art feel to it, yet the subject matter is a hospital room, such a sterile and bland/bleak environment but the colours and style give it a fun aspect? **[opposition sterile/fun]** There is an absence of space and movement. No people are present and there is not insight into what has been happening. The covers are ruffled which is strange as you would expect them to be very neat and straight. **[opposition ruffled/neat]** The green plastic chosen does lend itself to being sterile and cold as well as green associated with sickness, but it is a more pastel nice green which contradicts how we normally would see a hospital room. **[opposition cold green/nice green]** There is a real looseness to this piece. Again not what we would associate with the subject matter. Lots of harsh blocks of black inside the bed… perhaps shadows or a scary kind of life sucking area? **[opposition pop/life sucking]**	O

FRED FISHER

Fred Fisher
Coil, 2006
MDF, acrylic paint 203.5cm x 32cm
(Image: courtesy of the artist)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Fred Fisher's work is informed by a background in industrial plastic modelling. **[opposition art/design]** Researching every possible variation, his three dimensional sculptural forms have a complex dynamism **[aesthetic]** derived from the repetition of machine-cut coloured shapes. In contrast, there is a real physicality or figurative presence **[opposition abstract/figuration]** in the video projection which depict the animation of a series of small sculptures.	O/A

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
The idea of continuity stood out to me – both in the circles and the spirals. It also conjured up images of a barber's shop. **[unresolved opposition]**	UnO

LISA GARLAND

Lisa Garland
Peter and Kerry, 2005
silver gelatin print, 100cm x 100cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Lisa Garland's intense and graphic black and white photographs **[aesthetic]** reveal the relationships of people to their home and environment **[narrative]**. Drawing on the long heritage of portrait photography, there is a disarming honesty and obvious rapport between the artist and her subjects. Garland's ongoing documentary project is a tribute to her home, the North West Coast of Tasmania **[narrative]**.	A/N

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
I chose this work because on first look it had a strong impact. This was because it immediately evoked a strong sense of smell associated with the	R

images in the picture. This reaction was a personal one and other people probably react completely differently. **[rejection of premise in favour of aesthetic]**	
Mr & Mrs Dick are in the title of this piece, but they don't get the typical treatment for subjects of an artistic work. The lighting of the photograph is not designed to feature the couple; instead it picks up elements of the garish feature wall, and also draws the eye to an empty sofa and a dining alcove off to the right. Mr & Mrs Dick virtually disappear into their sofa; the vase of flowers in the foreground also fights for prominence in the photo. The couple's positioning suggests they are just two more elements in this space. The lighting at opposite sides suggests impermanence; life goes on elsewhere, this room it not so important in the scheme of things. **[strange] [opposition]**	O

DAVID MARTIN

David Martin,
Sunpicture series, 2001-2004
C-type photograph, 127cm x 127cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
David Martin looks at the primary sources of being and existence, the sun. **[narrative]** These large scale, colour photographs are part scientific document part sensual meditation on the passages of light. **[opposition - science/aesthetic]** Captured at different times of the day and in various weather conditions, the works cut across and challenge the traditional notions of abstraction and representation. **[uses representation and abstraction]**	N/O/U

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
I think the piece reflects on the earth, nature within it; seeing how fragile the sun can weaken in brightness. **[strange] [opposition weak/bright]**	O
The light V the dark. From L to R light is winning. From R to L Dark is winning. The artist's personal struggle. **[opposition light/dark]**	O

Depiction of how the sun registers on film, seemingly blocking out most of the sun's intensity by photographing it behind clouds. **[opposition hidden/exposure]** Airbrushes are on the corners of the work, making me believe the works are airbrushed until I got from right to left and reading about the detail/info of the work at the end.	O
These pictures are of real sights, something we could see everyday if we just looked up. But they are unfamiliar because whoever looks at the sun? **[strange]** What an eye-opener to how we view the world, and what a great way to look at the sun.	S
A photographer, who knows how to work a camera, has found a process whereby they can capture a calm friendly glow of the sun, along with colour and textures that the light filtering through the clouds produces. It is easy to sit and look at. There is a beauty present within each image, yet there lingers a mysterious space of infinity, or the unknown of darkness. **[strange]**	S
Goes from cool, neutral, to warm. Something to do with a cycle. There's a glow to the last one, representing life, change, or fulfilment. 2nd photo: boredom, mundane 1st: protection, mystery **[opposition cool/warm]**	O
The first in the series I think should shows some sort of confusion or insecurity of loss of direction, whereas the second shows a calm feeling almost like the confusion is over but there's still no direction but the last is brighter with colour shows resolution or maturity. Conquered decisions. Overall I think it's a mental state representation/interpretation more than a physical one. **[narrative]**	N

PETRA MEER

Petra Meer
The Last Seconds (Die letzen Sekunden), 2006
reused woollen jumpers, dressing gowns, skirts and blankets,
plant dyes, cotton thread, (detail) 171cm x 176cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Petra Meer's banner-like installation continues her fascination with the woven woollen material in found men's dressing gowns. **[strange]** The used fabric is almost talismanic, and already richly coloured and textured **[aesthetic]**. Meer enhances the social significance of the shroud/blanket/protector with a concentrated overlay of stitches. **[opposition – real/aesthetic]**	S/A/O

VIEWER'S RESPONSE	CODE
Violent end to life. [narrative]	N

MISH MEIJERS

Mish Meijers
Byte, 2006
sugar and dyes, (detail) 240cm x 270cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Mish Meijers' luridly coloured [aesthetic], sugared [opposition art material/sugar] landscape looks to what is now an archival period for computer generated imagery. [narrative] In this work Meijers employs the climactic end of most computer games, the violent mise en scène where the player is taken to another (better, more skilled?) level. This giant, pixellated image is deliberately subversive. [narrative]	O/N

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
A flashback to the earlier computer game era, before the new 3D/real-life technology. It celebrates what has been, the history especially of the 'Space Invaders' game which has also found its way into literature and music as well. [narrative]	N
Sugar coated violence. Violence is sugar coated in today's world. Violence is more accepted when sugar coated or disguised as with the war on terror. [opposition] sugar coated/terror]	O
Two men and a small girl with one of the men shot in half by his fellow comrade. My interpretation is the two men represent the world. The small girl is something the two men (the world) don't understand and because of this they are scared and try to destroy it with no regard to whoever is in their way, i.e. the man shot in half. The little girl (the thing the world doesn't understand) has a right to be and is defending herself. [narrative]	N

MICHAEL MURUSTE

Michael Muruste
Sousse, 2006
ink on paper, 1 of 30 elements each 76cm x 112cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Michael Muruste's loaded brush takes audiences on journeys that suggest cultural meta-narratives and garden-like microscopic worlds. **[narrative]** This sequence of black and white drawings on paper is the initial fire or inspiration for later painting. The works form an architectural framework whose presence is enhanced with a multitude of amoebic leitmotifs. **[opposition – framework/amoebic]**	N/O

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
It is a puzzle game with tiles you have to move around. **[narrative]**	N
This artwork made me think about cells and organisms. About how every tiny little dot or line, though unrecognisable, is working for the same purpose. **[strange]** The painting also sort of reminds me of a primary school classroom, in the way that it is made up of large white pieces of paper all stuck together. **[narrative]**	S
A grand feast or I see a journey through a forest or bush. **[narrative]** Like the use of pattern and repetition and the basic contrast of black and white.	N
Pattern and science in nature. **[narrative]**	N
It is about finding the balance between good and bad. **[opposition good/bad]** Educating the viewer! Breaking the normal square of art. **[strange]** [refers to Muruste and Robinson]	O

DENISE AVA ROBINSON

Denise Ava Robinson
–or'ium, 2005
correlus algae and oil paint, 0.5cm x 4cm x 12cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Denise Ava Robinson enjoys intricate processes of gathering and making. Drawing upon many different cultural references, she creates fragile objects that have echoes of precious offerings given in ritual. **[narrative]** The careful placement of the vessels in glass vitrines is part of the dialogue on the traditional understanding of the museum as a holding place for things of value. **[opposition – natural gathered materials/precious]**	N/O

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
This is a work one could easily pass by or miss at first glance, but if you start to explore these tiny precious objects you will see much more. Let your eyes caress every detail of these tiny works that you want to touch but that cannot be reached. They are containers inside containers inside another container and no matter how much you may want or touch them, they will remain inaccessible and wanted. **[strange] [opposition touch/not touch]**	O
The precious, the miniature, the forgotten… non-existent or imagined, untouched, a container of nothingness, the natural, the obsessive, the non-functional. Painted white like an undercoat, yet the material/medium is hidden. **[opposition seen/unseen]** Hiding behind a second nakedness. **[opposition hidden/naked]** Tightly woven. The unseen, stillness, quietly, simple details of almost nothing veils the labour and the love. A muted life, living. Lingo. Meditative emptiness. Time and timelessness. Silence. Continuum. Circular. **[strange]**	O

CATHERINE WOO

Catherine Woo
Blister, 2006
mica, clay, acrylic on canvas, 135cm x 196cm
(Image: reproduced from catalogue, TMAG 2006)

CURATORS' STATEMENT	CODE
Catherine Woo's reclaims the mantle of the scientist to create objects that contest the perception of surface and depth of field. **[opposition - science/art]** A naturally occurring mineral silicate, mica, is the core material for the artist's exploration. **[opposition natural/art]** Strangely weighty in spite of the shimmering and lustrous surfaces, **[aesthetic]** these works recall epic geological forces and unstable atmospherics **[narrative]**	O/A/N

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
It doesn't have to mean anything. It's just beautiful! **[rejects premise]**	R
I thought it was a pretty, sensual artwork until I read the title and it changed my entire perspective of the piece. I found it more difficult to see the beauty I initially saw as all I could see was a blister to be picked, skin disease, lumps, bumps and other unpleasantries from personal experience. **[opposition beauty/ unpleasant]** I felt very limited in my appreciation of the work by not being allowed to touch it. This was very restricting. I found the glare from the overhead lighting obstructing too. **[strange]**	O
Strangely beautiful. I respond to the softness of shapes. There is a sense of tactility. But also a sense of danger. Sharpness, cutting that stops me from wanting to touch. **[strange] [opposition touch/don't touch]**	O
Like tough love this is tough beauty. It has a sort of impenetrability that is daunting like nature itself when it turns a blind eye on us. Yet the power of the presence of the work is almost magnetic. It is like a piece of reality and like reality is extremely uncomfortable. I think it is an amazing work. **[strange] [opposition tough/beauty]**	O

GENERAL RESPONSES

Six (6) of the responses did not refer to a particular work but dealt with the exhibition in more general terms.

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
Art is usually used as a vessel to communicate a particular idea to the audience – or suggestion – or for the artist to work through personal ideas through visual means. [rejection of premise]	R
It's all ok. [rejection of premise]	R
Art has no meaning. It can have no meaning I can define. Each work has a meaning to the artist and also to each visitor. I always try not to impose a meaning or reaction onto works I view, but just to experience them. [rejection of premise]	R
Don't care what it means. I like the interesting techniques and colouration used. [rejection of premise]	R
I don't care what it means because I am not here to voice my opinion on the gallery or exhibition. I am here to enjoy the experience! [rejection of premise]	R
Makes me think about the necessary use of an antagonist, i.e. the use of two rooms (pairs) push and pull [opposition]. Feel more comfortable in the room with obvious reference to death and medical use as external reference and prefer to work in patterns [form] and capture moments as an internal release or internal to external process [opposition].	O

A simple comparison between Sample 1, the curators' statements, and Sample 2, the viewers' responses to the artists' work, indicates that both samples contain similar properties.

The following analysis of the coding applied to the responses reveals the interpretative capacity of viewers.

ARTIST	O	S	N	UO	R	TOTAL
Matt Calvert	6		2			8
Amanda Davies	1	1	3	1		6
Fred Fisher				1		1
Lisa Garland	1				1	2
David Martin	4	2	1			7

Petra Meer			1			**1**
Mish Meijers	1		2			**3**
Michael Muruste	1	1	3			**5**
Denise Ava Robinson	2					**2**
Catherine Woo	3				1	**4**
General	1				5	**6**
TOTAL	**20**	**4**	**12**	**2**	**7**	**45**

Table 1: Distribution of properties pertaining to discursive code in Sample 2

Twenty-four (24) of the forty-five (45) respondents wrote a response that included noting oppositions or things that were strange and out of place as part of their interpretation. In addition twelve (12) respondents wrote a narrative that connected the visual elements together. These thirty-six (36) respondents are comparable with those given in the curators' statements.

