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No New Utopia?
The Crisis of Art as Critique
Under Globalisation

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Abstract

'Globalisation', a term invented by corporations, is understood today in a variety of ways. Its fundamental economic orientation is underlined by the specific ideological conjunction of neoliberalism and Western liberal democracy. This combination effectively usurps the traditional role of world politics, replacing it with the regulatory and administrative operations of vastly expanded markets. Such a global shift simultaneously replaces traditional notions of oppositional and Leftist critique with a naturalised image of 'neutral' economic exchange applied worldwide. The general deracination of critical and political opposition that results is also crucially apparent in the production of a contemporary 'global culture'.

Promotion of such culture occurs alongside, and in consensus with, the broader spectacle-orientated media-entertainment culture — which is also, crucially, attended by multinational commercial interests. Against celebratory representations of the buoyant contemporary global 'culture industry' these purvey, many alternative art practices have nevertheless emerged. Such practices radically contradict the positive image of globalisation as an 'enlightened' self-fulfilling prophecy of imminent contemporary progress. While drawing from avant-garde and 'neo' avant-garde heritages, the critical and resistant practices of contemporary artists and collectives, sometimes loosely affiliated with the much broader and conveniently labelled 'anti-globalisation' movement, utilise highly specific, often semi-legal means to respond to such changes.

Central to the multiplicity of these disparate flowerings of critique is their questioning of the machinations of a globalised art world, which seeks to present a completed picture of contemporary culture that incorporates all difference and is ideologically opposed to all expressions of genuinely critical negativity. The paradox of today's 'triumphant globalisation' is its inability to contain or curb the growing points of sociopolitical contestation that arise through its engendering of multiple, globally dispersed, zones of chaos. These points mark globalisation's ultimate failure to successfully unite the world in the image of its privileged markets by facilitating numerous oppositional 'cracks' in its imperialist vision.
Preface

This thesis arose out of my ongoing practice as a contemporary artist, and because I am an artist with a history in and commitment to the alternative possibilities of Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs). From such involvements it seemed to me that many contemporary artists, especially younger so-called emerging artists of the local Australian creative milieu in which I practised, were less and less concerned with articulating any type of critical or analytic position. If many discredited ‘avant-garde’ criticality, they also, and equally thoroughly, implicitly discredited any notions of contemporary art as potentially critically resistant.

Whilst contemporary disregard for and suspicion of avant-garde terminology seemed completely justifiable, the seeming absence of any art-critical positioning was harder to understand. Indeed, the paradigmatic attitude amongst many local contemporary artists was their unquestioned deference to the prevailing status quo of ‘official’ cultural institutions, and particularly to the highly valorised commercial galleries. This attitude was met, at the same time, by numerous ‘alternative’ artist-run spaces keenly adopting self-promotional, quasi-commercial roles for the potentially increased short-term career exposure of the individual artists involved.

Alongside these local cultural trends was the resounding political successes of the global Right: in Australia, the victories of the ruling and deeply conservative Liberal Party prime ministership of John Howard, and in the United States, the even more profound victories of ultra ‘neo-con’ corporate-friendly President George W. Bush. Meanwhile, the public face of the political Left, from a Western perspective at least, appeared in the economically rationalist ‘centrist’ policies of Britain’s Tony Blair. Overall, contemporary Western politics, it appeared, had collapsed into the administrative pursuit of a ‘consensual centre’ insulating itself against any of the signs of conflict or oppositional antagonism that one would expect to be central to the existence of a political Left or Right.

Nevertheless, the necessity of political struggle and opposition seemed, more than ever, constitutive of an actual democracy. Against this rapidly depoliticising, ‘post-political’ background, ‘momentous’ events occurred, most notable of which, perhaps, was the 2001 September 11 terrorist attacks on New York’s World Trade Center. These prefigured the consolidation of United States imperialist hegemony, fully expressed in that country’s subsequent invasion of the sovereign nation Iraq, against advice from innumerable security and weapons analysts as well as from the UN Security Council.
What became even more striking in the course of undertaking this research was evidence that the entire terrain of contemporary politics had radically altered under what is currently referred to as ‘globalisation’. In this thesis, ‘globalisation’ is critiqued as a supposedly self-regulating, neo-liberal market paradigm, conjoined with a paternalistic Western liberal democracy whose current attempted implementation is thoroughly transnational. Globalisation’s effects have been particularly dramatic since the highly visible collapse of a readily identifiable international socialist or related collective, a global alternative. In the absence of an identifiably united internationalist opposition, ‘global’ politics has largely been usurped by the totalising master discourse of neo-liberal economics, to which, globalisation’s apologists argue, there is no justifiable alternative.

This effective colonisation of politics by the ‘neutral’ discourse of global economics has also had profound effects on contemporary art. Such art is now increasingly beholden to the consensual ‘centrist’ politics of neo-liberal ‘democracy’ and apparently less and less concerned with socio-cultural issues of ‘justice’ or ‘equality’. As a result many contemporary artists seek instead their accelerated integration into globalisation’s celebrated markets. Thus in contemporary ‘global art’, active engagement in potentially resistant or oppositional practices broadly tied to post-Marxist Leftist cultural heritages, and including the examples of conceptuasil, de-materialist, site-specific and art specifically critiquing the effects of its institutionalisation, has, at a superficial glance, been outmoded. In its place, ‘hybridised’ practices have emerged. These are often reminiscent of, or even indistinguishable from, the pervasively commercialised ‘global culture’ of essentially Western populist media/entertainment forms, which encompass design, fashion and advertising.

