

new light

fragments and responsibilities

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Transforming Aesthetics

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*Kia Ora koutou katoa
Nau mai haere mai
He mihi tenei ki a koutou katoa*

*No reira
Tena koutou
Tena koutou
Tena tatou katoa*

In the era of the *neo-* that follows the decade of the *post-*, there is a preponderant sense of something new, some new mode of practice or appreciation that constitutes a new aesthetic. This is more than the normal shifting of fashion in an epoch and a cultural sector deeply embedded in fashions. Among the books I've been reading recently are several commenting this shift. Virilio, for example, argues

At the end of the millennium, what abstraction once tried to pull off is in fact being accomplished before our very eyes: the end of REPRESENTATIVE art and the substitution of a counter-culture, of a PRESENTATIVE art. A situation that reinforces the dreadful decline of *representative democracy* in favour of . . . a *presentative* multimedia democracy based on automatic polling (Virilio 2003: 35)

- an accusation that seems at first simply an extension of Michael Fried's (1992) strictures on theatricality in *Art and Objecthood*. In his forthcoming book *What Do Pictures Want*, WJT Mitchell describes our 'biocybernetic' period as one in which informatic, computer and digital 'models of calculation and control' are 'interlocked in a struggle with new forms of incalculability and

uncontrollability, from computer viruses to terrorism' (Mitchell 2005: 313). In one of the most sophisticated accounts, Giorgio Agamben (citing Kafka's diaries) sees a very similar phenomenon in a more optimistic light:

In this "attack on the last earthly frontier", art transcends the aesthetic dimension and thus, with the construction of a totally abstract moral system, eludes the fate that destined it to kitsch. . . . art succeeds once again in transforming man's inability to exit his historical status . . . into the very space in which he can take the original measure of his dwelling in the present (Agamben 1999 114)

Not only the 'new' of new media but the 'contemporary' in contemporary art, inextricably related to one another, suggest a more or less abrupt break with the immediate past, and a kind of prophetic position in the discourse around art and culture.

Agamben's argument in particular articulates two major themes in the discourses of the new and contemporary, hinging on the ambiguity of the word 'aesthetic'. Obviously we're talking about art, so by aesthetic we mean art that no longer needs to be attractive. In fact, in transcending the aesthetic, art has even gone beyond the aesthetic pleasures of destroying old conventions or making work beyond conventions of pleasure and beauty. Equally, however, we're talking with a philosopher, for whom aesthetics means also the philosophy of the senses. Art has reached a point where it transcends the sensible, either by being entirely conceptual in the first instance, or by merely inhabiting a material form which, however, is insignificant compared to the idea which it transmits.

I would like to start then with two images. The first is Ernst's *Europe After the*

Rain, a décalcomanic piece made in New York in 1944. It is here less for itself than for Charles Harrison's judgement on it: 'Ernst may have got his history right', he says, 'but he got his art wrong'. In the possibility of getting it wrong lies a crucial change in the discourse of art towards, in this instance, the concept of painting rather than painting itself.

The second is one of Peter Robinson's work *Divine Comedy* from the Venice Biennale a couple of years back. Most of you will recognise the tukutuku lattice mixed and the kowhaiwhai colour, and perhaps recognise the relation of red and black to the fullness of being and the void of becoming in kaupapa Maori. Those of you who can't read ASCII code may like to know that the 0s and 1s decode as "Nothingness li%#s #oiled in the heart of being like a wwrn". As Douglas Bagnell points out, while one non-digital critic 'references "the infinity of digital information consisting of zeros and ones, where meaning can be altered by the slightest shift of a digit"', this work nicely pokes a hole through this: you can see past the typos and read the message' (posted to ada_list 21 July 2004). This survival of meaning past the apparent lockdown of information management systems is part of what fascinates me. Robinson's Comedy also, among other themes, establishes a relation whakapapa, wisdom of the ancestors, and technology, the embodied form of Western historical memory, Marx's dead labour. This rich play of presence, absence and becoming suggests too that materiality has a part still to play, and that most explicitly not only in the tradition which the meeting with modernity created, but in the very heart of the supposedly immaterial world of binary digits.

And I would like to take forward three problems posed as characteristic of the new and the contemporary: presentation as the fulfilment of abstraction in the age of sampling; art's transcendence of the aesthetic; the the dialectic of control and chaos.

Even art has left the spaces of enclosure in order to enter into the open circuits of the bank (Gilles

Deleuze)

Terabyte Culture

Setting out the case for 'societies of control' (that takes over from Foucault's disciplinary societies sometime in the aftermath of World War II), Deleuze remarks that 'Man is no longer man enclosed but man in debt', a metonym for the transition. The problem with this characterisation is that it accounts only for a minority of the planet's population, as Deleuze goes on to note:

It is true that capitalism has retained as a constant the extreme poverty of three-quarters of humanity, too poor for debt, too numerous for confinement: control will not only have to deal with erosions of frontiers but with the explosions in the shanty towns (Deleuze 1997: 446)

In the emergent light of globalisation, most of our neat assertions are condemned to untidy riders explaining the limitations of their applicability. The problem with both the old societies of discipline and the new societies of electronic control is that neither extended globally.

The difference is that while empire was essential to disciplinary society, it was so only as a source of wealth. The empire of discipline never needed to apply its disciplinary measures to the colonised: the absence of such disciplinary models is the subject of Fanon's analysis among many others. The empire of control, however, Hardt and Negri's Empire, does need to integrate, indeed incorporate, the colonised into its workings. It must, in the interests of a globalised capital which now engulfs all sectors and most regions. This is a system not without contradictions, notably the boundary condition of inclusive exclusions. These contradictions are integral to the societies of control. To understand why, we need an operation which Foucault and Deleuze do not carry out for historical reasons to do with the betrayal of May '68 by the Stalinist PCF: a reintegration between the political and the economic.

The state, Claus Offe argues, 'does not favour specific interests, and is not allied with specific classes. Rather, what the state protects and sanctions is a

set of institutions and social relationships necessary for the domination of the capitalist class' (Offe 1984: 119-20). Even the most ardently reformist government must preside over private accumulation because every government relies on taxes raised on accumulation to enact its policies. For Offe the transition which Deleuze describes as one from discipline to control is better understood as a crisis in the commodity form which emerges when the two major players in capitalism find other ways of using their values than in the exchange which characterises the capitalist market: the workers no longer necessarily bring their labour power to the labour market; and the capitalists no longer necessarily bring their capital to invest in the means of production.

Whether these values are squandered, used in criminal activities, or displaced geographically by emigration and the 'flight of capital' need not detain us: their effect is that the state confronts a crisis of the commodity form. The Chicago-school orthodoxy has pushed heavily towards a solution which Offe refers to as 'recommodification': 'creating conditions under which legal and economic subjects can function as commodities (Offe 1984: 124).

These new characters move between the poles of subject and citizen which earlier defined their position in the state as free agents whose freedom however is constructed – legally, economically and politically – in the state.