Of those comments that did not utilise the discursive code, two (2) considered things that were in opposition or strange but did not use this in their interpretation. A further seven (7) responses did not engage with the discursive code and instead stated a belief that such an approach was incompatible with the desire for aesthetic engagement.

These results give confidence to the notion that viewers can make valuable interpretations of artworks that require a discursive approach.

STRATEGY 2: WRITTEN PRESENTATION OF DISCURSIVE CODE

With the knowledge that viewers could engage with this artwork discursively, a second intervention was designed to test the effectiveness of the Discursive Comment Sheet.

Discursive Comment Sheets were made available in the gallery space for anyone to complete. The sheets and the invitation posted on the gallery wall described the discursive code and asked the viewer to consider this when responding to one of the works.

One hundred and ten (110) viewers responded to this invitation by completing Discursive Response Sheets. These responses constitute Sample 3 (see Appendix A).

Following the coding of the responses, the results were tabulated in relation to properties of the discursive code as they pertain to viewer responses as in the previous intervention.

ARTIST	O	S	N	UO	X	TOTAL
Matt Calvert	4	2	0	0	5	11
Amanda Davies	2	2	2	0	1	7
Fred Fisher	0	0	1	0	0	1
Lisa Garland	2	1	2	0	9	14
David Martin	4	0	0	0	1	5
Petra Meer	1	0	0	3	9	13
Mish Meijers	1	0	1	1	7	10
Michael Muruste	1	0	0	0	3	4
Denise Ava Robinson	2	0	0	0	1	3
Catherine Woo	1	0	0	2	8	11
General	0	0	0	0	15	15
Museum	1	0	0	0	4	5
Not Applicable	0	0	0	0	11	11
TOTAL	19	5	6	6	74	110

Table 2: Distribution of properties pertaining to discursive code in Sample 3

Of the one hundred and ten (110) responses, thirty-one (31) did not pertain to the artists and instead considered the museum or exhibition experience as a whole or contained insufficient information to be coded. Of the remaining seventy-nine (79) that focused on the artists' work, twenty-nine (29) show evidence of using either opposition, strange or narrative in line with the curators' statements. These latter responses and their coding are as follows:

MATT CALVERT – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
The use of recycled indicators, brake lights, reverse lights in a modern medium is excellent. [opposition recyled/modern]	O
Beautiful, stylish use of colour and shape. I love the frame shape and colour of the background. I've always wanted to see something absolutely beautiful made from recycled items. [opposition recyled/beautiful]	O
I like the way how he used plastic to create flower shapes. A very well created piece of art work. [opposition plastic/flowers]	O
Wonderful way of displaying art. Original idea that people would seldom think about. [strange] Two thumbs up.	S
It's really good but maybe something different. [strange]	S
Powerful reminder that the human body is as fragile as the plastic appendages on the modern aggressive car. [opposition power/fragile]	O

AMANDA DAVIES – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
Maybe the people are green because of the representation of sickness and how it effects (sic) those around us. The figures are posed as if in a photo (positioning and frontal gaze). They appear to be pasted over the background creating a sense of dislocation to time and place and space. [strange] The dark monochrome of the background contrasts to the white blankness of the foreground. The foreground is blank! The work speaks to me of life/death and immortality. [opposition life-death/immortality] The little boy on the left crosses the white barrier of the foreground with his fingers, leading us into the unknown [opposition known/unknown] – he has green hands. There is also an interesting relationship between the bedridden patient and the girls with orange hair. I think the artist has used colour quite symbolically in this work.	O/S
Some of the people look like 'oompa loompas'! (Jono age 12) [strange]	S
Like our health system – the wheels falling off the wagon. [narrative]	N
I don't think a polio party would be fun! [strange]	S
It makes me feel sick! Why is it all green and orange? I want to go into the painting. [opposition sick/go into]	O
Like a bad dream ! [strange]	N

FRED FISHER – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
I thought the binary opposition might have been an excursion in liquorice allsorts. I've been enjoying thanks. [narrative]	N

LISA GARLAND – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
What is familiar? – You get to see old people. What is out of place – The stuff in the picture. [opposition public/private]	O
I loved the work because some of the photos disturb me [strange] Like Aunty Jean and the Hume Brothers and I don't know why.	S
An honest, revealing insight into ordinary lives. [narrative] Tremendous.	N
Her language is eloquent in its simplicity. Her works speaks of a person, who what, where or 'I am'. [narrative]	N
What a fascinating series of photos. It reminds me of all the people I've known in the past with homes/lives like these people – now I wish I had photographed them! Ordinary people with interesting, individual lives all around us but often not seen or celebrated! [opposition visible/invisible]	O

DAVID MARTIN – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
Very inspiring artwork. When I look at these I get a warm feeling but at the same time I feel cold! [opposition warm/cold] because of the way you've combined atmospheres. Excellent work.	O
Slow enough to capture! [opposition slow/implied speed of photography]	O
Wonderful photography. Extraordinary way of capturing the time frame of that picture in a second. Beautiful. [opposition long time/second]	O
Oh yes yes yes yes So much movement; my head is spinning! Finally we can stare at the sun without blinding ourselves. [opposition see/blind]	O

PETRA MEER – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
I want to touch this piece of beautiful, preloved material. Visually delightful. [opposition touch/vision]	O

MISH MEIJERS – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
It makes me feel of the city and the world. [narrative]	N
Sugar cubes soaked in insecticide [opposition sugar/poison], hmmm, reminds me of some sugar cubes I swallowed back in college. Wooh – flashback. [narrative]	O

MICHAEL MURUSTE – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
Mususte allows us to hover in multiple places; I find a sense of place both within my own skin on a cellular lever (micro) and also my space shared within	O

an organised – chaotic land (macro). [opposition organised/chaotic] I delight, not just in his celebratory outcome, but also, and more importantly, the gesture of the maker. A body moving through space, marked by fluid. [narrative]	

DENISE AVA ROBINSON – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
An extremely subtle work – Nurtured and cultured– rather than 'showy'. [opposition nurture/showy] Fragile and filled with a kind of humility. Thank you.	O
So little. Says so much. [opposition a little/a lot]	O

CATHERINE WOO – VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
Beautiful, sensual and fragile – perhaps it references are humanity – our skin, our ease at breaking, splitting – how did we keep it together. [opposition fragile/together]	O

Even a cursory comparison between these responses to the relatively unmediated strategy involving only the provision of Discursive Comment Sheets (Sample 3) and those made following the information sessions (Sample 2) shows a considerable reduction in both the frequency and detail of the responses in relation to the discursive. It could therefore be assumed that verbal explanation sessions are the preferred option if discursive responses are to be generated. Rather than end the analysis with this conclusion, it was decided to scrutinise the data more closely in order to see if the minimal intervention had had any effect.

STRATEGY 3: MAKING THINKING VISIBLE

In order to comply with the principle of making thinking visible, the viewer responses to the Discursive Comment Sheet were considered in relation to their placement on a 'comments wall' in the gallery during the exhibition in response to the principle of making thinking visible. In this instance the responses that constitute Sample 3, that is, the one hundred and ten (110) responses considered above, became the primary sample (Sample 4), as these responses had been placed on a Comments Wall in the gallery space during

the exhibition. In order to make a comparative analysis of these data two further samples were developed.

Responses on Open Comment Cards

Responses were gathered during a preliminary phase of the case study during which the comment sheet did not include reference to the discursive code and neither was the Comments Wall installed. This second comment sheet, referred to as the Open Comment Sheet, contained an invitation made in the following terms:

> Your comments please.
> We are interested in hearing your comments on the artworks in this exhibition.
> Please write your comments down on the sheet and place it in the slot.
> Thank you.

As with the Discursive Comment Sheet, the bottom half of the card was left blank for the viewer to write on. Over an eight-day period ninety-one (91) responses were received. These responses constitute Sample 5.

Responses on Open Comment Cards Placed on Comments Wall

The final sample was obtained when the Comments Wall was installed but before the Discursive Comment Sheet was distributed. Ninety-two (92) responses were received. These responses constitute Sample 6.

Sample 4 on Discursive Comment Sheets and Sample 6 on Open Comment Sheets were collected simultaneously over three weeks, with both forms of comment sheet being randomly intermingled in order to mitigate bias created by the kinds of audiences such as art classes, adult education groups and students who might visit the gallery in any period.

RESULTS

Following the open coding procedures, the data were examined as for the previous strategy although different characteristics were considered. In this instance the characteristics pertained to the approach used to evaluate art

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that the participants displayed in their responses. The analysis of the data revealed that the artworks were evaluated in two significantly different ways. (For complete transcripts and coding of Sample 4, Sample 5 and Sample 6 refer to Appendix B.)

The first approach included responses that: evaluated the art as good [right] or bad [wrong]; focused on aesthetic qualities [aesthetic] and how the work made the respondent feel [sensory]; were based on formal qualities [form]; related success to the process [process] or the materials used [materials]; or characterised the merits of the work in terms of uniqueness or difference but without explaining what was different [difference]. The words and phrases that presented one or more of these characteristics were deemed to have the overarching property of Judgement.

The following are examples of responses, including the coding pertaining to the property of Judgement [J].

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
Good [right]	J
STRANGE All of them.[wrong]	J
Fine delicate [aesthetic] and crap. [wrong]	J
It's nice. [right]	J
My interpretation of these works really surprises me. [sensory] I find them very frustrating. [sensory] She is obviously a sensitive maker, sensitive to her material, on a physical level. [material] But is she forcing herself to find a context for them? Climate? Blister? – I am lost at this point. There is time here, and a love of material and process, but its almost as if she does not trust that that is enough. A really interesting substance. [material] reduced to be 'about' the weather? Be true to your material [wrong] But, the fact that I have a strong response is positive – they do draw me in [aesthetic], even if it is to a confused place. [sensory]	J
I wonder how long it took Michael Muruste to do his painting [process]. Its amazing [right]. [name]	J
I love [right] the texture [form] and the use of natural resources, it is very interesting and captivating .[sensory] The layering of textures [form] and the colours it creates is unique. [difference]	J

The theoretical perspective that the viewers take in these examples is to make a judgement as to its quality either as an artwork or as a personal sensory experience. What is not in evidence in these responses is consideration of what the work might be about or what it might mean.

The other group of responses to varying degrees articulated what the work might mean. These responses included one or more of the following characteristics: a description of what the respondent was looking at in the artwork [description]; the respondent noticed something particular in the work [observation]; the respondent presented an idea about what might be going on in the work [speculation]; and the respondent was reminded of something when looking at the work [reminds]; the respondent engaged in questioning [questioning]; the respondent reflected on their reaction [reflection]. Responses with these characteristics were deemed to have the property of Interpretation.

The following are examples of the responses including the coding pertaining to the property of Interpretation [I].

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
What a fascinating series of photos. It reminds [reminds] me of all the people I've known in the past with homes/lives like these people – now I wish I had photographed them! [personal connection] Ordinary people with interesting, individual lives all around us but often not seen or celebrated! [observation]	I
I like [right] this artwork the best. It's so eerie and unsettling [sensory]. The style captures the sickness of the subject [speculation]. Why does one of the children have orange hair? [questioning]	I
Lisa Garland - the depth of the black [description] pulls them into a darker consciousness [speculation], redeeming them from pure photojournalism [speculation]	I
Michael's work doesn't mean anything to me [wrong] without interpretation. (Perhaps it's an Aboriginal interpretation of landscapes or gardens?) [speculation]	I
An extremely subtle work – nurtured and cultured – rather than 'showy'. Fragile and filled with a kind of humility. [speculation] Thank you.	I

Like [reminds] our health system – the wheel falling off the wagon. [speculation]	I
Beautiful, sensual and fragile [sensory] – perhaps [speculation] it reference [sic] are humanity – our skin, our ease at breaking, splitting – how did we keep it together. [speculation]	I
Thank you [right] for a meaningful memorial for all of us [personal connection] who have lost a loved one in a car accident. [speculation]	I

While these comments often contain elements pertaining to judgement, the decision to classify them as interpretation is based on the theoretical assumptions considered in the first chapter of this study, that while aesthetic and formalist judgement is independent of interpretation, interpretation can be inclusive of judgement where judgement is used in constructing meaning.

A further property was discerned. These responses contained either insufficient information, or were too ambiguous to categorise with sufficient certainty. These were categorised as Insufficient [N].