Acknowledging these conditions, this thesis aims to theoretically reconnect contemporary art, practised under the enveloping circumstances of contemporary ‘globalisation’, with the critical possibilities of a truly social-democratic politics. The arising possibilities in contemporary art are necessarily critically opposed to the stultifying domination of contemporary culture by the politics of an unashamed economically fixated neo-liberal consensus. And while critiques of commodification and their effects on the production of art have long been in evidence, their present strategic de-favouring in contemporary art criticism fundamentally supports the unfettered spread of global economic rationalism.

Ultimately, this thesis does not argue heroically — and impossibly — for an absolute ‘outside’ to contemporary globalisation discourses. Instead it identifies, as an example, varieties of contemporary art that critically address the circumstances of their own global economic, social and political production. Opposing the rampant expansion of rigidly
rationalist neo-liberal globalisation, in the context of this thesis, means daring to propose
contemporary critical practice of art, from alternative positions of 'utopian' 'im-possibility'
and economic 'irrationalism'. The gaps these positions open are a vital means of refusing an
assumed a priori agreement with a global system which rhetorically presents itself as
inherently 'reasonable' but ultimately espouses the ideologically conservative discourses of the
political Right and even extreme Right. This thesis therefore theorises contemporary global art
that refutes globalisation's triumphalist 'New World Order', an order that ultimately
reconfigures all social, cultural, ethical and political expressions as secondary to the regulatory
and controlling functioning of world markets.
Introduction

The notion of contemporary art’s criticality, that is, its essentially critical orientation towards contemporary society, has a long history. Under present globalising conditions, contemporary art’s claims to a privileged ‘critical’ view of the world have become particularly complex and problematic. Chapter 1, Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, surveys the wide body of literature tracing the emergence of this socio-critical conception of art’s role, and the subsequent challenges posed to it via its incorporation into a much broader ‘culture industry’. Today such an industry has indeed become truly global in its reach and influence, and it affects the production of contemporary culture in very specific ways that challenge its oppositional and politically resistant capabilities.

Chapter 1 begins with a historical consideration of the oppositional and socially determined agendas of some specific internationalist avant-gardes. In particular, it addresses the significantly differentiated socio-political positions of international avant-garde movements such as Dada, pursuing an anarchically discontinuous vision of contemporary culture, and Russian Constructivism, allied to the revolutionary agendas of the 1917 Soviet Revolution. Self-consciously internationalist movements such as these viewed art as having a distinctly socio-critical purpose, a purpose that could additionally be employed in the transformation of contemporary society. For both Dada and Constructivism, though they are very different, art was ideally a means of seriously contesting the dominant moral and mercantile values of an increasingly industrialised and conservative bourgeois society. Art, then, was crucial in changing society.

This notion of the functional agency of art provided a loose model for subsequently expanded ‘avant-garde’ activity. It appears in manifold guises in the equally internationalist activities of ‘Funk’, Fluxus, Conceptualist and ‘Situationist’ ‘movements’.¹ The oppositional and socially confrontational dimension of the activities of some of these groups and artists were eventually absorbed by the discourses of sociology and critical theory. As a result, their intended socio-critical function began to take on a passive ‘educational’ cast, as their claims to critical agency were made part of an emerging international canon of generalised contemporary art criticism. Even so, the critical intentions of such ‘post’ avant-garde movements were regarded as sound and realistically socially transformative, especially by influential theorists of

¹ The notion that such groups, groups like Dada, were simply united and ultimately homogenous is generally a convenient trope employed by art historians to discuss their activities. Indeed, such cultural manifestations, and Dada is a perfect example, were often distinctly and intentionally unsystematic.
the Frankfurt School of sociology such as Theodor Adorno. Adorno theorised the concept of a contemporary ‘culture industry’, predicated on endemic commodification and elevating of populist entertainment to the status of art. Such a negative transformation of contemporary culture, Adorno believed would be redressed via the overtly critical orientation of international avant-gardes.

The initial faith in the socio-political agency of the avant-garde expressed by theorists such as Adorno seemed supported later by the wide-scale student and worker protests of the 1960’s. In Paris in May 1968, for example, student protesters and workers’ unions united to momentarily shut down the city as they contested the socially and economically repressive regime of the French presidency of Charles de Gaulle. Yet the utopian social promise suggested by dissenting action such as this, action that was also supported by cultural collectives such as the ‘Situationists’, never fully came to fruition. Long-established social structures and hierarchies simply re-sedimented in expected patterns. The emergence of what in the West has been called French ‘post-structuralism’² broadly attempted to account for the apparent failure of such significant and spontaneous socio-critical dissent. In doing so, these theorists also problematised positive assumptions regarding the critical agency of contemporary art. Some, such as Jean Baudrillard, considered claims of the critical agency of contemporary culture utterly misguided. This was, he said, because world culture had been overtaken by depth-less circulation of a techno-imagistic simulation.³ Meanwhile, in a completely apposite vein, yet other French post-structuralists, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, extolled the liberationist and productivist capacity of contemporary culture to inventively contribute to multiple desiring machines and molecular revolutions.⁴

The ‘revolutionary’ quotient of international contemporary critical culture, however, was additionally challenged by the 1989 collapse of the Communist-installed Berlin Wall, which announced the demise of the Soviet Union and the supposed ‘death’ of globally credible Left-wing politics. Because critical strains of contemporary culture were traditionally associated with leftist politics, the global disappearance of an identifiable anti-capitalist alternative, although it had obviously been fatally flawed, was a crucial blow. Such a blow was only doubled with the consequent global emergence of the Reagan/Thatcher era in the 1980’s. This era saw the global

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² The term ‘post-structuralism’ is actually an American invention used to package and unify internally a divergent multiplicity of contemporary philosophical and critical outlooks. See Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, eds, *French Theory in America*.
³ See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 1: 3 (v) Reality and simulation: The critical vacuum.
⁴ Ibid., 1: 3 (vi) Ethics and aesthetics: Autonomy, nomadism and expression.
conjunction of the economic aims of the U.S. Republican presidency of Ronald Reagan (1981–89) and the Tory leadership of British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1983–92). Their joint economic reign was based on principles of market deregulation and accelerated privatisation. This culminated in the contemporary global rise of neo-liberalism, a virulent ‘naturalised’ form of capitalism to which, it was suggested, there was no alternative.