At this stage in his work, when the destruction of the welfare state in the Thatcher's UK, Reagan's USA and the 'rogernomic' disaster of Aotearoa New Zealand was of paramount concern, Offe did not observe the gathering clouds around globalisation. The national state had derived its legitimacy from its ability to provide a more or less level playing field for capitalism (common environmental, health and safety standards, common employment rights and rates of pay, comparable infrastructure and transport costs, contractual and compliance costs etc.)

Both the flight of capital and the migration of key workers could be managed by, for example, importing service personnel and providing safer and more lucrative banking and investment opportunities than overseas territories where the

business of manufacture continued. In the short term, these arrangements have worked well. In the opening years of the 21st century, however, the idol of free trade no longer guarantees the wealth of wealthy nations. The startling growth of the Chinese and Indian economies has led to two crucial breakdowns in the World Trade Organisation's management of global trade: the United States' threatened Chinese cotton tariffs and attempts to legislate against outsourcing of IT jobs.

The nation state was charged with providing the equality of overheads and costs which alone would promote accumulation. Global organisations, not needing to acknowledge the claims of workers, environmentalists, health professionals and so on, have not undertaken this task, with the result that the gains in flexibility for corporations have resulted in absolute declines in wealth among workers in the OECD countries and consequent decline in the legitimisation of the nation state.

Today radical departures in taxation or land reform are increasingly likely to result in demonisation and ostracism (see Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, and consider whether Mugabe's crimes would have appeared anything like so heinous had they not involved reform of land tenure). As these core powers decline, and as governments are increasingly under pressure to reconcile domestic policies with international norms, one of the few areas of activity left is culture.

Not that this arena is without contradictions. Held to embody values which are specifically not commodifiable (such as national identity), culture is increasingly organised as the creative industries sector and in Offe's terms recommodified. Likewise the articulation of cultural values as an arena of freedom and equality (the ideal virtues of the ideal bourgeois republic) must conflict with the felt necessity of organising them as intellectual property.

What then is the relation between this ensemble of economic contradictions and the more properly political issues which Deleuze periodises in the concept of societies of control? Offe's analysis pushes the crisis of the welfare state squarely into the problematic of globalisation. In the words of the Declaration

of the Rights of Man of 1789, 'The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation', and it is the nation which guarantees the innate rights of men. The contemporary nation loses or hands over elements of sovereignty to supra-national organisations which are no longer bound to recognise liberty and the pursuit of happiness. To that extent, they abandon sovereignty as a principle, and with it the rights which the nation previously underwrote.

Disciplinary societies, like the earlier societies of sovereignty, pass into societies of control to the extent that they abandon the rights that humans derive from any social contract or other founding socio-political moment, instead reducing the subject of politics to what Agamben calls 'bare life': a measurable, exchangeable and vulnerable fragment of biological life. In these new conditions, lives become commodities. This is the impact of globalisation, the removal of geopolitical borders as barriers to the free accumulation of capital.

The term 'control' must therefore be carefully articulated with developments in the global organisation of capitalism. Thus when Offe proposes that

A dynamic theory of social change must seek to explain why the sphere of work and production, in consequence of the 'implosion' of its power to determine social life, forfeits its structuring and organizing capacity, thereby releasing new fields of action, marked by new actors and a new form of rationality (Offe 1985: 150)

he begs the question of *where* these effects are to be observed. With the current attempts of the Bush administration to regulate outsourcing, the centrality of work returns to the centre from the periphery to which globalisation in its earlier phases had banished it. Like the crisis of French agriculture, the USA's crises of employment derive from no-longer tenable subsidies and no-longer affordable expectations of disposable wealth and leisure.

It is in this context of uneven capital investment and the uneven grounds of working conditions that we need to periodise the 'new' of new media, and to place the claim that a new mode of politics has begun. What democracy is possible under the terms of the power spectrum which is emerging?

New media are neither causes nor merely symptoms of control. Nor are they the magic bullets of development, wealth creation or renewed democracy. Integral both to globalisation as an economic phenomenon, and to control as an increasingly globalised polity, they cannot even be counted neutral. But to ask, as so many politicians do, about the 'impact of new media on society' is absurd. There is no society without media, old, new and futurological. And I would argue that the concept of society, a profoundly abstract notion, is far less tangible than the practice which is media, and in which both social life and the very concept of societies are constructed. For this reason alone, it is clear that whatever democracy is possible will be mediated.

The model of communication which underpins the coming community is neither the face-to-face nor the one-to-many but the many-to-many. But as Tiziana Terranova argues, management of many-to-many communications has been, since Shannon and Weaver, a matter of statistical probability. The briefest familiarity with practices of government since the later 19th century indicates that statistical knowledge has been integral to rule for a hundred and fifty years.

The automation of information gathering in the wake of Hollerith reaches a kind of apogee in cookie technology. Beyond any ethical queries about opt-out data harvesting, cookies take us directly to the core of a critical contradiction in the development of capital: intellectual property (see Elmer 2004). Here is Rupert Murdoch's take on it in a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April this year:

At the same time, we may want to experiment with the concept of using bloggers to supplement our daily coverage of news on the net. There are of course inherent risks in this strategy -- chief among them maintaining our standards for accuracy and reliability. Plainly, we can't vouch for the quality of people who aren't regularly employed by us -- and bloggers could only add to the work done by our reporters, not replace them. But they may still serve a valuable

purpose; broadening our coverage of the news; giving us new and fresh perspectives to issues; deepening our relationship to the communities we serve In the same way we need to be relevant to our readers, the internet provides the opportunity for us to be more relevant to our advertisers. Plainly, the internet allows us to be more granular in our advertising, targeting potential consumers based on where they've surfed and what products they've bought. The ability to more precisely target customers using technology-powered forms of advertising represents a great opportunity for us to maintain and even grow market share and is clearly the future of advertising. (Speech by Rupert Murdoch to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 13, 2005)

'Deepening our relationship to the communities we serve': in Murdoch's discourse, the potential of bloggers to contribute localness to global corporations sits alongside the potential of cookie technology to add localness to the delivery of audiences to global advertisers.

Anxieties about privacy are ill-formed when they ignore the ownership and operation of surveillance technologies. The threat comes only marginally from the state, and then often enough in forms which have been ratified by election, the wholly statistical but nonetheless only legitimate mode of communal action that we have at present. Nor should we fear a prying eye behind these technologies. The depressing fact is that no-one is looking: only machines, and they are interested only in aggregate practices in public spaces like supermarkets. What we should fear is the unpaid labour which we provide, the intellectual property we donate freely. In short it is our own philanthropy we need to undermine. The harrowing truth is that the vast majority of us are average.

The question of the statistical arises in two crucial moments of the political history of globalisation. The first was the rise of mass society and the various techniques developed to organise it, from mass entertainment to Stalinism and fascism. The second belongs not to the mass of the new societies of the 20th century but to their exiles:

What is essential is that, every time refugees represent not individual cases but – as happens more and more often today – a mass phenomenon, both these organizations [“solely humanitarian and social” institutions like the UN High Commission for refugees] and individual states prove themselves, despite their solemn invocations of the “sacred and inviolable” rights of man, absolutely incapable of resolving the problem and even of confronting it quickly (Agamben 1998: 133)

As with mass entertainment, and as voiced recently in Australian immigration's assertion (of a defecting Chinese diplomat) that all cases would be treated impartially: one size fits all. The age of mass culture and mass society is the age too of mass sociology, the sociology of norms and of the construction of demographic categories and 'lifestyle groups' that sought to standardise deviations from the norm into manageable markets.