VIEWERS' RESPONSES	CODE
As a Tasmanian institution I feel the museum should regularly showcase Tasmanian Artists that are in the collection or (…..) submissions from prominent local artists for the public to view. [insufficient]	N
I don't know. [insufficient]	N
visitor's name only – young people's writing [insufficient]	N
Shotgun 2004 [insufficient]	N
I enjoyed [sensory] taking off my shoes and socks mostly [ambiguous] (signed Sarah age 1 year)	N
Blink and you miss [ambiguous]	N

Once each of the texts had been examined and coded and the individual comments had been ascribed the property of Judgement [J], 'Interpretation' [I] or Insufficient [N], the results were compared.

Firstly, Sample 5, on which responses are written on Open Comment Sheets, is compared with Sample 6, in which Open Comment Sheets are placed on the Comments Wall.

PROPERTIES	Open Comment Sheet/No Comments Wall	Percentage	Open Comment Sheet/With Comments Wall	Percentage
Judgement (J)	78	85.7	68	73.9
Interpretation (I)	8	8.8	17	18.5
Insufficient (N)	5	5.5	7	7.6
TOTAL	91	100%	92	100%

Table 3: Effect of the Comments Wall on visitor response

Table 3 above implies that the dominant approach to art revealed in the responses is in the form of judgements. This is independent of whether the responses are made in isolation or in the context of the Comments Wall. There are some small variations, suggesting that judgement is reduced by 10% and interpretation more than doubled when responses are placed on a Comments Wall. This would seem to indicate that there is some effect from the addition of the Comments Wall; however, the percentage of interpretative comments is at a low level.

Table 4 analyses the data in terms of the format of comment sheet used, comparing the Open Comment Sheet with the Discursive Comment Sheet. In this comparison the Comments Wall remains constant.

PROPERTIES	Open Comment Sheet/With Comments Wall	Percentage	Discursive Comment Sheet/With Comments Wall	Percentage
Judgement (J)	68	73.9	62	56.4
Interpretation (I)	17	18.5	34	30.9
Insufficient (N)	7	7.6	14	12.7
TOTAL	92	100%	110	100%

Table 4: Effect of sheet format on viewer's response

Table 4 indicates that between the two forms of comment sheet there is a decrease in judgement (17.5%) and the incidence of interpretation is increased by over one-third when the Discursive Comment Sheet is used. This would suggest that the instructions on the Discursive Comment Sheet did have an effect.

Table 5 shows the effect of the combination of Discursive Comment Sheet and Comments Wall in relation to responses to the Open Comment Sheet with no Comments Wall.

PROPERTIES	Open Comment Sheet/No Comment Wall	Percentage	Discursive Comment Sheet/With Comments Wall	Percentage
Judgement (J)	78	85.7	62	56.4
Interpretation (I)	8	8.8	34	30.9
Insufficient (N)	5	5.5	14	12.7
TOTAL	91	100%	110	100%

Table 5: Effect of Discursive Comment Sheet and Comments Wall combination

From Table 5 it would seem that providing a Discursive Comment Sheet in association with placing viewer responses on a Comments Wall stimulates the greatest change towards interpretation. The analysis of the data would seem to indicate that judgement is decreased by approximately twenty-nine (29) percentage points and interpretation is increased from 8.8% to 30.9%. This is a significant result.

SUMMARY

Three strategies were enacted in this case study. The first involved explaining the discursive code through verbal means; the second explained the discursive code through written means, and the third placed comments within the gallery space in order to make thinking visible.

In relation to making the discursive code apparent in the public gallery it was found that:

- Viewers do have the capacity to make rich meanings in response to discursive art practice without recourse to the catalogue essay or other interpretative services that are based on providing the viewer with information about the specific artwork.

- Providing situations in which viewers can become aware of the discursive code is a useful tool in the public programs tool kit.

- The presentation of the discursive code can be verbal or written, although verbal yielded more substantial results in the case study.

With regard to the aim of creating discursive space within the gallery without the need for the constant presence of an informed mediator, it was found that:

- Visitors do take advantage of the opportunity to comment.

- Comments that are made to an open question tend to solicit judgements.

- Providing some instruction about how contemporary art might be engaged with makes a difference by decreasing judgement and increasing interpretation.

Finally, in response to making thinking visible it was found that:

- Placing the comments in the public space makes a difference by decreasing judgement and increasing interpretation.

- Providing an explanation on discursive engagement and making the viewers' comments public can maximise the decrease in judgement and the increase of interpretation.

- Anecdotally, the attendants who monitored visitor behaviour in the galleries reported a high degree of audience engagement with the Comments Wall. They also reported that they found the wall stimulating and helpful in coming to grips with some of the works.

Further research might consider a tracking study, noting how visitors move about the exhibition with and without the intervention of a comment opportunity and/or comments wall.

While the non-verbal strategies might not result in grand and detailed interpretations, they can generate interaction that involves viewers in looking at the artwork directly and can encourage the tendency towards interpretation over judgment, thereby increasing the discursivity enacted in the space.

The interventions presented in this case study offer the individual viewer an opportunity to enter a different kind of space and to participate in a conversation with the work and with the community of viewers. However, in general, it can be concluded that a more intense delivery of explaining the discursive code at group sessions leads to more dramatic results.

However, viewers need confidence to attend an information session. Those who are uncertain and uncomfortable taking up such offers will remain excluded. Limiting the access to the discursive code to those viewers who actively seek additional information runs counter to the move towards inclusion.

There are no doubt changes to the interventions that could reap greater rewards. Consideration of alternative ways that the discursive code could be presented and further experimentation on alternative descriptions of the discursive code, and where and how to place the invitation to participate in the gallery space, could prove fruitful. Such interventions are not expensive or time consuming. The gallery requires only small alterations to accommodate the invitation to comment and making the responses visible.

The issue is one of weighing up the need to make the discursive code clear within the gallery space against the demand for an uninterrupted gallery. Being braver with making the discursive code clear could well be a desirable outcome. The capacity to present the discursive code in bolder terms is limited by the overarching commitment to the purity of the

formalist aesthetic. At this point in time, given the resistance to almost any intervention in the contemporary art museum, even this minimal intervention represents a radical shift.

CONCLUSION

This research is built on the premise expounded by Arthur Danto, that there is a mismatch between formalist aesthetics as epitomised by Clement Greenberg and contemporary discursive art practice that was the inevitable consequence of Andy Warhol's dissolving of the demarcation between art and mere things in the 1960s.

As a consequence of this mismatch the suggestion was made that discursive practice in the art museum has often been inserted surreptitiously, even unbeknown to the curator and the museum management. Such practice has often been marginalised within the museum or sidelined to alternative art spaces beyond its walls. It was argued that discursive artwork that has managed to gain prominence in the public art museum, such as the work of Imants Tillers and Australian Aboriginal practice, has often done so because the work projects ideas that the dominant authorities can co-opt to suit their political agendas. The role played by contextualisation in this scenario is of particular interest. It was suggested that where the dominant ideology could be served well through art, such as Aboriginal art providing the credentials for Australia to claim ancient status, contemporary art has been well and expansively

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contextualised. In most other cases, however, contemporary art remains silent. The exception is the ubiquitous catalogue essay often generated from within the academy. However, as much of this writing is perceived as elitist, the marginality of contemporary discursive art practice remains to a considerable extent. Whether this situation has evolved through deliberate action or through the incapacity on the part of the public art museum to define the problem in terms of conflicting art paradigms is open to conjecture. In either case, increasing the placement of discursive art practice at the centre of the public art museum's programming would require the will to deal with the ambiguities and complexities of presentation if the object of the exercise is to move towards greater viewer engagement. In the meantime discursive practice in the public art museum will tend to remain on the margins or accepting of elitism.

For those working in museums, particularly in an education context, recourse to elitism runs counter to the call for inclusion. The constructivist museum, as described by George E Hein, Eilean Hopper-Greenhill and Elaine Heumann Gurian, seeks to cater for a broader range of viewers by providing a variety of learning experiences appropriate to the many different backgrounds, ways of learning and preferences for engaging with the world that viewers and potential viewers might have. In this regard, contextualisation through the provision of multifarious experiences is acknowledged as one of the key strategies employed in the constructivist museum. It is also noted that the twin requirements of participation and direct experience are essential to constructivism. A consideration of these requirements with regard to discursive art found that, to the extent that learning is the focus of the constructivist museum, the necessity for engagement with the particularities of individual artworks has not been considered overly important. Concomitantly, those practices that do focus on looking directly at particular artwork, such as Abigail Housen's concept of visual thinking, tend to favour relativistic narratives and formalist aesthetics. The researcher claims not only that there is a need to look at the artwork before engaging with the contextual material, but also that the kind

of looking undertaken needs to be different from that exemplified by the contemplative silence of the white cube. It is this issue that in part is considered in the concept of 'visuacy' that has been introduced to the Australian lexicon by Dianna Davis as a way of bring the visual arts into the school curriculum as a key player in learning for the twenty-first century. In discussing this term it was found that the lack of differentiation between different approaches to art tended to undermine the author's expressed intentions. Davis's assumption that art is risk-taking, innovative and involves problem-solving is not sufficiently examined, and in failing to recognise the different implications for these concepts with regard to formalist aesthetics and discursive art practice, the results of the review are inevitably confusing. Helen Illeris's concept of the performative museum provided a framework in which viewers are empowered to play the range of roles that art elicits. It was acknowledged that the discursive approach is one of the roles and its code needs to be made explicit to viewers.

In seeking to find a performative space in which the viewer might play the role of the discursive viewer, attention was drawn to the work of architects and exhibition designers who are seeking to disrupt the clarity of the white cube in order to encourage viewers to engage with art in more dynamic and discursive ways. It was found, however, that even museums such as the Guggenheim in Bilbao and the National Gallery of Victoria at Federation Square in Melbourne, which seek to disturb viewers' preconceptions by playing with the space, often revert to the dynamics of the white cube at the level of the reception of individual artworks. Artists engaging in institutional critique as espoused by Andrea Fraser, as well as the notion of relational aesthetics advocated by Nicolas Bourriaud, were considered in this context. It was argued that architects and designers have not been able to counter the necessity for the white cube that has arisen with the advent of artworks that come so close to real life that the white cube is the only clue connecting the material substance of the work to art. In this discussion a paradox was revealed: on the one hand, artists and designers seek to manipulate and redefine the gallery space; on the other, these efforts can be

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invisible to the viewer who does not appreciate what they are supposed to be looking at. Thus, over time the white cube has been converted from a contemplative space to a discursive space without any evidence of that change being made tangible. This has left the potential viewer of contemporary art even more isolated and inclined to spend their time in the cafés and shops of art museums rather than with the artwork.

Given the conclusion that there is little that the form of the space can offer to ensure discursivity, attention then turned to contemporary art theories. From Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion that the object of interpretation is to seek the answer to a question, rather than the other way around, came the recognition of the need to accept the work as it is, in its entirety, and in doing so appreciate the limiting value of judgement. From Derrida came the notion of 'doubling', repeating the work in order to reveal what is not written. In examining the physical act of 'doubling', it was recognised that professional interpreters double the images they are interpreting by literally speaking aloud, or in the process of writing. It was also realised that these professionals operate in a collegial framework in which they are in constant conversation with the writing and speaking of others. This means that their interpretations are not undertaken alone, even if it might look as if they do.

As a way of highlighting these behaviours, consideration was given to Justin Paton's ten steps for looking at art. It was argued that where Paton described many of the steps that art historians and theorists undertake in the process of interpreting, these last two behaviours – writing the work down and engaging in dialogue within a collegial environment – were not included. Instead, Paton reverted to notions of silence and private contemplation. Further, Paton suggested that viewers should seek out work to which they are drawn. In doing so, the fact that contemporary artwork is often asking viewers to engage with the strange, from which the initial response is often to recoil, was identified as problematic.

In order to engage the strange, I considered the Lacanian psychoanalytic conversation as a potential model for designing viewer engagement, as the encounter of the other is the purpose of psychoanalysis. Again, rather than unpack specific Lacanian interpretations, I simply considered the behaviours that the psychoanalyst performs. Using Stuart Schneiderman's personal experience of psychoanalysis, these behaviours, when transferred into an art context, were understood to be: acceptance of the viewer's first response; and overtly acknowledging that the viewer has been heard through a reflective interpretation of what had been said.

It was concluded that the behaviours gleaned from the interpretative practices of art historians, theorists and psychoanalysts could constitute the practical steps required for performing discursivity in the art museum. This would require the art museum to accept the viewer's first response; actively listen to the viewer; provide the opportunity for the viewer to rewrite or double their response to the artwork; make the viewer's response visible; and provide the conditions in which the viewer is willing to engage with the strange.