In conclusion, Chapter 1 addresses the critical effects of this particularly rampant form of ‘world capitalism’ on contemporary cultural production, especially as such culture is determined to pursue a vision allied to broadly Left, socially progressive politics. Neo-liberal ‘world capitalism’, conjoined with a prescriptive form of Western liberal democracy that theoretically supports concepts of difference and multiculturalism while massively profiting from them, defines the nature of what today is called globalisation. Globalisation’s massive capacity to absorb difference, opposition and instances of cultural resistance challenges considerably earlier notions of a socio-critically engaged contemporary art. In the current ideologically invested domain of contemporary ‘global’ cultural production, globalisation discourse has encouraged many contemporary practitioners to consensually embrace its core neo-liberal ethos. For such artists, issues of contemporary ‘global culture’s’ core dependency on the accelerated corporatisation of the international art world and demanding a radical increase of aesthetic commodities, appears unproblematic as it potentially provides increased financial and career opportunities. Nonetheless, other artists highly critical of the wide-ranging economically determined transformation neo-liberalism exerts over contemporary culture, the challenge is to locate resistant possibilities from within the cultural networks it proliferates. This challenge is particularly urgent for those contemporary artists critical of the overwhelming econometric biases and socio-political conservatism of the ‘global culture’ neo-liberalism shapes. And while globalisation dramatically confronts the idea of art as a credible socio-critical undertaking, it also inadvertently proliferates multiple critical attacks against it.

Following from this, Chapter 2, The empire and its allies: ‘enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus, investigates what is commonly understood as ‘globalisation’, as foremost an ideologically driven Western economic paradigm, though one equally ideologically driven. As an economic paradigm, globalisation promotes the supposed ‘universal’ of neo-liberal ‘self-regulating’ markets. Not surprisingly, the power dynamics that globalisation sets in motion also enable the United States’ current self-styling as the contemporary world’s sole empire. As a result, globalisation’s emphasis on the worldwide imposition of neo-liberal markets is crucially orientated towards U.S. financial and territorial interests and, more generally, to those of other Western nations, such as Britain and Australia.
Indeed, such global territorialism is doubly imperialist, as the U.S. now attempts to oversee and police a geo-political terrain of truly transnational proportions. In true imperial fashion, the U.S. exercises its global dominance through military intervention, which it repeatedly excuses since the terrorist attacks on New York’s World Trade towers.

Even more importantly, Chapter 2 critiques U.S. imperialist and triumphal invoking of globalisation’s ‘neutral’ rhetoric, predominantly as it relates to the supposedly non-discriminatory freedoms of the worldwide ‘free trade’ the country promotes. Such promotion is in line with the United States’ wholesale pursuit of contemporary global market deregulation. This fact is most obvious in its attempted worldwide ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). However, globalisation’s inflated market freedoms effectively usurp the agonistic\(^6\) democratic oppositions of both Left and Right political polarities, replacing them with a very particular, ideologically inflected ‘brand’ of Western liberal democracy.\(^7\) This particular democratic form is simultaneously defined by the politics of populism and of a consensual political and cultural Centre that seriously refutes the possibility of continuing engaged oppositional positions. As a result, in the assumed absence of effectively sustained critical attacks from a viably engaged political Left, contemporary global politics becomes, instead, the terrain for the manifold economically motivated interventions of Western-controlled multinational corporations. Under globalised conditions, such corporations fill the power role once assumed by traditional democratic politics, which are — or at least were — based on principles of ideological differentiation. Through this dismantling of classical oppositional politics, in parallel with its constant promotion of the innately ‘neutral’ rationality of its privileged neo-liberal market model, globalisation also pursues a quasi-enlightenment discourse of imminent world ‘progress’.

Such transformations of contemporary global politics also bear heavily on an invented contemporary ‘global culture’. Curiously, despite its claims to radical decentralisation, global culture’s most powerful institutions continue to reside mainly in North America. Thus its markets are centralised more or less in the West, particularly in ‘global’ cities such as New York and Los Angeles. Not surprisingly then, the work of certain of the United States’ most transnationally visible artists mirror its prevailing aura of economic excess and self-

\(^5\) See Alain Joze, *The Empire of Disorder*.

\(^6\) An agonistic democracy is one necessarily predicated on principles of genuine political opposition. See Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*.

\(^7\) This particular form of democracy is fundamentally market-based. See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt. The Work of Mourning and the New International*. 
mythologising capitalist individualism. Highly lauded international contemporary artists such as the video and multimedia practitioner Mathew Barney simultaneously become emblematic cultural representatives for the global superiority of the conjunction of Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal free trade economics. This would also explain why such eminently ‘global’ artists, who function in many respects as ambassadors for the contemporary cultural values of the U.S., are increasingly beholden to the heavily capitalised realm of a generalised worldwide media-entertainment culture, a contemporary culture North America also dominates economically.