The rise of consumer choice as means to identity in the demand-led Keynesianism of post-Depression economic policy began to cross this massification fuelled a new romanticism in the arts, a discourse of genius and alienation which, however, has been democratised, making all of us, like the children in Lake Woebegone, 'above average'. The vanguard genius, most of all the savagely deracinated like Artaud or Basquiat, leads directly to the granular markets that Murdoch looks forward to in the internet-savvy news organisation.

In parallel, that disciplinarisation of sexuality that Foucault traces in his late writings gives way to the commodification of sex. From birth control as invasive medicine to the market in prophylactics, viagra and sex toys, the very heart of subjectivity has been colonised, not by discourse, but by the commodity form.

The logic of the commodity form thus extends to the 'sovereign subject'. Agamben notes the term is an oxymoron, but this contradictory entity is nonetheless the actual agent whose entirely circumscribed freedom is at the heart of the two acts in which we are most thoroughly social: labour and shopping. In these acts of exchange, we can sell our labour to anyone or no-one; and we

can buy anything or nothing, but we cannot work or thrive without accepting these commodity relationships except at the expense of becoming illegal. (This is the secret of the pact between art and illegality which underpins the great Romantic refusal from Rimbaud to Heath Bunting).

The question of the distributed aesthetic, insofar as it becomes a thinkable category simultaneously with globalisation and new media, belongs with these themes of commodification and power, and with the statistical average of the mass and the granular measure of the individual. The aesthetic question concerns the nature of information (as in 'The Information Society' and 'The Information Economy'). In Hardt and Negri's account, the characteristic form of the contemporary economy is its dematerialisation. But what does this dematerialisation consist of? And, as we learnt to ask of the 'implosion' of work, *where* exactly does it occur?

The problem can be expressed thus

In order to consolidate its field of influence, capital demands a constant emergence of subjective and territorialized identities that, at the end of the day, require no more than an equality of exposure according to the uniform prerogatives of the market. Thus we have the capitalist logic of general equivalences and the cultural logic of community and minority identities coming together in an articulated whole (Badiou 1997: 11)

Truth is damaged when it is presented as the order of facts. Such facts as the boiling point of mercury, or the existence of unemployed paedophile priests, are in the end equivalent to one another according to the universal laws of capitalist exchange. This is as true of socially constructed facts (identities like "moderate Muslims") as it is of your phone number or my address. Database logic extrapolates from representational practices like those described by John Tagg (1988) to effect that identity thinking which demolishes the phenomenological specificity of any instance (*haecitas*), rendering it typical (*quidditas*).

Komar and Melamid's *Most Wanted* gives graphic expression to this. One the

left, the USA's 'most wanted painting' as determined by a poll of Americans; on the right the least wanted. Both images are in the sense I want to capture abstract, determinations of marketing technique, not the expression of a self or the outcome of working with pigment at the picture plane or the conceptual challenges of working within a conventional iconographic or illusionistic repertoire. We can contrast it neatly enough with Cartier-Bresson's famous image of a picnic by the banks of the Seine, an image which has come to signify the *haecitas*, the hereness of life lived, the kind of image Barthes celebrates in *La Chambre Claire*.

What is typical, by contrast, is a statistical norm: an aggregate, but also an ideal, which exists therefore as a universal, outside of history and thus, crucially for its commercialisation, foreseeable, if not indeed already foreseen. (*The identification of trends, demographic or by trend-spotting market analysts, become facts instantaneously in the moment they become objects of knowledge, facts in the sense that they are commodities that can be traded; and in "any difference which makes a difference in some later event" [Bateson, 1973: 351]*).

In information terms, the foreseeable is the probable, the repetitious, the redundant. The foreseen is an extension of the present into the future, which secures the status quo against risk, but also against both the not-yet existent, immanent utopia and the radical difference which futurity alone is capable of delivering. In this way fact makes actual what otherwise remains virtual. To the extent that they are meaningful, networked statements are in varying degrees probable. High probability actions tend to maintain the status quo (though perhaps only in the short term, since the greater the probability, the lower the efficacy). Low probability actions may occur as sheer noise with no receivers, or they may be accepted as meaningful in ways not foreseen by the originator, and in either case they cannot be repeated without acquiring probability. Or actions can branch out from and modify expected activities, the small modifications rippling through the system to unexpected effect, perhaps homeostatic, perhaps emergent. In all these cases, the fundamental metaphor

is spatial, and the conception of time is bounded by its reference to a state of origin whose temporality is an extended present, and which operates more like the origin of Cartesian geometry than like a moment in time.

In such examples, time is not only quantifiable (marketable as a commodity); it is deprived of its essence *as* time, its use-value as the only duration during which something other than the present might emerge. It is in short spatialised, a process which has been addressed across the board by commentators on the vanishing geography and (overstated) instantaneity of digital communication. This spatialisation and consequent detemporalising and dehistoricisation of communication is a key factor in promoting the 'massless and immaterial' perception of new media, especially in the context of new politics and new economics.

Thus Hardt and Negri undertake their revision of the labour theory of value, arguing that biopolitical creativity always exceeds what can be exploited as productive labour and is immeasurable (because it is not granular). Building their case they assert that

Material production – the production for example of cars, televisions, clothing, and food – creates the means of social life. . . Immaterial production, by contrast, including the production of ideas, images, knowledges, communication, cooperation and affective relations, tends to create not the means of social life but social life itself. Immaterial production [they conclude] is biopolitical (Hardt and Negri 2004: 146)

Borne up by their faith in immanent revolution, Hardt and Negri make some dangerous assumptions.

1. We have no notion whether human creativity is an infinite resource, but as we shall see, there are reasons to fear that it may not be.
2. The second concerns the unmeasurable nature of qualities that do not come in unit sizes. Despite Hardt and Negri, the contemporary world is entirely

measurable: Lyman and Varian's (2000) remarkable study estimates global production of information at between 635,480 and 2,120,539 terabytes in 1999. All of us are now so deeply involved in sampling technologies that we no longer see them as profoundly different in their manner of operation to analogue media. Whether taking the statistical average of sound over a microsecond or of market responses to a new product line over a weekend, sampling measures the immeasurable flux. This microstatistical analysis extends to the data images articulated by Mark Poster (1995). The Deleuzian 'dividual' as cloud of data is not a macron composed in non-linear relation to the microgeography of their constituents elements. Rather they are the statistical aggregate produced by endless micro-sampling. Sadly the social reality which is produced under late capitalism is all too quantised. Moreover, the sheer scale of cultural production means that sampling is all that can be achieved in a lifetime. Paolo Cherchi Usai estimated at a conference in 2000 that in 1999, about nine billion hours of film and television were produced. One sleepless night I calculated that the entire population of Australia, man, woman and child, working eight hour shifts, could not view 1999's production in one year. Sampling is how we navigate the excess of creativity.