In the final chapter, interventions employing these behaviours were presented in the form of a case study conducted in a public art museum. One intervention involved verbally informing viewers of the discursive code before inviting them to write down their responses to works of contemporary art. The other involved providing information on the discursive code in written form, inviting the viewer to respond, and displaying the responses in the gallery space. In the analysis that was undertaken it was shown that viewers could make meaningful interpretations without the mediation of an expert interpreter to explain the work. It was also found that providing opportunities for viewers to double or rewrite the image, as well as making their thinking visible, had a positive effect on the capacity for viewers to make interpretations rather than judgements.

What is valuable about this approach is that it does not require the artist to

tailor their practice in any particular direction. Neither does it require the art museum to produce expensive interpretive programs that the viewer needs to take on board if they are to gain insight. What is required in the final analysis is for the viewer to take time to engage with the artwork and, in doing so, enter the conversation that the artwork opens up. The public art museum simply needs to make it safe for this to happen.

The question posed in this thesis was: What can the public art museum do to facilitate greater participation in the experience of contemporary art? In seeking to find an answer, I have advocated a practical application of an approach modelled on the behaviours of art historians, art theorists and psychoanalysts. Such an approach has the potential to engage viewers with the discursivity of contemporary art. What is required is a reorientation of the role of the public art museum from expert speaker to expert listener.

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CURATORS' STATEMENTS AND VISITOR RESPONSES TO VERBAL EXPLANATION OF DISCURSIVE CODE

SAMPLE 1: CURATORS' STATEMENTS

Open Coding Key

		DISCURSIVE PROPERTIES
O		The response relates to an opposition. [opposition]
N		The response is in the form of a narrative base on elements in the image. [narrative]
S	·	The response describes something that is strange or out-of-place. [strange]
Q		Questions relating to possible meaning posed. [question]
U		Formalist aesthetic terms used discursively rather than for description. [aesthetics used]

Matt Calvert's sculptures are slippery. **[aesthetic]** They are like trophy shields commemorating some long lost battle or event. **[narrative]** They are also ironically simple and folkish in their references. **[opposition heroic/folkish]** Calvert builds accretive forms with the detritus of car culture – windscreen glass, reflector plastic, rubber seals, automotive paints and panel templates **[strange]**	**O/N**
Amanda Davies' paintings play with the nature of representation **[uses representation]**, that is, how illusion is created **[uses illusion]** and the dominant role of photography in contemporary culture. There is an air of risk **[strange]** about the making of these works. Often painting in reverse on plastic surfaces **[opposition]**, and inspired by caches of found photographs **[uses representation]**, Davies asks audiences what makes an image indelible **[question]**.	**U/O/Q**
Fred Fisher's work is informed by a background in industrial plastic modelling **[opposition art/design]**. Researching every possible variation, his three dimensional sculptural forms have a complex dynamism **[aesthetic]** derived from the repetition of machine-cut coloured shapes. In contrast, there is a real physicality or figurative presence **[opposition abstract/figuration]** in the video projection which depict the animation of a series of small sculptures.	**O**
Lisa Garland's intense and graphic black and white photographs **[aesthetic]** reveal the relationships of people to their home and environment **[narrative]**.	**N**

Drawing on the long heritage of portrait photography, there is a disarming honesty and obvious rapport between the artist and her subjects. Garland's ongoing documentary project is a tribute to her home, the North West Coast of Tasmania [narrative].	
David Martin looks at the primary sources of being and existence, the sun [narrative]. These large scale, colour photographs are part scientific document part sensual meditation on the passages of light [opposition - science/aesthetic]. Captured at different times of the day and in various weather conditions, the works cut across and challenge the traditional notions of abstraction and representation [uses representation and abstraction].	O/N
Petra Meer's banner-like installation continues her fascination with the woven woollen material in found men's dressing gowns [strange]. The used fabric is almost talismanic, and already richly coloured and textured [aesthetic]. Meer enhances the social significance of the shroud/blanket/protector with a concentrated overlay of stitches [opposition – real/aesthetic].	O/S
Mish Meijers' luridly coloured sugared [opposition art material/sugar] landscape looks to what is now an archival period for computer generated imagery [narrative]. In this work Meijers employs the climactic end of most computer games, the violent mise en scène where the player is taken to another (better, more skilled?) level. This giant, pixellated image is deliberately subversive [narrative].	N/O
Michael Muruste's loaded brush takes audiences on journeys that suggest cultural meta-narratives and garden-like microscopic worlds [narrative]. This sequence of black and white drawings on paper is the initial fire or inspiration for later painting. The works form an architectural framework whose presence is enhanced with a multitude of amoebic leitmotifs [opposition – framework/amoebic].	O/N
Denise Ava Robinson enjoys intricate processes of gathering and making. Drawing upon many different cultural references, she creates fragile objects that have echoes of precious offerings given in ritual. The careful placement of the vessels in glass vitrines is part of the dialogue on the traditional understanding of the museum as a holding place for things of value [opposition – natural gathered materials/precious].	O
Catherine Woo's reclaims the mantle of the scientist to create objects that contest the perception of surface and depth of field [opposition - science/art]. A naturally occurring mineral silicate, mica, is the core material for the artist's exploration [opposition natural/art]. Strangely weighty in spite of the shimmering and lustrous surfaces, [aesthetic] these works recall epic geological forces and unstable atmospherics [narrative].	O/N

SAMPLE 2: MUSEUM VISITORS' RESPONSES FOLLOWING DISCURSIVE CODE EXPLANATION SESSION

Open Coding Key

	DISCURSIVE PROPERTIES
O	The response relates to an opposition. **[opposition]**
N	The response is in the form of a narrative base on elements in the image. **[narrative]**
S	The response describes something that is strange or out-of-place. **[strange]**
Q	Questions relating to possible meaning posed. **[question]**
U	Formalist aesthetic terms used discursively rather than for description. **[aesthetics used]**
	NON-DISCURSIVE PROPERTIES
UO	These responses contained oppositions but their possible significance is not recognised. **[unrecognised opposition]**
RA	The respondents reject the premise on the basis that art should be aesthetic rather than interpretative. **[overt reject of premise]**
RJ	The respondent does not engage with the premise giving a judgement instead. **[unstated rejection of premise]**
X	Other non-discursive responses

MATT CALVERT

About motor vehicles accidents. Flowers, death in motor vehicle. Making something beautiful out of something horrible, tragic. **[opposition beautiful/horrible]**	**O**
There is a strength in the work. The connect between the 3 entities is strong. At an outward glance they seem perfect, but are broken and hold great tension. **[opposition perfect/broken]**	**O**
Three people in a red car (red goes fast). They crash and die! Flowers represent their funerals. **[narrative]**	**N**
Individuality in a structured environmental setting. **[opposition individual/structured]**	**O**
This work confused me at first glance – I wanted it to be beautiful and smooth to balance or compliment the shine factor but up close it was jagged, raw, dangerous – unexpected. When I thought about memento mori I felt like the work hit home. It has a powerful conflict: the colour drew me in, the threatening shards repelled me. **[opposition draw in/repel]**	**O**
The materials that Matt employs have a common origin. The automobile. The pristine quality of the enamel paint versus the redundancy of the brake	**O**

light and indicator fixtures. **[opposition pristine/redundancy]** The flower motif, in this case 'three' is suggestive of an elegy, possible to a real life incident or a … theatre born from an aesthetic decision; a poetic remedy for a formal problem. **[opposition real life/aesthetic]**	
That the aesthetics of gleam and shine and colour and symmetry have this other meaning: death. **[opposition gleam, shine/danger, destruction]** So all the traces of danger and destruction and injury can be reassembled. That is the meaning of transcendence.	**O**
The artist is commenting on road fatalities. Homage to 3 friends that he lost due to fatal road accidents. The imagery of the flowers (funeral wreathes) fragments collected along the road. After the wreckage is towed away and the ambulance has taken away the bodies and the police have gone; all that remains to make the spot of the accident is the pieces of reflector – fragments too small to bother picking up. Each fragment is from a collision. Homage to all the accidents that have taken place. **[narrative]**	**N**

AMANDA DAVIES

21st century – innocence lost in what was once a sweet time someone's life – childhood. **[narrative]**	**N**
The feeling of hospital, antiseptic, disinfectant, including the smell. No context – maybe anaesthetic is still working. No blood. **[narrative]**	**N**
The plastic appearance of the paint is perfect for the subject matter. **[strange]**	**S**
I find interpretation to be irrelevant, although it is obvious the two paintings dwell on the nature of disease or illness. For me, I find myself attracted to the vivid bright colours utilised with what really is a fairly traditional form of representational painting. They're alive, fun and distinctive and that is what intrigues me. **[unresolved opposition]**	**UO**
This is a painting of a family dressed up for some special occasional maybe church. The use of colour on children creates a contrast to the black and white 'forest' scene. Sick child in bed feels like a family of well-wishers seeing brother before church. Almost a hospital scene, juxtaposed against black outdoor background. Formal, rigid. Children would rather be playing outdoors than being 'dressed up'. White border across bottom gives depth, sense of standing behind something. Child's hand encroaching into white adds perspective. Olden days, family unit is important, large number of children. Definite family resemblance. Contrasting orange and greens, vibrant. Feel of togetherness. Importance of family unit. **[narrative]**	**N**
I like this piece for its feel. It has a very colourful pop art feel to it, yet the subject matter is a hospital room, such a sterile and bland/bleak environment but the colours and style give it a fun aspect? **[opposition sterile/fun]** There is an absence of space and movement. No people are present and there is not insight into what has been happening. The covers are ruffled which is strange as you would expect them to be very neat and straight. **[opposition ruffled/neat]** The green plastic chosen does lend itself to being sterile and cold as well as green associated with sickness, but it is a more pastel nice green which contradicts how we normally would see a hospital room. **[opposition cold green/nice green]** There is a real looseness to this piece. Again not what we would associate with the subject	**O**

matter. Lots of harsh blocks of black inside the bed… perhaps shadows or a scary kind of life sucking area? [opposition pop/life sucking]	

FRED FISHER

The idea of continuity stood out to me – both in the circles and the spirals. It also conjured up images of a barber's shop. [unresolved opposition]	UO

LISA GARLAND

I chose this work because on first look it had a strong impact. This was because it immediately evoked a strong sense of smell associated with the images in the picture. This reaction was a personal one and other people probably react completely differently. [???]	A
Mr & Mrs Dick are in the title of this piece, but they don't get the typical treatment for subjects of an artistic work. The lighting of the photograph is not designed to feature the couple; instead it picks up elements of the garish feature wall, and also draws the eye to an empty sofa and a dining alcove off to the right. Mr & Mrs Dick virtually disappear into their sofa; the vase of flowers in the foreground also fights for prominence in the photo. The couple's positioning suggests they are just two more elements in this space. The lighting at opposite sides suggests impermanence; life goes on elsewhere, this room it not so important in the scheme of things. [strange] [opposition]	O

DAVID MARTIN

I think the piece reflects on the earth, nature within it; seeing how fragile the sun can weaken in brightness. [strange] [opposition weak/bright]	O
The light V the dark. From L to R light is winning. From R to L Dark is winning. The artist's personal struggle. [opposition light/dark]	O
Depiction of how the sun registers on film, seemingly blocking out most of the sun's intensity by photographing it behind clouds. [opposition hidden/exposure] Airbrushes are on the corners of the work, making me believe the works are airbrushed until I got from right to left and reading about the detail/info of the work at the end.	O
These pictures are of real sights, something we could see everyday if we just looked up. But they are unfamiliar because whoever looks at the sun? [strange] What an eye-opener to how we view the world, and what a great way to look at the sun.	S
A photographer, who knows how to work a camera, has found a process whereby they can capture a calm friendly glow of the sun, along with colour and textures that the light filtering through the clouds produces. It is easy to sit and look at. There is a beauty present within each image, yet there lingers a mysterious space of infinity, or the unknown of darkness. [strange]	S

Goes from cool, neutral, to warm. Something to do with a cycle. There's a glow to the last one, representing life, change, or fulfilment. 2nd photo: boredom, mundane 1st: protection, mystery [opposition cool/warm]	O
The first in the series I think should shows some sort of confusion or insecurity of loss of direction, whereas the second shows a calm feeling almost like the confusion is over but there's still not direction but the last is brighter with colour shows resolution or maturity. Conquered decisions. Overall I think it's a mental state representation/interpretation more than a physical one. [narrative]	N