Chapter 2 also considers the ‘Empire of globalisation’ in terms of the powerful influence North American ‘global culture’ exerts on other Western, English-speaking countries. Britain is an especially good example of how globalisation’s guiding neo-liberal example has produced a ‘branded’ zone of contemporary art production that is simultaneously and paradoxically nationalist. In this sense, the ‘Young British Artists’ (yBa) phenomenon, as well as British artists practising in the aftermath of its global success, harnesses the economic emphases of globalisation to market itself as a commodity container for contemporary ‘British-ness’. Such values are, in turn, propagated worldwide for their hyper-contemporaneity, while they also symbolically compensate for Britain’s now defunct global imperial influence. Furthermore, the yBa’s obsession with British popular culture effectively transforms the contemporary artist into a ‘pop star’ or tabloid idol working in alignment with a generalist and insistently commodifying ‘global culture’. Additionally, under present globalising conditions, contemporary Australian art is tied to the dual examples of U.S.’ entertainment-art and British popular culture. In fact today, some of contemporary Australian art’s most globally marketable practitioners purvey aesthetic and ideological idioms uncannily similar to the present cultural output of both.

Beyond mere cultural issues, though, Chapter 2 extends its critical consideration from the generic commonalities evident in the contemporary ‘global’ art of the United States, Britain and Australia to the equally conciliatory politics that allowed the so-called coalition of the willing to invade Iraq in 2001. From this wider socio-political background, the ‘freedoms’ expressed via the contemporary art of these three countries appear largely simulated. Indeed, their unwillingness to attempt to engage the critical or oppositional possibilities of contemporary culture, to analyse or affront populist opinion about such global issues, other than occasionally through media-savvy sensationalist ‘shock tactics’, only affirms the global ascendancy of a Western liberal form of democracy that breeds self-censorship and is antagonistic towards genuine disagreement.
Locating widespread evidence of such disagreement, Chapter 3, *Contested global contexts: Critical regionalisms contesting globalisation's 'new world order'*, regards multiple geo-cultural antagonisms to globalisation's reconfiguration of the contemporary art world according to predominantly Western hegemonic visual and economic paradigms. Indeed, these antagonistic outbreaks of dissonant cultural activity indicate that overall, there are numerous and significant disavowals of globalisation's positivist and totalising outlook. Such regional challenges to a hegemonic and ideologically inflected contemporary 'global culture' strategically internalise its core free trade econometric emphases in order to challenge and subvert them. Contemporary cultural production of this sort is most evident within particular nations and regions: the ex-Soviet bloc, Latin America, the Middle East and China. These are nations and regions whose individual and collective histories have traditionally opposed economic and cultural domination by Western, and particularly U.S. agendas.

The contemporary cultures produced within these aforementioned regions, responding to the radical effects globalisation processes exert, are by no means merely 'peripheral', nor uniformly traditionalist, though their societies have often been portrayed as such by the supposedly technologically superior West. On the contrary, the contemporary regional critical cultures produced in these locations are outward-looking and globally aware, as well as being technologically and iconographically sophisticated. Furthermore, much of the contemporary localised critical culture produced in these geo-political regions is explicitly critical of globalisation's Western neo-liberal market motivations. Nonetheless, rather than simply reiterating easily identifiable oppositional positions, many examples of the critical art analysed in Chapter 3 parasitically adapt recognisable signifiers and methodologies of mainstream 'global culture', as a Western neo-liberal construct,\(^8\) to enact a challenge to it. For example, Chinese 'Pop Art' superficially imitates the visual tropes of its North American counterpart. However, it also self-consciously reflects on its *a priori* identity as a desirable global commodity 'dependent' on a well-known U.S. model. This work, carrying overt signs of Western authorising influence, is eagerly consumed in the United States on this very basis, while it is also just as eagerly ushered into the global art market.

Chapter 3 also investigates the extent to which contemporary 'global' art generates increasing amounts of transnationally circulating capital. It is argued here that the promise of increased capital generated by the regional production of contemporary generalised 'global culture' is an effective means of producing sympathetic local representations of the global

\(^8\) Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated.*
ideological investments of the West in general, but more specifically of the empire of the United States, in the cultural and political affairs of other nations. Needless to say, the United States' pursuit of aggressive unilateral foreign policies produces numerous globally distributed opponents. Fittingly, cultural critics of the enforced market-orientated globalisation of contemporary art, while increasingly unable to discount its influence, have not mutely embraced its 'promises' by adopting Western cultural forms that privilege capitalist representations of entertainment, luxury and youth, either. Meanwhile, the critical inversions of contemporary Western cultural and representational idioms created by transnational opponents of the processes of neo-liberal globalisation can be regarded as doubly critical of the frequency their own governments' backing of such world transformations, and of the overt promotion of their domestic cultures for essentially Western 'global' consumption.

The particular regional critical cultures addressed in Chapter 3 include Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and China. While each of these regions is by no means culturally 'pure' or united, of course, neither do they passively accept the escalating effects of globalisation's attempted worldwide implementation of neo-liberal economics. Certainly, such regional critical cultures seriously question global neo-liberalism as the quasi-mythical 'solution' to the problem of contemporary human existence promoted by its Western apologists. At their most effective, site-specific instances of geo-political cultural resistance transnationally demonstrate the manifold shortcomings of globalisation as a viable theory of harmonious multiculturalism and transcontinental unification. In fact, such regional instances of cultural resistance contest suggestions that the contemporary world can be harmoniously united under the combined ideological and economic umbrella of Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal capitalism. Equally, they suggest that globalisation's self-portrayal as a positively totalising discourse is in fact primarily driven by Western territorial interests. Finally, this chapter utilises crucial examples of multiplying instances of global geo-political cultural resistance to indicate globalisation's continuing failure to successfully re-route all negative cultural approximations of the economic territorialism underlying its positivist neo-liberal rhetoric.