Such quantum sampling is inevitably inaccurate. No longer analogous (or analog), it sacrifices thereby its claim to isomorphism with the real it samples. In its place it produces not so much an ideological categorisation as a mathematical abstraction. After Saussure, no-one expected a one-to-one relationship with the real. In its place, governmental demographics produce at first the grand categories of the Average Man, and now the micrological analyses of lifestyle trends. The appeal to knowledge is equally intemperate when demography is claimed as anything other than aggregate and abstraction; and when the intention of its employment is to name and order the real, as instrument or resource, for policy or commercialisation.

3. Breakdowns in the WTO ideology of free trade over Chinese clothing exports illustrate the resistance of material production (a similar case is argued by Alan Sekula [1995] for the resistance of maritime trade as evidence that material

distribution is still required). The differences in salaries and working conditions that brought China 62% growth in US and EU markets in 2004 (*Economist* 4 June 2005) indicate that the measure of 'biopower' does not differ greatly from the measure of labour power, suggesting in turn that Agamben's and Foucault's biopower is a belated recognition in politics of what Engels brought to light in the *Condition of the Working Class in England* and Marx theorised in *Capital*: a man or a woman is worth only what they produce. In short we still need economics, even in the era of biopower. Yet this does not mean that we abandon the challenge of periodisation; just that we get more specific about what has changed, how, when and where.

The End of Subjection

The question of distributed aesthetics has to start here in the particulate flux of terabyte culture. A short anecdote to place the residual materiality of the object in exchange:

Back in July [2000], Amazon.com teamed up with Federal Express to deliver 250,000 copies of the new Harry Potter book to eager US fans. True to the spirit of 1-click™ shopping, no effort was spared in ensuring that the book hit people's doormats on the morning of publication. A press release issued the next day proudly declared it to be 'one of the largest sales and distribution events in e-commerce history'. In just 24 hours, over 300 tonnes or 188 million pages of Harry Potter magic were transported to homes across America. . . . A press release issued the next day proudly declared it to be 'one of the largest sales and distribution events in e-commerce history' At strategic locations across America, a fleet of 9000 trucks revved their engines, 100 planes rolled down the runways. Their mission: to deliver [250,000 copies of] *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* to a nation hungry for instant fulfilment (Wilsdon 2001: 1).

What this tale reminds us, again, is not only that there remain physical attributes, but that the distributed aesthetic is in its own way a flagbearer for an ideological construction of immateriality which overlays the physical

armature of trade. Amazon is all too happy for us to associate our purchasing with a mouse click. At the moment of purchase, these goods are vapourous anyway, all alure, bodiless, the mythical state of pure theory.

I cannot resist the analogy with the invisible labour none of us likes to do: cleaning, catering: the low-income jobs we train our students to avoid, and ourselves to ignore. But just as our refusal to take on dirty ill-paid jobs is turning into the contradictory 'hail and fuck off' of migration policies, so the contradictions of an imaginay disembodiment of trade is preparing a nasty contradiction of the unwitting arts. If no longer the tyranny of distance, still the power of geography remains in the temporality of our objects as much as their avoirdupois. And in that same resilient dimensionality and physicality counterbalancing the informationalising of "everything", we find a mirror of the contemporary formation of a networked subjectivity, or rather something that slips in after subjectivity, which I'd like to refer to as the citizen - not the legal entity, but the ancient root word: the participant in the polis.

What has changed to give Hardt and Negri the idea that there is a life beyond work is that leisure has been colonised by capital? Dallas Smythe's adage that television exists to sell audiences to advertisers is exemplary of the new sociology which we need: 'The material reality under monopoly capitalism is that all non sleeping time of most of the population is work time' (Smythe 1977). The trade in the value of attention matches the trade in the value of labour in its intensities and scale. Digitisation has achieved only a vastly more efficient market, in which any value can find its purchaser, no matter how bizarre the taste. The reverse is also the case: even the most bizarre taste has been turned into consumer demand, and in many instances, the contemporary arts have been in the forefront of supplying it.

Fragmentation is a modern phenomenon. Kracauer, for example, was already aware that the formal mechanisms of mass spectacle - the dance troupe the Tiller Girls for example - belonged foursquare to Taylorism: 'The masses organized in these movements come from offices and factories; the formal

principles according to which they are molded determines them in reality as well' (Kracauer 1995: 79). The segmentation and regularisation of bodies in Fordist production belong to the modernity which Agamben analyses as 'bare life', down to the factory as homologue of the camp. Constance Balides, commenting on Kracauer in the context of an essay in media history argues that the 'virtual spectacle' of theme park rides, in displacing the mass spectacle of regulated bodies moving in unison, reflects two key transitions in post-Fordist (she actually calls it neo-Fordist) production. Contemporary work is temporally and spatially decentred, splitting up the divisions between work and leisure, workplace and home. And the old subjection to massive machineries and their clocks has transformed into 'subjection by incorporation', the worker now feeling themselves integral to the circuits and flows of capital, relays rather than cogs (Balides 2003: 327-8).

This new mode of existing conforms to Hardt and Negri in a perverse way, by suggesting that the subjection that characterised modern manufacture, the subjection analysed by Lukacs (1971) for example, was embodied. It belonged to the age of the factory hand, surplus value extracted from the sweat and skill of the hourly-paid worker. But what is left in the indeterminate spaces between home and work are people who no longer see themselves alienated or reified: on the contrary, they know their contributions are important to the firm. They know they have to keep the workflow going. But at the same time, the benefits they expect in return are less substantial, and the work they perform less readily visible at the end of the day. It is not the goods that have dematerialised – their materiality is all too apparent to the sweatshop worker. Instead it is labour itself, the valorised labour of the creative, that becomes insubstantial, and with it the exercise of selfhood.

The distributed aesthetics of terabyte culture needs to be placed in relation both to the particulate materiality of productive and consumptive flows and in relation to the emergent subjectivity associated with them.

'Sieved through the narrow accountancy of a sterile search for money' (Dyson

1996: 16), as ever, creativity is not only a flow but a particulate flow, mirroring the segmentation of program segments and data bytes. Something analogous seems to be happening in the constellation of citizenship. Both the political analyses sketched above and the political economy underpinning Hardt and Negri and Offe's contributions suggest a movement away from subjection to the state and institutions, and towards (re)commodification of the citizen as a legally constituted entity whose key position is marked by rights. This shift includes a distressing movement away from the responsibilities of the republican burgher, marked, in Offe's analysis, by the failure of capital and labour to meet the 'moral' obligations to bring their wares to a single market. The legal discourse of rights masks the occlusion of the ethical discourse of responsibilities.

At the same time, the drift from consumer to prosumer noted by analysts as disparate as *The Economist* and Lash and Urry (1994) suggests a migration of productive labour from the manufacturing sector to the hands of the consumer herself, now charged with designing the modular make-up of her kitchen or car, installing and customising software, completing complex itinerary design online on behalf of travel companies . . . and so adding the task of building her own media interfaces to the existing capital and temporal investments she has in advertising (buying a TV, spending time online). Marked out in discourses as varied as economics and games studies, the prosumer now serves as the privileged figure of individualising tendencies in contemporary capital and contemporary culture. She is the epitome of a certain idealised but imaginary audience for modern art: active, smart, the creative participant in a culture which she has had no part in building.