PETRA MEER

Violent end to life. [narrative]	N

MISH MEIJERS

A flashback to the earlier computer game era, before the new 3D/real-life technology. It celebrates what has been, the history especially of the "Space Invaders" game which has also found its way into literature and music as well. [narrative]	N
Sugar coated violence. Violence is sugar coated in today's world. Violence is more accepted when sugar coated or disguised as with the war on terror. [opposition sugar-coated/terror]	O
Two men and a small girl with one of the men shot in half by his fellow comrade. My interpretation is the two men represent the world. The small girl is something the two men (the world) don't understand and because of this they are scared and try to destroy it with no regard to whoever is in their way, i.e. the man shot in half. The little girl (the thing the world doesn't understand) has a right to be and is defending herself. [narrative]	N

MICHAEL MURUSTE

It is a puzzle game with tiles you have to move around. [narrative]	N
This artwork made me think about cells and organisms. About how every tiny little dot or line, though unrecognisable, is working for the same purpose. [strange] The painting also sort of reminds me of a primary school classroom, in the way that it is made up of large white pieces of paper all stuck together. [narrative]	S
A grand feast or I see a journey through a forest or bush. [narrative] Like the use of pattern and repetition and the basic contrast of black and white.	N
Pattern and science in nature. [narrative]	N
It is about finding the balance between good and bad. [opposition good/bad] Educating the viewer! Breaking the normal square of art. [strange] [refers to Muruste and Robinson]	O

DENISE AVA ROBINSON

This is a work one could easily pass by or miss at first glance, but if you start to explore these tiny precious objects you will see much more. Let your eyes caress every detail of these tiny works that you want to touch but that cannot be reached. They are containers inside containers inside another container and no matter how much you may want or touch them, they will remain inaccessible and wanted. **[strange] [opposition touch/don't/touch**	**O**
The precious, the miniature, the forgotten… non-existent or imagined, untouched, a container of nothingness, the natural, the obsessive, the non-functional. Painted white like an undercoat, yet the material/medium is hidden. Hiding behind a second nakedness. **[opposition hidden/naked]** Tightly woven. The unseen, stillness, quietly, simple details of almost nothing veils the labour and the love. **[oppositions seen/unseen]** A muted life, living. Lingo. Meditative emptiness. Time and timelessness. Silence. Continuum. Circular. **[strange]**	**O**

CATHERINE WOO

It doesn't have to mean anything. It's just beautiful! **[rejecting the premise]**	**R**
I thought it was a pretty, sensual artwork until I read the title and it changed my entire perspective of the piece. I found it more difficult to see the beauty I initially saw as all I could see was a blister to be picked, skin disease, lumps, bumps and other unpleasantries from personal experience. **[opposition beauty/unpleasant]** [I felt very limited in my appreciation of the work by not being allowed to touch it. This was very restricting. I found the glare from the overhead lighting obstructing too. **[strange]**	**O**
Strangely beautiful. I respond to the softness of shapes. There is a sense of tactility. But also a sense of danger. Sharpness, cutting that stops me from wanting to touch. **[strange] [opposition touch/don't touch]**	**O**
Like tough love this is tough beauty. It has a sort of impenetrability that is daunting like nature itself when it turns a blind eye on us. Yet the power of the presence of the work is almost magnetic. It is like a piece of reality and like reality is extremely uncomfortable. I think it is an amazing work. **[strange] [opposition tough/beauty]**	**O**

GENERAL

A number of responses did not refer to a particular work but rather to the exercise in interpreting the meaning of art itself.

Art is usually used as a vessel to communicate a particular idea to the audience – or suggestion – or for the artist to work through personal ideas through visual means. **[rejected premise]**	**R**
It's all ok. **[rejected premise]**	**R**
Art has no meaning. It can have no meaning I can define. Each work has a meaning to the artist and also to each visitor. I always try not to impose a meaning or reaction onto works I view, but just to experience them.	**R**

[rejected premise]	
Don't care what it means. I like the interesting techniques and colouration used. [rejected premise]	R
I don't care what it means because I am not here to voice my opinion on the gallery or exhibition. I am here to enjoy the experience! [rejected premise]	R
Makes me think about the necessary use of an antagonist, i.e. the use of two rooms (pairs) push and pull [opposition push/pull]. Feel more comfortable in the room with obvious reference to death and medical use as external reference and prefer to work in patterns [form] and capture moments as an internal release or internal to external process.	O

SAMPLE 3: VISITORS' RESPONSES TO DISCURSIVE RESPONSE SHEET (NO DISCURSIVE CODE EXPLANATION SESSION)

MATT CALVERT

It's cool [not discursive code]	X
It is cool because it has car bits in it. (name, aged 5) [not discursive code]	X
The use of recycled indicators, brake lights, reverse lights in a modern medium is excellent [opposition recyled/modern].	O
It mycs my fiik of srmr (translation – It makes me think of summer) [not discursive code]	X
Beautiful, stylish use of colour and shape. I love the frame shape and colour of the background. I've always wanted to see something absolutely beautiful made from recycled items. [opposition recyled/beautiful].	O
I like the way how he used plastic to create flower shapes. A very well created piece of Art work [opposition plastic/flowers].	O
The art work has real feel to it and also how he has made it a tribute to crash victims. Very good. [not discursive code]	X
I love him, so I love his art work. [not discursive code]	X
Wonderful way of displaying art. Original idea that people would seldom think about [strange]. Two thumbs up.	S
It's really good but maybe something different [strange].	S
Powerful reminder that the human body is as fragile as the plastic appendages on the modern aggressive car. [opposition power/fragile].	O

AMANDA DAVIES

Maybe the people are green because of the representation of sickness and how it effects (sic) those around us. The figures are posed as if in a photo (positioning and frontal gaze). They appear to be pasted over the background	O/S

creating a sense of dislocation to time and place and space [strange]. The dark monochrome of the background contrasts to the white blankness of the foreground. The foreground is blank! The work speaks to me of life/death and immortality [opposition life-death/immortality]. The little boy on the left crosses the white barrier of the foreground with his fingers, leading us into the unknown [opposition known/unknown] – he has green hands. There is also an interesting relationship between the bedridden patient and the girls with orange hair. I think the artist has used colour quite symbolically in this work.	
Some of the people look like "oompa loompas'! (Jono age 12) [strange]	S
Like our health system – the wheels falling off the wagon. [narrative]	N
I don't think a polio party would be fun! [strange]	S
I liked the paintings. They're attractive. [not discursive code]	X
It makes me feel sick! Why is it all green and orange? I want to go into the painting. [opposition sick/go into]	O
Like a bad dream ! [strange]	N

FRED FISHER

I thought the binary excursion might have been an excursion in liquorice allsorts. I've been enjoying thanks [narrative]	N

LISA GARLAND

What is familiar? – You get to see old people. What is out of place – The stuff in the picture. [opposition public/private]	O
I loved the work because some of the photos disturb me [strange] Like Aunty Jean and the Hume Brothers and I don't know why.	S
An honest, revealing insight into ordinary lives. [narrative] Tremendous	N
Her language is eloquent in its simplicity. Her works speaks of a person, who what, where or 'I am'. [narrative]	N
Stunning – more like this please [not discursive code]	X
Well very artistic and very good. Well done great job (name provided) [not discursive code]	X
Hume Brothers - Each person has a flower [not discursive code]	X
I like your work because it's full of life. I like looking at the faces of people in the photos. The backgrounds of each photo are no natural and lively. (smiley face) [not discursive code]	X
Nice shots of your friends Lisa but just BIG photos	X
What a fascinating series of photos. It reminds me of all the people I've known in the past with homes/lives like these people – now I wish I had photographed them! Ordinary people with interesting, individual lives all around us but often	O

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not seen or celebrated! [opposition visible/invisible]	
Good look + people + Life [not discursive code]	X
Artist's name only. [not discursive code]	X
Powerful images of people and places. Very impressive. [not discursive code]	X
Somewhat Diane Arbus – same but not so disturbing. I'd like to have a visit with Mr & Mrs Dick, Aunty Jean and the Hume Brothers. I'll bet Vicky's fun too when she smiles. Good on ya, Lisa! [not discursive code]	X

DAVID MARTIN

Extremely beautiful – I wish I owned them! Very talented artists also very inspiring. [not discursive code]	X
Very inspiring artwork. When I look at these I get a warm feeling but at the same time I feel cold ! [opposition warm/cold] because of the way you've combined atmospheres. Excellent work.	O
Slow enough to capture. ! [opposition slow/implied speed of photography]	O
Wonderful photography. Extraordinary way of capturing the time frame of that picture in a second. Beautiful. [opposition long time/second]	O
Oh yes yes yes yes So much movement; my head is spinning! Finally we can stare at the sun without blinding ourselves. [opposition see/blind]	O

PETRA MEER

Bright Scrummy But is it art? [not discursive code]	UO
It makes me feel like a rainbow. [not discursive code]	X
I think it took a lot of time to make it. It is very bright and colourful. I enjoyed this art gallery. Thank you!!! [not discursive code]	X
Really obscure [not discursive code]	X
I really like the way that all the different things can join together. [not discursive code]	X
I want to touch this piece of beautiful, preloved material. Visually delightful. [opposition touch/vision]	O
A beautiful piece of artwork. The way the colours match and the stitching is amazing. [not discursive code]	X
A blanket is a blanket!	UO
Great to see a textile. [not discursive code]	X
Very warm. Exceptionally beautiful. I just want to wrap myself up in this delightful piece of art.	UO

Fantastic! She's actually done what I've always wanted to do ! But at 80 I might be too late! [not discursive code]	X
Loved the relaxing feeling looking at this work – I had to come back twice (on different days) to look and try to work out why I found it so pleasing. [not discursive code]	X
Amazing. They would like to ... it! shit [not discursive code]	X

MISH MEIJERS

It looks so cool like you could almost eat it.	UO
I liked the sugar cubes a lot it was my favourite piece of art [not discursive code]	X
Sugar in art. That's new. It looks quite different. Can't wait to see what's next. (April age: 9) [not discursive code]	X
It makes me feel of the city and the world. [narrative]	N
I thought that it looked different. [not discursive code]	X
Sugar cubes soaked in insecticide [opposition sugar/poison], hmmm, reminds me of some sugar cubes I swallowed back in college. Wooh – flashback. [narrative]	O
It makes me want to eat it. [not discursive code]	X
Stood and examined it for a long while and saw new meanings with each minute that passed, very thought provoking piece. [not discursive code]	X
I love the sugar one. It makes me want to eat it. [not discursive code]	X
Bravo Mish. Your work speaks for me! [not discursive code]	X

MICHAEL MURUSTE

I seriously think that it's very childish AND STUPID!! [not discursive code]	X
As for the black and white thingy?! [not discursive code]	X
Like this very much. Has a kind of grandeur. [not discursive code]	X
Mususte allows us to hover in multiple places; I find a sense of place both within my own skin on a cellular lever (micro) and also my space shared within an organised – chaotic land (macro) [opposition organised/chaotic]. I delight, not just in his celebratory outcome, but also, and more importantly, the gesture of the maker. A body moving through space, marked by fluid. [narrative]	O

DENISE AVA ROBINSON

An extremely subtle work – Nurtured and cultured– rather than "showy" [opposition nurture/showy]. Fragile and filled with a kind of humility. Thank	O

you.	
Denise – get of drugs! [not discursive code]	X
So little. Says so much [opposition a little/a lot]	O

CATHERINE WOO

Too abstract. [not discursive code]	X
I love the sheeny, lustrous quality of the work – more than that, the eco-purity of the materials. PS I run a workshop in New Mexico called Mica, 'mud, stories of the Mother' (i.e. Gaia) nice eh?	UO
I like the crystal on it [not discursive code]	X
Excellent floor covering for bathroom or kitchen. [not discursive code]	X
Beautiful, sensual and fragile – perhaps it references are humanity – our skin, our ease at breaking, splitting – how did we keep it together [opposition fragile/together].	O
Very organic – mica, sand, rust etc [not discursive code]	X
What was wrong with abstract? Why does it have to mean anything? [not discursive code]	X
I love the texture and the use of natural resources, it is very interesting and captivating. The layering of textures and the colours it creates is unique. [not discursive code]	X
Monet's water lilies in beige. Beautifully calm and meditative: an illusionary quality perhaps especially considering the title. The hypnotic daubs draw me in. [not discursive code]	X
Serene and very beautiful. A 3D meditation. Let's see more of her work. [not discursive code]	X
My interpretation of these works really surprises be. I find them very frustrating. She is obviously a sensitive maker, sensitive to her material, on a physical level. But is she forcing herself to find a context for them? Climate? Blister? – I am lost at this point. There is time here, and a love of material and process, but its almost as if she does not trust that that is enough. A really interesting substance reduced to be 'about' the weather? Be true to your material. But, the fact that I have a strong response is positive – they do draw me in, even if it is to a confused place.	UO

GENERAL

It was ok [right] but boring [wrong]	X
SHIT [wrong]	X
I think it gives you a calm and happy feeling [sensory] inside. It's just so unusual and original [difference].	X

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I don't know. **[insufficient]**	**X**
Ok. **[right]**	**X**
I dunno. Itz all wicked! **[right]**	**X**
All of it WEIRD! **[wrong]**	**X**
I think this place is GAY **[wrong]**	**X**
!Madness! ART IS NOT IN THIS ROOM **[wrong]**	**X**
STRANGE All of them **[wrong]**	**X**
I Like? (sic) I like? I like? I like? I like? **[right]**	**X**
I think you need to research to find better artist. (sic) **[wrong]**	**X**
I think the whole exhibition shows the contemporary vibrance of Tasmanian art. It is diverse **[difference]** – exciting. My students love it – you bring more teenagers in with these loud/large words. **[sensory]** Diverse materials – great! **[right]**	**X**
Habib Mustaffa. It was gay. **[insufficient]**	**X**
(Lots of swearing) **[wrong]**. A two year old could do better **[wrong]**.	**X**

APPENDIX B

VISITOR RESPONSES TO WRITTEN EXPLANATION OF DISCURSIVE CODE AND COMMENTS WALL

All responses to intervention conducted in conjunction with *Register: Tasmanian Artists 2006*. The responses have been ordered in the first instance in relation to the 3 samples. The responses within each sample are ordered in terms of the date they were collected.