Of course under globalising conditions, contemporary attempts to 'streamline' 'global culture' and its various institutions are affected by the attempted transnational implementation of its core neo-liberal economic paradigms. Chapter 4, *The global art machine: Streamlined or*
steamrolled?, critically approaches the way in which contemporary global art education, art production and the staging of international contemporary art exhibitions, especially the globally proliferating biennales, are increasingly forged into a highly interdependent relationship with globalisation's principles of economic rationalism. 'Global culture's' attempted 'streamlining' of contemporary art and its multiple institutions comes, then, to emphasise a reductive 'user-pays' approach to the production, display and collection of contemporary culture. This economically rationalist 'streamlining', not surprisingly, runs parallel with globalisation's repeatedly invoked 'new world order'.

Globalisation's overall corporatisation of contemporary culture at the same time impacts on the curricula of international universities and art schools, especially in the West. So, too, is globalisation's spectacle-oriented 'global culture' reflected in the contemporary art museums designed to display it. At the same time, it is also mirrored in the curatorial outlook of many contemporary art museums, and especially in the display practices of the highly influential network of global commercial galleries. While contemporary art education is edged globally towards private and industry 'partnerships', the populist and frequently generalist discipline of 'cultural studies' increasingly dominates its syllabuses. Alongside such global transformations in the nature of contemporary art education, much-hyped transnational exhibitions, mainly the rapidly expanding global circuit of biennales, serve double duty as a cultural mechanism that supports an economically determined vision of 'global culture'. However, such an underlying fact, fully supported by the sheer economic resources, including corporate and industry sponsorship, necessary to stage such events, is disguised by globalisation's rhetoric of 'multicultural' inclusion and altruism. Further aligned with such changes in the terrain of the globalised 'culture industry' is the increasing corporate penetration of previously state-funded, state-owned contemporary art spaces. This adds to the continued disciplinary blurring between overtly populist and essentially commercially orientated contemporary cultures — such as those of design, fashion and advertising — and the socio-critical trajectory of much recent contemporary art.

This particular levelling of the differentiation between contemporary commercial-industry culture and notions of contemporary art's critical autonomy also results globally in the production of institutionally supported cultural 'hybrids'. From a contemporary cultural institutional perspective, these appear in the guise of semi-commercial, semi-autonomous quasi-

9 The highly influential U.S. based economic, cultural and political analyst, Francis Fukuyama, is a prime example of one such public apologist for the 'liberating' value of global neo-liberalism. See Francis
institutions. Numerous contemporary art spaces of this nature opportunistically glean, as the contemporary neo-liberalised realms of design and fashion do, ‘alternative’, ‘independent’ identities, while wholly subscribing to globalisation’s dominant econometric and consensually populist cultural paradigms. In lieu of the hybridising specificities of these present cultural conditions, fostered undoubtedly by the spread of global neo-liberalism, the challenge to contemporary art, as a still active means of social dissent or cultural non-alignment, is considerable. This is especially the case as a vast array of different contemporary critical practices are rapidly being de-territorialised, only to be re-offered as diversely ‘branded’ commodities on what is by this stage a thoroughly globalised art market.

Turning from this discussion of the institutionalisation of contemporary ‘global art’, Chapter 5, _The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation’s reinstated centre_, returns to considerations of globalisation’s effects on contemporary regional cultures, in this case that of Australia. Of course globalisation discourse self-consciously prefigures contemporary Australian culture as distinctly ‘post-colonial’: that is, as having transcended, as a result of its new ‘global’ positioning, previous definitions of itself as marginal and ‘antipodean’. Yet globalisation processes, far from wholly dislodging earlier hierarchical models of contemporary culture, determined by the peripheries’ relation to a dominant centre, actually reinstates such a model. Largely and paradoxically through its prioritising of the ‘placeless’ virtuality of contemporary media forms, globalisation ultimately merely replaces an older form of cultural centrism with a newer one. Again, it is the current empire of the United States, prodigiously reliant on its endlessly productivist ‘image factories’ and on massively inflated, in terms of the power they are accorded, global financial institutions — such as the World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO) — that can most readily be considered the cultural and economic ‘epicentre’ (though in no sense the sole embodiment) of globalisation’.  

Thus contemporary Australian art, presently fixated on its global identity, seeks its ‘presence in the centre’, which means that the work it generates is fundamentally orientated towards, though at times critically positioned against, the core cultural and institutional values of globalisation’s dominating contemporary culture.

The global scenario just described would also explain why ambitious contemporary artists from Australia self-consciously focus on achieving professional success in those ‘global’ centres — New York or Los Angeles, for example — that are most likely to enhance both the economic

_Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man._

_10 Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 11._
and ‘contemporary’ status of the work they produce. Such a situation also explains why being ‘international’ or ‘contemporary’ in art frequently signifies nothing but having been exhibited in elite spaces on the island of Manhattan’. From this perspective, the ‘global’ validation of a contemporary artist’s work is still considered to primarily result from the artist’s having either physically relocated from the southern, in the case of Australia, ‘antipodean’ periphery to the northern centres of global economic and cultural influence, or intentionally exaggerated the representational commonalities shared by the ‘peripheral’ culture and that of the hegemonic centre.