The third pole of this tripartite construction of citizenship is the one in the news most today, the relationships between natives and migrants. The more mobile trade, investment and services become, the more protective of their borders the metropolitan nations; the more mobile skills and workforces are, the more restrictions are placed on the free flow of people. Meanwhile the differing layers of authenticity implicit in claims of nativity emerge in the 'politics of

identity', in direct contradiction with the production of a commodified rather than a subjected citizen.

Despite the contradictions to which they give rise, the forces operating on contemporary citizens tend towards a single conclusion: there is no inner life.

About fifteen years back, Félix Guattari proposed that 'there really isn't any exteriority: collective territorialised subjectivity is hegemonic' (Guattari 1995: 102). As grounds for a 'new aesthetic paradigm', the title of the chapter of *Chaosmosis* that these sentences are drawn from, this seems to me almost exactly the opposite of what is now the case. Interiority – individuated subjectivity – was invented the night Descartes spent in his tent doubting everything, not only God, but more significantly the existence of the world. If there was any one moment at which the sin against the Second Commandment became truly vicious, it was this: in place of Creation, Descartes would posit the determinations of geometry. The condition of the coming to being of the sovereign self was the dereliction of the world and its reduction to what Heidegger would come to call the world picture: 'That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man's becoming *subiectum* in the midst of that which is' (Heidegger 1977: 132). The tohu-bohu of the unformed world, waiting for God's informing breath, was settled in its objectivisation – ugly word – as the standing-reserve of an almighty knowledge.

Kant's transcendental aesthetic fulfills Descartes' visualisation of the world. In the *Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*, public space conforms to the geometry and regularity of space and time defined in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Such is the rock on which Foucault's disciplinary society would stand. But this edifice, more bridge than castle, required the equally staunch rock of the subject, and the subject, under this burden, unsurprisingly broke down, already in the plates of the *Encyclopedia*, if we are to believe Barthes (1989) – plates in which the rage to order already bred monsters.

Subjectivity was brief historical blip lasting a mere four centuries. Like privacy,

it was only ever a privilege of the wealthy in Europe and the Wersternised world. The self was only ever a construct in time, and its time, like that of privacy, has passed. Today only wife beaters and tax evaders claim a 'right' to privacy. Only the arrogant and those who wish to claim a legal defense of mental illness regard the self as a sacrosanct field of existence. For the rest of us, self is a necessary lens through which we are forced, unhappily, to experience the world. Our sense of an inner being is fed, as apparatus theory always argued, by machineries of consumption that require the burden of social life to fall on the shrinking and overburdened field of the ego. In the kind of reality BF Skinner quite rightly asserted to be the only one we know, there is no evidence of an inner life; only of consumer choices and, at best, refusals.

The displacement of inner life by consumer choices brings what was previously private, even intimate, into the public domain of commerce. At the same time, what is left out of the typical development of the new politics and the new economics is culture. In this instance, culture, like the unconscious before it, and nature before that, can be defined (and arguably is structured) by its exclusion from politico-economic life. Culture as social unconscious and as second nature, as the estranged and excluded other of global imperium, is now ripe for exploitation. In the mid-19th century, Thomas Huxley proclaimed the endless bounty of the oceans (and their infinite capacity for carrying and disposing of waste). Sadly we have learned otherwise. Today we are disposed to believe in the infinite capacities of human creativity in an equally mythic way. At the same time, however, the waters of creativity are of use only to the extent that they can be tamed. Culture, creativity, the unconscious, nature itself are of value to the extent that they can provide intellectual property (pharmaceuticals, DNA, songs and stories . . .) – or evidence of resistance.

In perhaps the greatest expression of artistic philosophy of the last century, Theodor Adorno argued that art is compelled 'to undergo subjective mediation in its objective constitution' (Adorno 1997: 41). If art were to undertake the task of critiquing the objective historical conditions of living, it could only rest on the experience of those conditions in the way that was most deeply felt: as

an individual. 'If the artist's work is to reach beyond his own contingency', he wrote in the *Aesthetic Theory*, 'then he must in return pay the price that, in contrast to the discursively thinking person, he cannot transcend himself and the objectively established boundaries' (Adorno 1997: 42). Unlike philosophy, art cannot transcend the givenness both of the world and the conditions of living in it. Today, that cruel effect of capital and modernity can no longer be admitted as the proper lens through which art passes. Such previously personal creativity – as late as the 1960s – is now a mere resource for exploitation.

We are now in a position to re-evaluate Fredric Jameson's twenty-year-old thesis that the last remaining areas of the world unexploited by capitalism were the Third World and the unconscious. Here I do not mean to echo Wenders half-anguished, half-amused description, 'The Americans have colonised our unconscious'. Instead, I want to argue that exactly in the unconscious, there where for Adorno the crucial work of the artist was undertaken, there is only a workshop, artisanal perhaps but nonetheless articulated, a relay in the circuits of global capital. Subjectivity has been displaced from its sovereign status and shifted to the margins of political and social life. As a result, paradoxically, subjectivity gains in value to both capitalism and radical politics.

We confront a world in which Freud's old adage, 'Wo Es war, soll Ich werden' must be reversed: where 'I' was, 'it' will be. Of course Das Es, for Freud, was the unconscious. For us it is merely things: the external or externalisable attributes (such as skills and creativity) out of which we construct an exterior for the rest of the world. This is the price we pay in order to inhabit a networked world and a distributed aesthetic.

Distributed Aesthetics

"Reification won't get you out of the parking lot"
Things, Bob Perelman, 1986

Some years ago, I asked a physicist about how cathode ray tubes work. He told me the only explanation that squared with Heisenberg's uncertainty

principle was that we inhabit the only one among all the universes in which an electron fired at a screen reaches the destination it is intended for. Some similar mysticism attends the most banal experience of TV, computers and our expert-riddled lifeworlds. So much of what we use escapes our comprehension. Not only referential truth but the truth of any given apparatus to any ordinary user is statistically almost certain to be missing.

As if in response Walter Benjamin, here discussing the emergent nazi state under the disguise of Baroque culture, redirects our understandings of truth:

The object of knowledge, determined as it is by the intention inherent in the concept, is not the truth. Truth is an intentionless state of being . . . The proper approach to it is not therefore one of intention and knowledge, but rather a total immersion in it. Truth is the death of intention (Benjamin 1977: 36)

Benjamin's insight should be placed alongside Hardt and Negri's desire for a human energy that exceeds its rule or exploitation. Intention is that mode of thinking in which we take command of the future. Where truth is intentional, in Benjamin's terms, it is both objectifying (and therefore not truthful) in the present, and deterministic when it comes to the future. Intentionality strips the futurity from the future, takes away its fundamental quality of being unlike the present.

To strip away the unforeseeable nature of the future is equivalent, not to be too rhetorical about it, to snatching away the food, clothing, affection and education that might fulfil a mother's wild ambitions for her child. To operate as a relay in the system is to accept not one's own but the system's truth, even though it means sacrificing both the substance of the present and the immateriality of the future. Whether we conceive ourselves as nodes and switches or as the flow itself, we are caught in a self-replicating code, a spectacle with no depth.