ABBREVIATIONS:

ARTISTS

MC	Matt Calvert
AD	Amanda Davies
FF	Fred Fisher
LG	Lisa Garland
DM	David Martin
PM	Petra Meer
MMe	Mish Meijers
MMu	Michael Muruste
DR	Denise Ava Robinson
CW	Catherine Woo

OTHER THAN ARTISTS

G	Refers to Exhibition in General
M	Refers to Other Museum Exhibition/s
NA	Insufficient Information
R	Refers to Researcher's Intervention

CODED PROPERTY

J	Judgement
I	Interpretation
N	Insufficient

Note: When a viewer response deals with more than one artist's work, the comment on each artist is separated out and numbered 'a', 'b', 'c' etc.

SAMPLE 4: DISCURSIVE RESPONSE SHEET WITH NO DISCURSIVE CODE EXPLANATION SESSION AND WITH COMMENTS WALL

DATE	NO	SHEET TYPE	ARTIST	RESPONSE WITH CODE	PROPERTY
09/*20	1	2	G	It was ok [right] but boring [wrong]	J
09/*20	2	2	G	SHIT [wrong]	J
09/*20	3	2	LG	What is familiar? – You get to see old people. What is out of place – The stuff in the picture. [description]	I
09/*21	1	2	MMe	It looks so cool like you could almost eat it. [reminds]	I
09/*21	2	2	DR	An extremely subtle work – Nurtured and cultured – rather than "showy". Fragile and filled with a kind of humility. [speculation] Thank you.	I
09/*21	3	2	PM	Bright [aesthetic] Scrummy But is it art? [wrong]	J
09/*21	4	2	LG	I loved [right] the work because some of the photos disturb [sensory] me like Aunty Jean and the Hume Brothers and I don't know why.	J
09/*21	5	2	MC	It's cool [right]	J
09/*21	6	2	MC	It is cool [right] because it has car bits in it [description]. [name, aged 5]	J
09/*21	7	2		Maybe [speculation] the people are green because of the representation of sickness and how it effects (sic) those around us. The figures are posed as if in a photo (positioning and frontal gaze). [description] They appear to be pasted over the background creating a sense of dislocation to time and place and space. [speculation] The dark monochrome of the background contrasts to the white blankness of the foreground. The foreground is blank! The work speaks to me of life/death and immortality. [speculation] The little boy on the left crosses the white barrier of the foreground with his finger, leading us into the unknown – he has green hands. There is also an interesting relationship between the	I

			AD	bedridden patient and the girls with orange hair. I think the artist has used colour quite symbolically in this work. [speculation]	
09/*21	8	2	LG	An honest, revealing insight into ordinary lives [speculation]. Tremendous [right]	I
09/*21	9	2	MMe	I liked [right] the sugar cubes a lot it was my favourite [right] piece of art	J
09/*21	10	2	CW	Too abstract. [form]	J
09/*22	1	2	PM	It makes me feel like a rainbow. [sensory]	J
09/*22	2	2	PM	I think it took a lot of time to make it. It is very bright and colourful. [aesthetic] I enjoyed [right] this art gallery. Thank you!!!	J
09/*22	3	2	MMe	Sugar in art. That's new. It looks quite different [different]. Can't wait to see what's next. (name, age: 9)	J
09/*22	4	2	MC	The use of recycled indicators, brake lights, reverse lights [description] in a modern medium is excellent [right].	J
09/*22	5	2	MC	It mycs my fiik of srmr (sic) (translation - It makes me think [reminds] of summer.	I
09/*22	6	2	CW	I love [right] the sheeny, lustrous quality [aesthetic] of the work – more than that, the eco-purity of the materials. [observation] PS I run a workshop in New Mexico called Mica, 'mud, stories of the Mother' (i.e. Gaia) nice eh?] [personal connection]	I
09/*22	7	2	NA	Great (Zoe 4) [right]	J
09/*22	8	2	LG	Her language is eloquent in its simplicity [aesthetic]. Her work speaks [speculation] of a person, who what, where or 'I am'.	I
09/*22	9	2	G	I think it gives you a calm and happy feeling [sensory] inside. It's just so unusual and original [difference].	J
09/*22	10	2	AD	Some of the people look like [reminds] 'oompa loompas'! [name. age 12]	I
09/*22	11	2	MMe	It makes me feel [reminds] of the city and the world [speculation].	I
09/*22	12	2	M	I think the artwork brings interest [right] in	J

				jewls [sic[[name provided]	
09/*22	13	2	M	Wonderful! [right] [artist' name]	**J**
09/*22	14	2	M	Mass 1: Pink cars 2006 They are very good. [right] Study: a cure for melancholy it is very cool. [speculation]	**I**
09/*22	15	2	M	Brenda Factor Pink cars - My 4 yr old son really loves [right] this one and so do I. We like [right] the cars - like the blue parts and some are in pieces - They are like our society - all the same - some broken but basically all the same [speculation].	**I**
09/*22	16	2	NA	unreadable probably by very young person [insufficient]	**N**
09/*23	1	2	LG	Stunning – more like this please [aesthetic]	**J**
09/*23	2	2	CW	I like [right] the crystal on it [personal connection]	**J**
09/*23	3	2	NA	visitors name only [young person's writing] [insufficient]	**N**
09/*23	4	2	NA	visitors name only [young person's writing] [insufficient]	**N**
09/*24	1	2	LG	Well very artistic and very good. [right] Well done [right] great job [right] (name provided)	**J**
09/*24	2	2	G	I don't know.[insufficient]	**N**
09/*24	3	2	LG	Hume Brothers - Each person has a flower [description] [insufficient]	**N**
09/*24	4	2	M	re island of ice [insufficient]	**N**
09/*24	5	2	PM	Really obscure [wrong]	**J**
09/*24	6	2	MMu	I seriously think that it's very childish AND STUPID!! [wrong]	**J**
09/*24	7	2	PM	I really like [right] the way that all the different [difference] things can join together.	**J**
09/*24	8	2	MC	Beautiful [aesthetic], stylish use of colour and shape [form]. I love the frame shape and colour of the background [form]. I've always wanted to see something absolutely beautiful [aesthetic] made from recycled items [description].	**J**

09/*24	9	2	PM	I want to touch [sensory] this piece of beautiful [aesthetic], preloved material [description]. Visually delightful [right].	I
09/*24	10	2	MC	I like [right] the way how he used plastic to create flower shapes [description]. A very well created [right] piece of Art work.	J
09/*24	11	2	FF	I thought the binary excursion might have been an excursion in licorice allsorts [speculation]. I've been enjoying thanks [right].	I
09/*24	12	2	G	Ok. [right]	J
09/*24	13	2	AD	Like [reminds] our health system – the wheel falling off the wagon [speculation].	I
09/*24	14	2	NA	bla [wrong]	J
09/*24	15	2	NA	name only [insufficient]	N
09/*24	16	2	NA	I would like to be able to see the whole book. Excellent [right] works (name provided)	J
09/*24	17	2	NA	Gunclub 2004 [insufficient]	N
09/*24	18	2	NA	Shotgun 2004 [insufficient]	N
09/*26	1	2	DM	Extremely beautiful [aesthetic] – I wish I owned them! Very talented artists [right] also very inspiring. [sensory]	J
09/*26	2	2	G	I dunno. Itz all wicked! [right]	J
09/*26	3	2	G	All of it WEIRD! [wrong]	J
09/*26	4	2	MMe	I thought that it looked different [different].	J
09/*26	5	2	LG	I like [right] your work because it's full of life.[speculation] I like [right] looking at the faces of people in the photos. The backgrounds of each photo are so natural and lively. [speculation] [smiley face drawn] [right]	I
09/*26	6	2	DM	Very inspiring [right] artwork. When I look at these I get a warm feeling [sensory] but at the same time I feel [sensory] cold because of the way you've combined atmospheres [observation]. Excellent work. [right]	I

09/*26	7	2	PM	A beautiful [aesthetic] piece of artwork. The way the colours match [form] and the stitching is amazing. [right]	**J**
09/*26	8	2	G	I think this place is GAY [wrong]	**J**
09/*26	09a	2	PM	A blanket is a blanket! [wrong]	**J**
09/*26	09b	2	LG	Nice [right] shots of your friends Lisa but just BIG photos [wrong]	**J**
09/*26	09c	2	DR	Denise – get off drugs! [wrong]	**J**
09/*26	09d	2	MMu	As for the black and white thingy?! [wrong]	**J**
09/*26	09e	2	G	!Madness! ART IS NOT IN THIS ROOM [wrong]	**J**
10/*02	1	2	MMe	Sugar cubes soaked in insecticide, hmmm, reminds [reminds] me of some sugar cubes I swallowed back in college. Wooh – flashback.	**I**
10/*02	2	2	CW	Excellent floor covering for bathroom	**I**
10/*02	3	2	LG	What a fascinating series of photos. It reminds [reminds] me of all the people I've known in the past with homes/lives like these people – now I wish I had photographed them! [personal connection] Ordinary people with interesting, individual lives all around us but often not seen or celebrated! [observation]	**I**
10/*02	4	2	AD	I don't think [reminds] a polio party [speculation] would be fun!	**I**
10/*02	5a	2	PM	Great to see a textile. [right]	**J**
10/*02	5b	2	LG	Good look + people [description] + Life [speculation]	**I**
10/*02	6	2	MC	The art work has real feel[sensory] to it and also how he has made it a tribute to crash victims.[speculation] Very good. [right]	**I**
10/*02	7	2	CW	Beautiful, sensual and fragile [sensory] – perhaps [speculation] it reference (sic) are humanity – our skin, our ease at breaking, splitting – how did we keep it together.	**I**
10/*02	8	2	G	STRANGE All of them [wrong]	**J**

10/*02	9	2	MC	I love him [personal connection], so I love [right] his art work.	J
10/*02	10	2	CW	Very organic [observation] – mica, sand, rust [description] etc	I
10/*02	11	2	CW	What was wrong with abstract? [right/wrong] Why does it have to mean anything?	J
10/*02	12	2	PM	Very warm. Exceptionally beautiful [aesthetic]. I just want to wrap myself up in this delightful piece of art. [sensory]	J
10/*02	13	2	DM	Slow enough to capture. [speculation]	I
10/*02	14	2	MC	Wonderful [right] way of displaying art. Original [difference] idea that people would seldom think about. Two thumbs up [right].	J
10/*02	15	2	AD	I liked [right] the paintings. They're attractive [aesthetic]	J
10/*02	16	2	MC	It's really good but maybe something different.	J
10/*02	17	2	AD	It makes me feel [sensory] sick! Why is it all green and orange? [form] I want to go into the painting. [personal connection] [ambiguous]	N
10/*02	18	2	DM	Wonderful [right] photography. Extraordinary [difference] way of capturing the time frame of that picture in a second [process]. Beautiful [aesthetic].	J
10/*02	19	2	AD	Like a bad dream. [speculation]	I
10/*11	2	2	CW	I love [right] the texture [form] and the use of natural resources, it is very interesting and captivating. [sensory] The layering of textures [form] and the colours it creates is unique [difference].	J
10/*11	3	2	G	I Like? (sic) I like? I like? I like? I like? [All] [right]	J
10/*11	4	2	MMe	It makes me want to eat it. [reminds]	J
10/*11	5	2	G	I think you need to research to find better artist. [sic] [wrong]	J