Somewhat paradoxically, Australian culture’s desire to be rewarded by being placed visibly at the centre of a contemporary ‘global culture’ is evidenced by its strategic invocation of various nationalist myths said to embody the quintessentially ‘Australian’. The types of myths referenced in this manner in contemporary Australian art repeatedly concur with those promoted by the neo-liberalist globalisation rhetoric. For example, particular contemporary Australian artists employ myths that portray today’s Australia as essentially ‘classless’, as a nation made up of an undifferentiated, materially ‘aspirational’ and supposedly ‘neutral’ middle class. Globalisation promotes such a myth worldwide as perfectly illustrative of the rewards of its ‘naturalised’ markets. Similarly connected with the previous myth is the myth of Australia’s innate youthfulness, and its attendant celebration of a sport-fixated populace, enamoured of physical, rather than intellectual, prowess. An image of this sort simultaneously aims to emphasise Australia’s foremost contemporary identity as a ‘young’, globally emergent nation. On these grounds, contemporary Australian culture promotes itself also alongside innumerable campaigns of multinational corporate advertisers, who saturate ‘global culture’ with insistent images of a universalised ‘youth culture’. The latter at the same time represents a massive global market that accords closely with the positivist jargon at the centre of globalisation’s ‘new world order’.

In the end, however, the positivist rhetoric everywhere underscoring globalisation’s hegemonic drive to unite and oversee a contemporary ‘global culture’ that deterritorialises

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13 In this way, contemporary Australian culture seeks to distance itself from the class-determined culture of its British parent, presenting itself instead as the most likely ‘new world’ partner of the contemporary United States.
critical and oppositional cultural practices,\textsuperscript{14} while highly and increasingly successful, is also fatally flawed. Chapter 6, \textit{Unforeseen effects: The paradox of global culture — globalisation proliferating critical heterogeneities}, challenges the totalising assumptions behind the contemporary attempt to globally implement the conjunction of Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal economics, as well as the contemporary cultural paradigms these provoke. The chapter does this by illustrating the way in which globalisation processes generate multiple, simultaneous and uncontrollable zones of widespread disorder.\textsuperscript{15} While purporting to be indicative of a contemporary, ‘objective’ and ‘enlightened’ discourse founded in the ‘neutral’ rationalism of neo-liberal economics, globalisation, in reality, continually fails to realise its smooth translation to immeasurably dissimilar transnational locations.\textsuperscript{16}

As a result of global neo-liberalism’s repeated and ongoing failure to universally ‘adhere’ to the prevailing geo-political singularities of individual transnational contexts, the imperialist and authoritarian ambitions of the contemporary ‘global’ empire of the United States intensify as compensation for this very failure. Indeed, if the disparate multiplicity of contemporary global cultures and economies are united today in the era of globalisation, they are only ‘united by a new form of chaos, dominated by the imperium of the United States, though not controlled by it’,\textsuperscript{17} and itself representing a greater world system which ‘we lack the words to describe... while being surrounded by its images’.\textsuperscript{18}

Chapter 6 specifically interrogates globalisation’s paradoxical — in terms of the overweening positivism of the language in which it is couched by its predominately Western corporate supporters — production of dual terrains: of centralised hegemonic authority and diffuse and ultimately un-containable chaos. The effects of globalisation’s generation of this fatal duality, multiplying chaotic conditions globally, is attested to both in diverse examples of contemporary art and in the strategic harnessing, by artists critical of its positivist presumptions, of this very chaos. The globalisation of the contemporary art world frequently encloses the identity of contemporary art within a restrictively commercialised realm of the randomised

\textsuperscript{14} See Chapter 4, \textit{The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled?} Refer also to Jean Baudrillard, who writes that what we are experiencing today is a world situation where ‘no alternative form of thinking is allowed’: Jean Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism}, p. 9.

\textsuperscript{15} The ‘global order is already the site of such disorder and deregulation that there is no point whatever in adding to it’ (via acts of terrorism, for example). See Jean Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism}, p. 55.

\textsuperscript{16} This is certainly apparent in the economic collapse of Argentina in 2000, after its market deregulation, and the general failure of the global capitalist system in the former Soviet Union. See Chapter 3, \textit{Contested global contexts: The critical role of regionalism in globalisation’s ‘new world order’}.

\textsuperscript{17} Alain Joxe, \textit{The Empire of Disorder}, p. 81.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
difference of unrelated consumer and entertainment products. Nonetheless, its 'schizoid' dualism, resulting from its incapacity to control the vastness of the territories it sets out to influence, inadvertently produces a global counter-terrain, a 'counter-empire', of proliferating and reinvigorated art-critical and interventionist modes of practice. Chapter 6 ends by expressly demonstrating how such practices are engendered by the predominantly ideology-free economic motives of globalisation, as well as how these contemporary practices function individually and collectively.
Chapter 1

Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation

Following the aftermath of World War I, modernism branched into two distinct streams. One was dominated by the notion of contemporary culture as fundamentally expressive. Art embracing such a conception included French Fauvism and German Expressionism. The other strain, most notably represented by the international avant-garde’s Dada and Surrealism, as well as Russian socialist-orientated Constructivism, engaged with the idea of modern art as a critical tool for socio-political transformation. In the latter sense art was, ideally at least, a means for challenging the dominant moral and mercantile mores of prevailing bourgeois conservatism. This critical steam of art was later expanded in a variety of directions, appearing in multiple guises in the self-consciously internationalist activities of the Funk, Fluxus, Conceptualist and ‘Situationist’ ‘movements’. As the activities of these artists and groups were subsequently slowly absorbed by the discourses of sociology and critical theory, they began to assume a passive ‘educational’ dimension, their criticality made part of an international canon of generalised contemporary art criticism. Nevertheless, their socio-critical intentions were largely still regarded as sound, and potentially socially transformative.