The problem with such history-ending narrative closures is that they leave no room for exactly what they mourn: the future. In their place I like Hannah

Arendt's concept of natality:

the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities. Moreover, since action is the political activity par excellence, natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought (Arendt 1958: 9)

Natality is the potential that an infant is born with, the open future it brings into being with its birth. In my considerations of the constitution of the contemporary polis, I'm caught by what appears to me more and more the centrality – and you'll forgive the oxymoron – of migration. The problem, as I've stated it, is at least in part that the world of things has overtaken the subjective world that once existed, and made it one more thing, or perhaps a source of things, among other things. Vilém Flusser, however, notes an incompleteness in this thesis:

humans are not completely contingent. There is in their surroundings one place without things . . . This place that is free of things may be called the ironic . When we take an ironic stance, we are afforded a clearer view of our contingency (Flusser 2003: 20)

Flusser is thinking here about the experience of migration. The freedom of the migrant is the fruit of crisis, forced or willed, that drives someone from their home. It results in the unexpected gift of freedom – from habitual horizons of reference, from unexamined traditions. I think of it as akin to Nietzsche's aristocratic disdain for those who have not yet made Zarathustra's leap beyond. For Nietzsche, that was enough: to live beyond good and evil.

For Flusser this is only the first moment of freedom. The second, far more difficult, comes not from departure but from arrival. The exile arrives in their new home as something new, something different. Such difference is information, Bateson's 'difference that makes a difference' The exile 'becomes the catalyst for the synthesis of new information' in an external dialogue with those that

now surround him. At the same time, however, in an internal dialogue, the migrant compares the old home with the new, making with luck some creative novum out of their disparities.

When such internal and external dialogues resonate with each other, not only the world but the settled inhabitants and the expellees as well are transformed creatively . . . the freedom of the expellee consists in remaining foreign, different from the others. It is the freedom to change oneself and others (Flusser 2003: 86)

Flusser, exiled from Czechoslovakia as a Jew and from Brazil by the military dictatorship, is not starry-eyed. He knows that the dialogue with the foreigner is as often angry, even murderous, as it is invigorating and open. But it is dialogue.

It's in this motif of the second freedom of the migrant that I understand the capacities of distributed aesthetics. The network itself, despite our best beliefs and efforts in the early 1990s, is not intrinsically liberating or democratic. On the contrary, it is the model and the vehicle for a reintegrated capital served by recommodified citizens. More empirically, I think it's easy enough to demonstrate that the critical discourses, curatorial practices and general experience of new media arts are no more global than those of contemporary art, and in many instances far less so. Unless you can travel to one of the major global events (Ars Electronica, SIGGRAPH, ISEA) or get to one of the rare centres for media arts (FACT, ZKM, ACMI), you will see in general only your national artists and a few travellers, often enough underwritten by a necessarily normative praxis of critical praise and institutional subvention. Books like *Prefiguring Cyberculture* and Mitchell Whitelaw's *Metacreation* understandably focus on Australian artists. My first books, for similar reasons, focused on British ones; Peter Lunenberg does the same. To write knowledgeably about international artists only betrays that you belong to the privileged biennial club. We all understand the double bind. But we replicate nonetheless the exclusions of the established artworld until, in recent years, it too began to colonise the Third World. Is there really only a rag media collective in India? Is there really no digital art in Latin America?

The nation state maintains its pull, specifically in this area of culture. Today the state's freedom to raise tax levels, wage war, or use any damn wavelength it feels like is subject to all kinds of external pressures, treaties, obligations, inward investment threats . . . The state is no longer free to run its economy or its polity unhindered. In many cases it no longer even has the monopoly on violence. What it retains are the power to police its borders, monitor morals, set national curricula, and subsidise the arts. Culture is the last arena for state legitimisation in the early 21st century. In this context, the migrant will always be an embarrassment. At the same time, in the present context, it is probably legitimate to admit that the native is also either embarrassing – when it takes the form of the settler culture – or shaming, when we finally confront first peoples. This dialectic of home and away, this unsettled and unsettling pole is the unrealised edge of the dialectic that currently offers us the best opportunities of making new and breaking out, in a period in which, Frederic Jameson suggests, we are more ready to think the end of human existence on the planet than to contemplate the possibility that capitalism is a temporary phenomenon.

This empty shell processed by the world's circuits and contingent upon the commodified and objectified world of things, Flusser argues, is not entirely determined by them. It is instead capable of this wrenching flex of irony, all too often an estrangement forced on the exile, the refugee. But it is their – and our – only freedom. Our proximity to Maori or Aborigine in Aotearoa or in Australia is a privilege that should teach us how deeply we are already not at home. Networked subjectivity, distributed aesthetics, is a way of acknowledging that change in status.

But it may also be a snare and a delusion. An apparatus, no matter how staggeringly complex, will not save us; and indeed, the more mysterious its complexity makes it, the less we stand to become independent of it or in it.

art (?) works

An art that queries the vehicles and presence of the network in the material world is what I prize, and celebrate. I want, in fact, to show some work by friends of mine, in New Zealand, Canada, Australia and the UK, not so much to evidence my belonging in this company, but to flag the migrations that constitute at least one ironic inhabitation of the world. And to make some points. The first is, I suppose, the fundamental situatedness of being with a piece of art. All the examples I'll show are documentation, not artworks – a slippage that's easier to make in digital media than, say, with photographic slides. The first are page proofs in pdf from a book art project, *The Falling of the Monumental*, by the British artist Richard Davies. In Vivian Sobchack's words (in her 1992 book, *The Address of the Eye*), ' . . . when we experience the 'timelessness' that a photograph confers on its subject matter, we are experiencing the photograph's compelling emptiness; it exists as the possibility of temporality but is a vacancy within it'. That vacancy is a raw material for the artist now, along with software and printer technology. Davies' inspiration lies in part in Whistler's engravings of the Thames banks, but caught in the moment, after 9/11, when every tall building shifted from totem to tragedy in waiting, and every jet became a missile.

These works belong not to photography, despite their use of Adobe Photoshop. Their medium is print, with everything that entail in the transitions from RGB to CMYK colour, the control of the presses, the choices of paper and inks. Davies art is the heir of silkscreen and lithography rather than the photos that he uses as a source. Print is a medium permanently underestimated in the artistic canon, despite the beauties it offers. It lures the digital artist because, unlike the contemporary artist, if such an abstract creature exist, the digital demands a level of craft which has been abandoned by the biennial arts in favour of that 'transcendence of the aesthetic' which, for Agamben, denotes its step outside history.

That craft demands our attention is proven again in *Boy*, a work by Welby Ings. Though marketed – extremely intelligently – as a short film, this work exists as an exhibition and as installation, a commentary on cinema as much as an

example of it. What most intrigues me is its deployment of layers. If anything characterises the digital image, it is its sense of layering, the handling of one layer over another, under another, the passages between layers. Ings makes a special trade of this in dragging elements of the frame up to the picture plane, forcing you to refocus, demanding an awareness of depth as an irreducible quality of projection. Ings describes his work as design. Like Davies, he seems to set a caveat around the word 'art'.