10/*11	6	2	G	I think the whole exhibition shows the contemporary vibrance of Tasmanian art. It is diverse [difference] – exciting. My students love it – you bring more teenagers in with these loud/large words. [sensory] Diverse materials – great! [right]	J
10/*11	7	2	CW	Monet's water lilies in beige [speculation]. Beautifully calm and meditative [sensory]: an illusionary quality perhaps especially considering the title. The hypnotic daubs draw me in. [sensory]	I
10/*11	10a	2	DR	So little says so much [speculation]	I
10/*11	10b	2	MMe	Stood and examined it for a long while and saw new meanings with each minute that passed, very thought provoking piece. [personal connection]	J
10/*11	13	2	MMe	I love [right] the sugar one. It makes me [reminds] want to eat it.	J
10/*11	15	2	DM	Oh yes yes yes yes [right] So much movement; my head is spinning! [sensory] Finally we can stare at the sun without blinding ourselves. [speculation]	I
10/*11	17	2	PM	Fantastic! [right] She's actually done what I've always wanted to do! But at 80 I might be too late! [personal connection]	J
10/*11	26	2	G	Habib Mustaffa. It was gay. [insufficient]	N
10/*11	29	2	G	[Lots of swearing] [wrong]. A two year old could do better [wrong].	J
10/*11	32	2	PM	Loved [right] the relaxing feeling [sensory] looking at this work – I had to come back twice [right] (on different days) to look and try to work out why I found it so pleasing.	J
10/*11	33	2	LG	No comment written [insufficient]	N
10/*11	34	2	MMe	Bravo [right] Mish. Your work speaks for me! [personal connection]	J
10/*11	35	2	CW	Serene and very beautiful [aesthetic]. A 3D meditation. [speculation] Let's see more of her work. [right]	I
10/*11	42a	2	LG	Powerful [aesthetic] images of people and places [description]. Very impressive [right].	J

10/*11	42b	2	MMu	Like [right] this very much. Has a kind of grandeur [aesthetic].	J
10/*11	43	2	LG	Somewhat Diane Arbus [reminds] – same but not so disturbing. I'd like [personal connection] to have a visit with Mr & Mrs Dick, Aunty Jean and the Hume Brothers. I'll bet [speculation] Vicky's fun too when she smiles. Good on ya, Lisa! [right]	I
10/*11	44	2	MMu	Muruste allows us [speculation] to hover in multiple places; I find a sense of place both within my own skin [personal connection] on a cellular lever (micro) and also my space shared within an organised – chaotic land (macro) [speculation]. I delight, not just in his celebratory outcome, but also, and more importantly, the gesture of the maker. A body moving through space, marked by fluid [speculation].	I
10/*11	45	2	CW	My interpretation of these works really surprises me [sensory]. I find them very frustrating [sensory]. She is obviously a sensitive maker, sensitive to her material, on a physical level [material]. But is she forcing herself to find a context for them? Climate? Blister? – I am lost at this point [personal connection]. There is time here, and a love of material and process, but its almost as if she does not trust that that is enough. A really interesting substance [material] reduced to be 'about' the weather? Be true to your material. [wrong] But, the fact that I have a strong response is positive – they do draw me in [aesthetic], even if it is to a confused place [sensory].	J
10/*11	46	2	PM	Amazing [sensory]. They would like to ... it! shit [wrong]	J
10/*11	52	2	NA	State: How much do you want for the mummy Bill? [on scrap of lined paper] [insufficient]	N
10/*11	53	2	NA	(On scrap of lined paper) Kill Paul Vladimir Putin (Dr Evil) - sick Where is "Austin Powers" I need mummy. Has to be examined. Xian tomb to be opened. (On other side) Throw out sick. Who the hell is he. I hate him. I left here on my own. Get us out of here. Ian is a sucker. [insufficient]	N

DATE	NO	SHEET TYPE	ARTIST	RESPONSE WITH CODE	PROPERTY
10/*19	54	2	MC	Powerful [aesthetic] reminder that the human body is as fragile as the plastic appendages on the modern aggressive car [speculation].	I

SAMPLE 5: VISITORS' RESPONSES TO OPEN COMMENT SHEET WITH NO COMMENTS WALL

DATE	NO	SHEET TYPE	ARTIST	RESPONSE WITH CODE	PROPERTY
09/*19	1	1	G	[Heart]ed it. [right]	J
09/*19	2	1	LG	Lisa Garland's photographs SO AMAZING! [right]	J
09/*19	3	1	G	It waz [sic] fucking shit [wrong]	J
09/*19	4	1	G	Boring [wrong]	J
09/*19	5	1	G	It waz [sic] very nice. [right] Some of it amazed me. But it waz [sic] all the same [different] [heart]	J
09/*19	6	1	PM	Petra Meers work Amazing!! [right]	J
09/*19	7	1	M	I really like [right] the 3-D movie. I also like [right] the place where the animals are that have the sound where you put your print in the ice. I also [right] like where you can touch the animals it is so cool [right] (name provided)	J
09/*19	8	1	G	It's prettyful [sic] [right] by [name provided]	J
09/*19	09a	1	LG	Especially liked [right] Lisa Garland's photography – such a 'capture' of character [speculation]	I
09/*19	09b	1	PM	Petra Meer's 'The Last Seconds' – a very arresting [sensory] piece and beautifully made [aesthetic].	J
09/*19	10	1	G	I thought the collection was excellent [right], being vibrant and alive [sensory] with difference [difference] and texture and colour [form].	J
09/*19	11	1	G	Good [right] [name provided]	J

09/*19	12a	1	PM	I wonder how long it took Petra Meers [sic] to sew that fabric together! [process] [insufficient]	N
09/*19	12b	1	MMu	And I thought Michael Muruste's painting was fantastic! [right]	J
09/*19	12c	1	LG	I don't quite get the photos though?! Please tell me WHAT'S WITH THE PHOTOS! [wrong]	J
09/*19	13	1	G	All of the rooms were wonderful [right]. My mum just looked and looked.	J
09/*19	14	1	LG	Liked [right] Lisa Garland's work.	J
09/*19	15a	1	PM	The Last Seconds is very creative [right].	J
09/*19	15b	1	MMu	Sousse is very attractive [aesthetic].	J
09/*19	16	1	LG	They seem [speculation] to capture the real lives of the people in the photographs. Very good! [right]	I
09/*19	17	1	G	Very neat! [right]	J
09/*19	18	1	G	Interesting [underlined] [right]	J
09/*19	19	1	G	The artworks are hot! [right]	J
09/*19	20	1	G	More please, more often! [right]	J
09/*19	21	1	G	So beautiful [aesthetic]. Great information. Interesting [right].	J
09/*19	22	1	G	The exhibits were amazing. [right]	J
09/*19	23	1	G	Its great [right] to see some contemporary Tasmanian art. Lets see more! Thanks [right]	J
09/*19	24	1	LG	I love [right] Lisa Garland's personal shots, very touching [sensory] – FANTASTIC!!! [right] Thanks Lisa!!!	J
09/*19	25	1	M	Put more Tasmanian things in the museum [wrong]	J
09/*19	26	1	G	That was good [right]	J

09/*19	27	1	M	As a Tasmanian institution I feel the museum should regularly showcase Tasmanian Artists that are in the collection or [illegible] submissions from prominent local artists for the public to view. [ambiguous]	N
09/*19	28	1	G	Look I do believe the work is absolutely divine! Look I would not kid! Hello beige! That's Hot! Snug! [wrong]	J
09/*19	29	1	G	I thought it was quite interesting [right].	J
09/*19	30	1	G	They are very good [right] some of them.	J
09/*19	31	1	G	The standard of works is outstanding [right]!! One of the best [right] contemporary exhibitions I have seen in ages.	J
09/*19	32	1	FF	Fred Fisher – red and white sculpture [description] - just great [right] work ingenious [different]	J
09/*19	33	1	G	They're all great [right]	J
09/*19	34	1	LG	I think this exhibit needs more colour [form]. The photos by Lisa Garland I feel the everyday person can relate to [sic]. [personal connection]	J
09/*19	35	1	PM	Very nice [right] I really like [right] the Petra Meer	J
09/*19	36	1	G	Cool and nice [right]	J
09/*19	37a	1	MMu	Michael's work doesn't mean anything to me [wrong] without interpretation. (Perhaps it's an Aboriginal interpretation of landscapes or gardens?) [speculation]	I
09/*19	37b	1	PM	Petra's work is really interesting [right]. Could stare at it for ages and still find subtle [aesthetic]	J
09/*19	38	1	G	It was very good [right].... It was fantastic [right]	J
09/*19	39	1	G	Bad [wrong]	J
09/*19	40	1	G	Excellent [right] work!!... NOT [wrong]	J
09/*19	41	1	G	Put more action in it [wrong]	J
09/*19	42	1	G	It was ok? [right]	J

09/*19	43	1	G	This is pretty [right]	J
09/*19	44	1	AD	Ms Amanda Davies' works were very very very interesting [right]. Why did she choose green for people?? CURIOUS! [enquiry]	J
09/*19	45	1	G	[Chinese characters] meaning beautiful [right]	J
09/*19	46	1	G	I enjoyed [right] the exhibition – some very interesting [right] pieces of art work; great to have the opportunity to see such a variety [difference] of pieces; well done [right].	J
09/*19	47	1	G	Nicely [right] exhibited. Very talented [right]artists	J
09/*19	48	1	G	Fantastic [right]. Many thanks [right] for putting on such wonderful [right] exhibitions.	J
09/*19	49	1	NA	Alex Wonders [sic] is a good [right] artist who lives in Howrah. His work is cool [right].	J
09/*19	50	1	MMe	They are very good [right]. I like [right] the one made out of sugar blocks [description].	J
09/*19	51	1	G	Hot [right]	J
09/*19	52	1	G	Great art [right] bit confronting though! [name]	J
09/*19	53	1	M	Great [right] range of prints more Tasmanian artists (budding ones @ Art School) would be good [wrong]	J
09/*19	54	1	NA	POOR [right]! GO CATS	J
09/*19	55	1	MMe	I would like to lick the sugar [sensory] from the artwork. Should introduce eatable artwork [drawing of salivating mouth and tongue]	J
09/*19	56	1	G	I recon [sic] they are weird [wrong]	J
09/*19	57	1	G	very nice [right]	J
09/*19	58	1	M	Fabulous [right] to see printmaking take centre stage – and how strong & current it is. Well done [right]. [name provided]	J

09/*19	59	1	G	Very nice [right] artwork [drawing of smiley face] [right]	J
09/*19	60	1	NA	GO SWANS [insufficient]	N
09/*19	61	1	G	I enjoyed [right] it very much. Its great [right] to see everyday items and materials [description] being used in many different forms to make ART [observation]. [name] I will be back again [right].	I
09/*19	62	1	G	Cool [right]	J
09/*19	63	1	G	Works of time consumption [speculation]. Brilliant [right] too.	I
09/*19	64	1	MMe	I like [right] the sugar artwork[description]. Its cool right] but it took me a while to figure it out.	J
09/*19	65	1	M	Probably a little large [wrong]. Maybe one room less. Some of the jellewry (sic) … just isn't [wrong].	J
09/*19	66	1	G	The exhibition leaves me speechless [sensory]. Never can come to terms with the talent [right] these exhibitions bring to our notice.	J
09/*19	67	1	G	It was a bit cool [right]	J
09/*19	68	1	G	It was good [right]	J
09/*19	69	1	G	Instring [right] itoms [sic]	J
09/*19	70	1	M	Generally a great [right] display. However – pink cars and sugar a waste of space [wrong].	J
09/*19	71	1	G	Blink and you miss [ambiguous]	N
09/*19	72	1	G	BAD [wrong]	J
09/*19	73	1	G	HA [insufficient]	N
09/*19	74	1	MMu	I wonder how long it took [process] Michael Muruste to do his painting. Its amazing. [right] [name]	J
09/*19	75	1	LG	Great [right] shots! Lovely to see [right] real people in their environment [speculation]. Thanks [right].	I
09/*19	76	1	G	Fantastic [right] cool [right]	J
09/*19	77	1		Very nice [right]	J