With the emergence of French ‘post-structuralism’, the positive reception of the critical agency of contemporary art became considerably more complex. Some related theorists, such as Jean Baudrillard, regarded these claims as foolish in a world dominated by a techno-imagistic *simulation*¹ that ultimately eroded any claims to individual creative agency. Meanwhile, at another extreme, post-structuralists such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari extolled the liberationary aspects of contemporary cultural production, through suggesting its contribution to multiple *desiring machines*² and *molecular revolutions*.³ Nevertheless, the ‘revolutionary’ claims of international contemporary critical culture were further challenged by the collapse, in 1989, of the Soviet bloc, itself announced by the fall of the Berlin Wall. Critical strains of contemporary culture, broadly associated with international leftist politics, were then doubly challenged by the rapid ascendancy of global neo-liberalism, a virulent ‘naturalised’ form of capitalism to which there appeared no alternative.

¹ See 1: 3 (v) *Reality and Simulation: The Critical Vacuum.*
² See 1: 3 (vi) *Ethics and Aesthetics: Autonomy, Nomadism and Expression.*
This particular form of ‘world capitalism’, tied to a very proscriptive form of Western liberal democracy which supports concepts of difference and multiculturalism while massively profiting from them, defines the nature of what today is known as *globalisation*. Due to globalisation’s prodigious capacity to appropriate difference and opposition, it seriously challenges traditional concepts of contemporary art as a form of critically engaged social dissent. As a result, certain contemporary artists have uncritically embraced its core neo-liberal values, choosing to work in consensus with an ideologically invested ‘global culture’ that is inherently dependent on accelerated corporate privatisation and the dramatically increased production of commodities of all kinds. For artists critical of this present transformation of contemporary culture, the challenge is to resist its overwhelmingly econometric biases as well as the generally conservative social and political practices these biases shape globally. And while globalisation seriously confronts the notion of contemporary art as a socio-critical undertaking, it has also inadvertently led to the proliferation of significant ongoing cultural attacks against it.

The notion that art could function critically within society and could be employed in opposition to repressive contemporary cultural and political norms rose to particular prominence with the emergence of the modernist avant-garde in the early 20th century. In their different ways, avant-garde movements such as Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism set about theorising art not as a series of passive contemplative museological objects but as a process for radically altering society through challenging its core values. Such movements, although utopian, were also successfully internationalist, and their critical outlooks were intentionally globally focused.

This emphasis on the transnational validity of contemporary art as critical tool for progressive social change was twofold. First, it was broadly, if not explicitly, attached to the internationalist spirit of the Left political culture that stemmed from Karl Marx’s critique of world capitalism. Second, it was linked to an overall reconceptualisation of the encoded social and political values underlying institutional definitions of art *per se*. Inherent to avant-garde manifestations, however, is their oppositional antagonism towards the bourgeois culture that allowed them to emerge in the first place. This irony did not prevent the continued and active valorisation of ‘avant-garde’ art as an ideal means of critically exposing and attacking the inherent social, political and cultural biases of an economically fixated bourgeoisie. Therefore, later art-critical tendencies, such as ‘Funk’, Fluxus, Conceptualism and Situationism, sought to

³ Ibid.
reinvigorate the critical stance of earlier avant-garde movements from the position of a similarly, if in fact expanding, global-internationalist perspective.

Only such a global perspective, it was believed, could critically oppose and subvert the equally increasing globalised drive of Western capitalism to frame art's primary value as an internationally tradable commodity. In fact such ideology lies at the heart of bourgeois–liberal culture. Of course the rise of Western democracies was predicated on principles of free trade. Such trade was by no means neutral. In fact, the colonial activities of modern industrial democracies, their importing of foreign 'exotic' goods, as well as their endemic exploitation of Other cultures, especially for their primary resources, enabled the very concept of Western democracy to evolve. This is because such democracies were deeply engaged in demonstrating their technological superiority over other cultures. Western democracies, dependent on and ideologically invested in the principles of free trade, harnessed such principles to demonstrate their power to control and subjugate as many additional territories as possible, all the while in continual economic competition with each other. It is against the background of such a vision of 'democratic' modernity that the critical avant-garde arose.

The critical idealism of avant-garde activity, however, later sustained repeated attacks on its core liberationary claims. Throughout the 1980's and 1990's in particular, avant-garde oppositional tactics were said to be not only extremely limited, but also inherently tainted by their Western colonialist 'Othering' of global cultural difference. Still, the 'neo' avant-garde, itself conceptualised in the 1980's, fought, from a reworked critical position, to sustain the legitimacy of the avant-garde as an effective form of contemporary cultural opposition. With the parallel emergence of French 'post-structuralism', though, its diverse philosophies began to seriously undermine the binary and dialectical assumptions that informed both avant-garde 'criticality' and Marxist socio-economic theory.

Despite their significant differences, the discourses of post-structuralism proposed that 'critique' could no longer be regarded from the point of view of a direct dialectical positioning where one proposition was counterposed to another. This situation arose particularly once it was demonstrated that subjectivity was not the product of autonomous free will, but that its irreducible basis in language made it ultimately the product of related socio-political discourses of power. Therefore the subject could no longer be conceived as the simple, singular site of individual enunciation and agency; it was rather a site 'spoken through' various cultural and linguistic presuppositions. Nevertheless the varying post-structuralist theories of the contemporary French philosophers — Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari — are by no means devoid of socially critical
intent. In fact they are founded upon such intent. Yet the basis of their complex and multiple criticisms of contemporary society denies the sort of autonomous agency espoused by the avant-garde and, to a lesser extent, by the ‘neo’ avant-garde.