And not without reason. Some years ago, the British philosopher Peter Osborne remarked that art took up the tasks of ontology and epistemology at the moment that philosophy undertook its turn to language. One might say something similar is occurring today. Art has abandoned its quest for an understanding of the world and how we know it in favour of the pursuit of what it is itself. Art made, as Thierry de Duve puts it, of *n'importe quoi*, of whatever, asks us what makes this whatever art. One answer might be, an intention. But that, we have seen, is a barrier against truth, and so against the possibility of describing the world and what it is to live in it. The media, and digital media especially at present, have, I believe, taken up the challenge art has abandoned in its post-Duchamp descent into neo-conceptualism. A media designer abandons in turn the *mise-en-abyme* of the concept of art in favour of the work of making, the ethics of translation, and the craft of representing. As Peter Lunenfeld writes,

This attention to rigor, the desire to make as well as consume, the modesty of service, the belief in beauty and pleasure as beautiful and pleasurable in and of themselves, even the acceptance of its position within market economies – all of these and more really situate design as an exemplar for getting past the unresolved disputes of the 20th century, and exploring what could really be 'new' about media design (Lunenfeld 2004: 69).

Ings' film undertakes a thick description of bog trade in small town New Zealand, small town anywhere for that matter, with a cast of locals and a retroengineered set whose detail dissolves even in the 35mm print on which he lavished interminable care. Drawing on advertising, music video and DVD design more than cinematic narrative or style, the piece works most of all as

an ethical essay in the capacities of the audiovisual to convey memories into the future. As a straightforward screening, even interrupted, it begins to ask other questions about the position of the viewer, and especially the position of the screen in all this

The distributed requires a local, but a local degenerated into the universal of the screen. It's this universality which, in part, drives Stella Brennan's work. In *ZenDV*, she puns on Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film*. As everyone knows, *Zen for Film* was an hour-long reel of exposed film stock printed to positive so that the viewer watched an hour of white screen. When John Cage caught up with the work some years after its debut, he noted that it had acquired, in the interim, the dust and scratches that evidenced its passage through the world. Brennan's looped digital installation documented here is pristine. No dust can scar its emulsion or hairs catch in its gate. Instead, Brennan uses filters, simple user-friendly plug-ins from Apple's FinalCut Pro, to provide the evidence of an aging that has never and could never take place. The elementary lesson is of the materiality of film, its physical traverse through time, but also of the capacity of digital media to emulate that passage, to inscribe it in advance, as it were intentionally, and so to demonstrate the failure of the image to speak of what is or has been, but only to make the future contingent on itself.

Colour bars are an essential tool for video engineers. No two monitors are the same; and the video gamut of Microsoft doesn't match that of Apple, or PAL that of NTSC. The purest colours, in any case, veer towards dimness and invisibility as they approximate asymptotically to the purity of infra-red and ultra-violet. But these colour bars indicate their own malleability. At the same time, as reference colours, chroma blue or colour bars, they work with the keener sense of hearing to register fluctuations in tape-travel (that don't occur in digital media). To add a layer, Brennan pastes snaps and pops from another plug-in, this time to ProTools audio site, to introduce that critical term, noise. The irruption of improbable noise however is not significant if it does not map some contingency, as here it does not, product of a random number generator. Augury of an impossible history in a dimension that cannot exist: *Zen*, at the very moment of reference to the international, institutional standard. For our

purposes it is essential to reiterate: *ZenDV* interferes with the calibration of TV screens. It home sin on the dispersed and entirely material objects in which, we might otherwise believe, there exists an insubstantial array of data. This noise, and this impossible dimensionality, refers us out from the network to the interface.

Time also operates in a different mode for Matt Rogalsky, Canadian sound and music experimentalist. You may recall a law suit brought by shock-jock Rush Limbaugh against a radio station that curtailed his show by cutting out the pauses to allow more advertising time. The device used for stripping silences samples the audio track, decides on a level which it deems 'active', and removes everything else from the tape. Rogalsky determined to do the opposite, and wrote a script to strip the content from programmes and reveal only what was left in their interstices. This short audio piece, *A Little Bird Told Me*, is the result of applying this process to a speech announcing the resignation of CISA chief Carles Trenet in the Rose Garden of the White House, June 6 2004. You may recognise, in the suspicion of intaken breathes and bubbles at the lip, the presence of George Bush Jnr. The spatialised present extending or repeating itself into the future produces such strange forms of temporality, lacunae, gaps, unsilent silences: just as power produces resistance (and vice versa), a problematic neatly summed up in Rogalsky's piece.

Rotoscoping, a kind of tracing, ties Gina Czarnecki's imagery to drawing: a kind of painstaking digital tracing that separates the body from its ground, makes it more naked by erasing the world. Everyone knows that in the digital arena there is no final cut. There is no definitive moment when you stand back from the canvas and say, there, that's it, that's perfect. As Mallarmé said of poems, this work – *Nascent* – is not finished – it has been abandoned. But that act of abandonment is what finishes the artist's work, twice over. The first time, these naked souls, bare below the flesh, are abandoned by their maker. The second time round, they are abandoned to the tender mercies of their audiences, who in interactions or in the visceral and mental reactions the works evoke, remake the work. Are these tortured, anorexic, brutalised bodies laid out on the

operating table to incriminate everyone who looks? Or are they undiscovered beauties, like the tales the first microscopists left of the unparalleled beauty of fleas?

Traced, retraced, reimaged, divorced from their origins, blended, coloured, driven simultaneously into increasingly embodied embodiment and increasingly virtual virtuality, the figures and their taut disciplines of muscle and motion – are they ripped apart by contradiction or resolved in the mystical rebellion of the flesh and the machine? Even the doctor accused of the institutional control of looking has to acquaint themselves over and over with the frailty and the unbearable resilience of bodies, bodies in pain, bodies that, no matter how thin the thread that hooks them onto life, refuse to die. Like the stretched figures of petroglyphs, these stylised, elongated and compressed frames, curled to a foetus or laid out like a deposition at the foot of the cross of the Son of Man, require our tenderness, our pity.

Gina Czarnecki's *Nascent* addresses, again among other themes the forbidden figuring of her family's history in the Shoah. Against the ahistorical silencing of the sublime, her images strive against beauty, and at the same time against the removal of suffering from history. Likewise she boldly figures where the Jewish faith refuses (and Christianaioty hypocritically allows) transgression of the second commandment. I suspect God forbid graven images because He feared his power relied on peoples' faith in a God outside of history and therefore beyond dispute and dialogue. But history is built out of communication, and the future can never be built out of the ineffable removed from argument, change and history.

Jackie Sawatsky's RGB is a much kinder collaboration. Teams set out to portray their environment, briefed to seek out respectively red, blue and green to shoot. The gathered footage is run through a script in MaxMSP that strips everything but those colours from each image stream (and originally butts in the wildtrack when there is no colour available). The machine's perception of colour, needless to say, doesn't match even the gradually attuned vision that teams bring to

hunting down their target colours. More than that, however, is the fact that the art only exists as a project for people to carry out, a collaboration, a brief, intense experience of community, and of its transfiguration as raw material for software transformation.