			G		
09/*19	78	1	G	I think the art work is verry intoresting [sic] [right] to look at.	**J**
09/*19	79	1	PM	Nice to see [right] some interesting [right] textile work.	**J**
09/*19	80	1	G	I loved [right] it lots. (name, age 4)	**J**
09/*19	81	1	G	I loved it [right]. It was so cool [right]. (name, age 7 and address)	**J**
09/*19	82	1	G	It was a bit good [right]	**J**
09/*19	83a	1	LG	The series of photographs is superb [right]	**J**
09/*19	83b	1	PM	I particularly like [right] the beautiful [aesthetic] textile by Petra Meer.	**J**
09/*19	84a	1	LG	Really loved [right] the photos of people in their environment [description] – a celebration of art, story and environment [speculation]. Thank you [right]! Would love [right] to see more! Almost like an historical personal history in a set time and place [speculation].	**I**
09/*19	84b	1	PM	Also loved [right] the material, pre-used jumper [observation] hanging. Wonderful [right]!	**I**

SAMPLE 6: OPEN COMMENT ONLY SHEET WITH COMMENT WALL

DATE	NO	SHEET TYPE	ARTIST	RESPONSE WITH CODE	PROPERTY
10/*11	1	1	DM	First on the left - took my breath away [sensory]. I had to sit back and absorb. I wish I could have it on my wall. Beautiful. [aesthetic]	**J**
10/*11	8	1	G	Good [right]	**J**
10/*11	9	1	AD	It's nice [right]	**J**
10/*11	11	1	NA	When are we going to see the work we used to have on the walls again? I have looked in vein for months now for GTWB Boyes and his wonderful ilk?! [wrong] [signature]	**J**
10/*11	12	1		Whoever said this place is gay should go jump. Try this yourself, noob (sic). On a	**J**

			G	lighter note, this artwork is astounding [right]; very inspirational [personal connection]. ... Go get owned.	
10/*11	14	1	LG	I loved [right] Lisa Garland's images! They truly capture the soul and intrigue thoughts and insight into the subjects lives and self! [sic] [speculation]	I
10/*11	16	1	G	It looks very different [difference] to what I have seen. (name, aged 10)	J
10/*11	18	1	PM	Petra, does the world really need more rugs? [wrong]	J
10/*11	19	1	G	Great! [right]	J
10/*11	20	1	DR	My cat can do better with a ball of string. [wrong]	J
10/*11	21	1	DR	Denise shouldn't be bagged out. I think the people who made those comments probably couldn't even figure out how to spell art. So there. [right]	J
10/*11	22	1	AD	I totally love [right] the oil on plastic [description] [process]. So cool [right].	J
10/*11	23	1	MMu	I don't like [wrong] the one that has black and white egg stuff [description]. Looks like a doctor took a photo of someone's embryos [speculation]. Is that legal?	I
10/*11	24	1	PM	Congratulations [right] to all 3 and the Museum for an exciting [sensory] room. Especially good [right] to see Petra's piece – being here and being textile – Fabulous [right] Petra [signature]	J
10/*11	25	1	G	[10/*11-24cont.] When I commented before didn't realise 2 rooms and also first room held 4 not 3 artists – sorry Denise. Room 2 – we have some fine [right] artists don't we!? Lovely to see and plenty of room – Thanks [right] Tas Mus	J
10/*11	27	1	G	Penis [and matching drawing] [insufficient]	N
10/*11	28	1	DR	The artwork is too small [wrong]. No wonder it is getting bagged out.	J
10/*11	30	1	G	Room 1 > the concept of people living/viewing Room 2 > the concept of pop culture/watching. Thanx [speculation]	I

10/*11	31	1	G	Depressing [sensory] on the whole. Surely you have better things in your collection [wrong]. (contrast e.g. Ballarat)	**J**
10/*11	36a	1	LG	Black and white large photos would like to know how/why the photos came about? Looks really interesting. [right]	**J**
10/*11	36b	1	PM	Loved [right] the patchwork textile! Super. [right]	**J**
10/*11	37	1	PM	Stitching in the Art Gallery!! I'll be back. [right]	**J**
10/*11	38	1	G	Piss pore! [wrong] Thanks for nothing. [wrong]	**J**
10/*11	39	1	G	Very good [right]! Keep up the good [right] work! [name of school]	**J**
10/*11	40	1	G	It's fabulous! [right]	**J**
10/*11	41	1	LG	Real characters captured [speculation] in Lisa's photography	**I**
10/*11	47	1	G	very very good [right]	**J**
10/*11	48	1	NA	cun'ole [insufficient]	**N**
10/*11	49	1	G	Brilliant [right] smiley face [right] [name provided]	**J**
10/*11	51	1	G	[name only] [insufficient]	**N**
10/*19	1	1	G	I think it is off its head [wrong]	**J**
10/*19	2	1	MMu	I like [right] the solid black rectangle. It seems to balance [form] the whole piece.	**J**
10/*19	3	1	G	All inspiring work, fresh, innovative [difference]. Brought in some college art students and hope they bring home as much as I will from this. [right]	**J**
10/*19	4	1	M	What is the hell [wrong] is this gallery showing – can't find any explanation. [name]	**J**
10/*19	5	1	G	They are very big its true but if you multiply 0 x 6.326 it is still 0 – well like lots of stuff – just bigger [wrong]	**J**

10/*19	6	1	G	A variety of media types [difference], video work, in company with the photo series juxtaposed opposite the monochromatic 'speckled' paper panels, as well as the 'pixilated-like textile panel make a coherent exhibition [form]. The execution of the works appear to be of a high quality. A micro/macro 'argument' achieved also by the sculptural pieces. A refreshing show for a visitor from the East coasts 'centre' – Sydney. Well done. [right]	**J**
10/*19	7	1	LG	Lisa Garlands photos offer a wonderful [right] glimpse of a moment in the lives of ....[description] Thank you [name] Melbourne	**I**
10/*19	8	1	LG	I love [right] seeing the photos. They capture the mood and atmosphere [speculation] at the time – Thank you for showing them. [right] [name]	**I**
10/*19	9	1	DR	Fine delicate [aesthetic] and crap [wrong]	**J**
10/*19	10	1	G	Rubbish [wrong]	**J**
10/*19	11	1	G	I really enjoy [right] looking at art it gives me a sense of belonging [personal connection] and I like [right] the way I feel [sensory] when I look at art!!	**J**
10/*19	12	1	G	Its cool [right]	**J**
10/*19	13	1	G	The idea for the exhibition is really straightforward and great [right] – a couple of curators surveying local working artists and bringing the work of 10 (?) of them to the community's attention ("This is what we found in your suburbs!") It's exactly what a public gallery can and should do well. The range of media and ideas is great [right]. The lack of comment by the curators is good too – but good that there is some support info in the catalogue if desired. Well done! [right] Look forward to the next one.	**J**
10/*19	14	1	G	I think you should have some art work that your eyes think that it is moving! [wrong]	**J**
10/*19	15	1	G	They were all shit. [wrong] I hate [wrong] art.	**J**

10/*19	16	1	G	It was excellent [right], will come again with friends and family. Love it! [right] xxoo [right] [On reverse side of card: PICK ME!]	J
10/*19	17	1	G	What a load of rubbish [wrong]. I want proper art. No damn good [wrong]. Bring on real art.	J
10/*19	18	1	PM	"The Last Seconds" was my favourite [right] one out of this exhibition because it is different [difference].	J
10/*19	19	1	G	I think you need fun things to do for kids! [wrong]	J
10/*19	20	1	G	An interesting, delightful [right] and eclectic mix of work. Perhaps new (different) [difference] works by various artists could be rotated through the gallery every month (?) or three months (?). Great stuff.	J
10/*19	21	1	G	Its very cool [right] indeed.	J
10/*19	22	1	G	Hu – mm [wrong]	J
10/*19	23	1	G	Just been on a month's tour of UK. Tassie Museum and Art Gallery has so much more to offer – with 1/4 of the people! Beautiful [aesthetic] exhibitions (Huon Pine and Chinese to die for) – wonderfully presented [right]. A pleasure! [sensory] How glad I am to live in Tassie. [name supplied]	J
10/*19	24	1	FF	I love [right] the alternating colours [form]and the different [different] ways of putting them together [form].	J
10/*19	25	1	R	I love the exhibition, but my favourite is the comments display – especially the bizarre and narrow-minded negative comments. They amuse me.	J
10/*19	26	1	AD	Can we have these pictures in our hospital please? [right] [signed Doctor D]	J
10/*19	27	1	G	What an interesting [right] collection. I love [right] it. [signed]	J
10/*19	28	1	PM	Love [right] the 'red blanket' Inspires me [personal connection] to recycle all out throwout clothes [description] and have a go.	I

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10/*19	29	1	AD	Fantastic [right]. So evocative [aesthetic]!	J
10/*19	30	1	CW	A great picture. I like the way it's not really anything in particular, it just has a mysterious look about it. [speculation]	I
10/*19	31	1	G	This collection opens another window into the world of art. Just like someone's idea of garden maintenance by concreting the yard so you don't have to mow the lawn. It seemed like a good idea. [wrong]	J
10/*19	32	1	AD	I like [right] this artwork the best. It's so eerie and unsettling [sensory]. The style captures the sickness of the subject [speculation]. Why does one of the children have orange hair? [questioning]	I
10/*19	33	1	AD	Horrifically uncomfortable [sensory]. Sickly colours, disconcerting subject [speculation]. Yet you cannot look away [personal connection].	I
10/*19	34	1	LG	Breathtaking [sensory] depth of character [speculation] realised thru' the photos.[materials]	I
10/*19	35	1	G	I enjoyed [sensory] taking off my shoes and sock mostly [ambiguous] [name] age 1 year	N
10/*19	36	1	MMe	Sugar cubes are cool [right] [name] age 7	J
10/*19	37a	1	MMe	I found the way the sugar blocks are displayed it wasn't easy [wrong] to see the image	J
10/*19	37b	1	MC	Enjoyed [right] Matt Calvert's art – great [right] to see everyday objects [description] used.	J
10/*19	37c	1	CW	Catherine Woo's art is subdued and pretty [aesthetic] – pity about the light – I felt it didn't show the picture to best advantage [wrong].	J
10/*19	38	1	MC	Thank you [right] for a meaningful memorial for all of us who have lost a loved one in a car accident [speculation]. [personal connection]	I
10/*19	39	1	MC	I love [right] how he created something so pleasing to the eye out of something so tragic and devastating [observation].	I

10/*19	40	1	MMe	I like the idea of making something out of sugar [description]. Very interesting [right] to look at.	J
10/*19	41	1	MMe	The sugar cubes picture is nice because of the colours [form] but they look like [remind] they are shooting each other, not so nice. [observation] [name] age 4	I
10/*19	42	1	G	Good [right] pituchers [sic]	J
10/*19	43	1	G	This kool [right]	J
10/*19	45	1	MMe	It was very good [right]. I like [right] the sugar one.	J
10/*19	46	1	AD	Boring [wrong] subjects (polio party [speculation] plain silly [wrong]) and average painting [wrong]	I
10/*19	47	1	G	I find it a source of amazement [sensory] – that of all the wonderful [right] Tasmanian artists working in the state – this is the best the museum can come up with to exhibit and showcase. The museum has lost touch [wrong] with the ordinary person's idea of art.	J
10/*19	48	1	G/R	Overall exhibition very mixed range and I like [right] the way you 'register' audience participation. It would work well [right] as a curatorial concept if the work were more based on audience participation, intervention and conceptual narratives. A lot of these works engage more about subjective leanings towards surface or image [speculation].	I
10/*19	48a	1	FF	Fred Fisher belongs back in the 50's/60's [reminds].	J
10/*19	48b	1	MMe	Sugar work a bit lame [wrong]	J
10/*19	48c	1	MC	Matt's work looks complete [right] but what's next [wrong]	J
10/*19	48d	1	DM	David Martin, nice [right] series horrible [wrong] way to hang, what about magnetic pins	J
10/*19	48e	1	LG	Lisa Garland - the depth of the black [description] pulls them into a darker consciousness [speculation], redeeming them from pure photojournalism [speculation]	I

10/*19	48f	1	CW	Catherine Woo – nice [right] surface invention [form]	J
10/*19	48g	1	PM	Petra's work well executed [right]	J
10/*19	48h	1	DR	Denise Ava Robinson's well executed [right] (need to see more in the series – delicateness of work dwarfed somewhat. [wrong]	J
10/*19	49	1	G	They are very good [right] but some are very fxxx shit [wrong]	J
10/*19	50	1	G	This is an interesting [right] place that can teach you a lot about the art and the [artist's name]	J
10/*19	51	1	NA	Hi! [insufficient]	N
10/*19	52	1	NA	Love [insufficient]	N
10/*19	53	1	NA	Name only [insufficient]	N