And I'll add, though as an aside for the moment, the work also makes a commitment to ownership in common, in a period in which intellectual property is one of the half dozen most pressing political issues in globalisation. Open Source, Creative Commons and what Richard Barbrook calls the Internet Gift Economy are in many ways more abstract than this gift of a programme, incorporating its users, for making the world a little more strange, a little less foreseeable.

And a final example, Janine Randerson's video documentation for her installation *Report from Darmstadt*. As we heard from Nicholas Bourillaud earlier, projection has become a cliché, as vitrines were in the 1990s. The projected image is like and unlike any other image. Plato establishes his tragic metaphor of the cave on the basis of projected light. Melanie Klein understands projection as one of the primal processes by which the infant child copes with the instincts that threaten to engulf it. For Plato, the reflection is a delusion, and only the light source is real – a thesis most projectionists can easily counter. For Klein, projection's first and formative task is to deflect outwards the infantile death instinct: to project onto bad objects the destructive impulses that otherwise the mewling brat would visit on itself. The beginnings of mental and psychic life alike lie in the detournement of light, and the distortions that reflection and projection bring to an ordinary upwelling of biology or structure of the world.

But then, Leroi-Gourhan records the hands of hunters outlined in sprays of ochre on the walls of caves. The puff of life that so many gods give to so many clay effigies is one of the first techniques for mark-making – a projection of breath as colour onto the wall. Nor would the modern world's picture of itself be possible if it were not already a projection of one kind or another.

The age of the world picture pictured the world with two tools, perspective and cartography, systems for deploying knowledge of three dimensions onto sheets of two. That every map projection is a distortion any schoolboy can tell you. That perspective is illusory has been bread and butter to the arts since Panofsky.

And yet video projection is today despised because it is both overused and underexplored. To project means. And projection as technique is rich with possibilities. Yet neither meaning nor technique are explored in the endless rows of four-square projections onto flat white walls. The gifts of keystone, anamorphosis and the endless variety of reflective and translucent materials lie about like last year's broken toys. The majority of artworks scarcely even question the landscape format of the aspect ratios they inherit.

If our European ancestors set out to conquer the world with their maps and drawings, with the results we know, Randerson's activity is more like the child's, but without the savage motivation Klein ascribes to projection. Instead, you might say, she reverses the introjection of objects that occurred when Descartes first isolated himself from the world to ask how he could be sure the world existed. The possible answer – that "I" created the world – is one that devours the world and all its lives and loves, reduces them to their map, to their assigned places in the grid of geometrical perspective.

These suspended domes each replace the flat page of the atlas with the curved surface that the atlas sought to flatten. Not that these are globes or even hemispheres, so not in themselves stitched into the project of finding an adequate miniaturisation of the universe, making it portable, as the oil painting, the map and the drawing-master's manual had done. Their form is disconnected from the purposes of representation. Their shape seems more reminiscent of speaker cones or the mirrored parabola behind the bulb that shapes a torch's beam: shapes made from technologies, not nature, and destined not just to receive but to refocus and transmit the light that falls so softly on them.

Projection is an art without properties if by property we mean the textbook definition of the right to deny another the use of something you have. Projection is quite the opposite. As a psychological ploy, it is obdurate giving with no room left for refusal. As the process of focused light, it is nothing if it cannot pour out, only exists as a throwing forth. Projection replaces projectiles as peace replaces war: both are gifts that cannot be refused, but only one comes capable of richer messages than "Surrender or die".

Conclusion

The ambitious term 'new light' that forms my title has its own history, derives from the tohu-bohu I mentioned earlier – the Hebrew phrase translated in the second verse of *Genesis* as 'without form and void'. The term exercised the greatest minds of the 11th and 12th centuries, culminating in Robert Grosseteste's little tractate *De Luce* (MacKenzie 1996). Was there something there before God threw the switch? Grosseteste's mystical tour de force is an argument that light was the source for all creation, the first act necessarily, because on it all else depends, specifically for form: no light, no shape.

In a subjectless, recommodified world of self-replicating particulate flux, where knowledge is an object-oriented and statistical simulacrum, drawing its energy from finite reserves of nature, culture and creativity. it's unsurprising that we sit undecided between particle and waveform, an integral flow and a disintegrated fragmentation. This is the nature of light as physis, as part of the green world, and understandable in materialist terms as matter-energy, space-time and entropy, homeostasis or emergence. What I do not yet understand, and what I believe is vital, is what light is when it becomes technology.

These notes on periodisation then are a small pledge towards a work of criticism I have yet to undertake. But I think there are a couple of things to say. One is that the people whose work I've shown, whatever they call themselves, are making the world a better place, one computer at a time. I would be seriously worried, fifteen years after Linus Thorvalds launched Linux and

the Open Source movement, a decade after Richard Barbrook's Internet Gift Economy, seven years after Lawrence Lessig's Code and the formation of the Creative Commons movement, if all we had to show as a map for coping with globalisation, the G8, the WTO and GATS, global warming, the acidification of the oceans, the decline of democracy and the commodification of the person was the space between two piles of paper. The blogosphere, wikis, moodle, web.radio, podcasting and the hotly debated but vital, practical 'immanent utopias' (to use Bloch's phrase) of open source and creative commons

As the example from Peter Robinson's *Divine Comedy* at the beginning suggests, a philosophical outcome, is the paradoxically positive value of the void, or nothingness, of negation at origin. Against such Nietzschean nihilism as that of Baudrillard or Vattimo, digital media seems to me to propose nothingness as natality, as Benjamin's messianic time, against the atemporal incommunicado of the sublime and equally against loss, lack, the manque à être and the being towards death.

Something else Robinson's *Comedy* demonstrates, the important thing about code is not meaning. It is in fact performativity, the butt of Peter Lunenfeld's critique of the demo-or-die culture, but nonetheless as much a fact of digital media as individuality was of art. Demanding, as the price of entry, a high level of artisanship, digital media culture seeks proof of skill (and as we say 'proof of concept') in a practice that achieves something. We seem no longer to require anything similar of art.

And so my second conclusion is a question, and one I know is hard to ask at a time when in this country the arts are under attack, and our instinct is to rally to them. We lived through this in the Thatcher years, notably when the BBC was threatened with commercialisation by the Peacock Committee. At that stage, the Left rallied to the aging Auntie Beeb, even though we believed that it was the bastion of middle class values. So my question is this. In an age when art has abandoned so much in favour of an introspective analysis of what is or is not art, of its boundaries, of which we have seen so many examples in the

last few days, is the defense of art a defense of the indefensible? Is it time to encourage art to undertake its entertaining, charming and ultimately pointless navel gazing, a form of pure mathematics if you like. Should we now hand the work of translating planetary counter-globalisation, the ethics of the new millennium, and our experience of the world, to media practices that no longer claim the name and authority of that word that sprang into existence a scant few centuries ago. Not an answer, but a genuine question: is it time to admit that art has either painted itself into a corner, or discovered its particular and transhistorical task of defining its own limits and thereby the limits of everything that borders on it? Is it, to return to Agamben's phrase, the mode in which humanity describes the limits of living in the present? Is it in effect that branch of the media that properly devotes itself to self-reflexivity, while the rest of the media go on with the historical tasks of remembrance, experience and change?

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