The serious challenge posed by post-structuralist thinking to assumptions of what actually constitutes criticism, and how it connects with contemporary cultural discourse, is today magnified by the crisis of critical culture under the pressures of economic globalisation. With the 1989 collapse of Communism and the subsequent disappearance of a major identifiable international anti-capitalist alternative, globalisation discourse asserts that ideology in general has been rendered irrelevant. Globalisation’s fundamental economic market orientation is nevertheless also vitally dependent on the subsequent disappearance of Cold War political tensions. These implicitly threatened the real possibility of imminent global nuclear catastrophe, therefore facilitating an international political culture of opposed — and more or less balancing — ideologies. At the same time, the risk of nuclear disaster meant international economic and political relations were highly dependent on diplomatic relations. With the vanishing of Cold War political dynamics, globalisation is able to propose the replacement of ‘ideology’ with ‘economics’.

Without the inherent critical positioning implied by the existence of ideological content, contemporary art under globalising conditions therefore begins to align itself increasingly with the populist and industrial designer art-historical models of provided by U.S. Pop Art and Minimalism. At the same time, predominantly Western neo-liberalist economic imperatives start to magnify their effect over the perceived nature of contemporary cultural production and the role of social criticism within it. Yet globalisation’s blanket disavowal of ideological content also reveals its covert ideological dimensions, as it begins to reiterate the historical precedents set by the rationalist ideals of the Kantian Enlightenment. However, rationalist idealism is now paired with simple economic opportunism. The emphasis on a universal ‘global culture’ founded on social and political inclusion (which is espoused via globalisation rhetoric) takes on neo-colonialist aspects, as the role of international politics is threatened by its wholesale appropriation by the neo-liberal economic demands of global corporations. Despite the fundamentally Western positivist ‘global culture’ that emerges as a result, globalisation’s accelerated decentralisation of contemporary politics and culture also multiplies sites of oppositional dissent.

Furthermore, through the development of new digital technologies, including the internet, which emphasise the simultaneous global exchange of random images and information, diverse transnational sites are easily and instantaneously linked. The critical culture of contemporary art
that arises from these, and that regularly utilises the structural paradoxes of such technologies, suggests additionally the critically parallel culture of the conveniently labelled ‘anti-globalisation’ movement. And while examples of such contemporary art are often differentiated from the overt political activism of ‘anti-globalisation’ culture, as well as from avant-garde idealism, they are, in their reliance on deliberate strategies of critical discontinuity, nevertheless philosophically related to both. The anti-capitalist drive behind previous attempts to critically dematerialise the art-object and therefore confound the international commodity-orientated art market is now also linked to a challengingly multiplicity of mutating global critical sites, and facing an equally mutational and virulent form of capitalism. Thus, global neo-liberal capitalism’s militantly neo-conservative ideological dimension, allied to its technological ability to rapidly appropriate all types of dissent — political, economic and cultural — is counterposed with a multitude of contemporary critical cultures that are parasitically sustained by it.

1:1 The international avant-garde as critical conscience

Art as a form of critically oppositional internationalism has a complex history. However, it was not until the early 20th century, with the emergence of the avant-garde, that modern art fully embraced its potential as a vehicle for social transformation. The critical thrust of movements such as Dada and Constructivism was based in their reactions to an increasingly globalised, industrialised world, a world that was marked at the same time by the contemporary political polarisation of capitalist-friendly Fascism and socially orientated Communism. This is particularly true in relation to the industrialisation of warfare that occurred in World War I. Yet it is also true in terms of the relative novelty of the mediums artists exploited: photography, film, collages, multimedia ‘installations’ and ‘performances’. For the Dadaists and Constructivists in particular, principles of socio-criticality were employed, perhaps for the first time, in an overtly modern manner, as the very foundation of their art, despite the extent of the differences between those two groups. Historically, Dada is generally distinguished by its apparently nihilist and anarchic formlessness, while Constructivism is noted for its formalist/socialist positivism. Both are central to an understanding of current thinking about the continuing identity of art as a form of critical opposition.

This is especially so because the socio-critical impetus behind both movements has been relayed further through subsequent interpretations and theoretical reworkings. Thus Surrealism,

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4 See Douglas Kahn, John Heartfield.
5 Of course the contemporary art-related terms ‘installation’ and ‘performance’ were invented much later, in the 1960’s and 1970’s.
emerging initially out of Dada, although crucially differentiated from it, saw itself as outwardly antagonistic towards bourgeois social values, explicitly those based in the socially rewarded pursuit of capital and status. Likewise, Surrealism also later became directly affiliated with the international Communist cause. Overall, Surrealism as a movement sought to manifest a radical shift in contemporary individual and collective consciousness. This is evidenced by the dictums pronounced by its leader, the poet and theorist Andre Breton: ‘Transform the world’ and ‘Change life’, he said.⁶

In the 1960’s, ‘Funk’ art, also referred to as neo-Dada, blended a Dada/Surrealist, quasi-fetishistic treatment of the object with anti-materialist, anti-consumerist political content, reminiscent of the more propagandistic aspects of Russian Constructivism. Such an outlook was similarly echoed in the de-materialist, performative and absurdist practices of Fluxus, whose art-critical inclinations were again distinctly immaterialist and internationalist. Likewise Conceptualism, another expressly global tendency, focused on critiquing the covert institutional encoding of art while pursuing anti-object, anti-commodity oriented practices. Meanwhile, the *Internationale Situationiste* simultaneously scorned contemporary commodity and entertainment culture and the institutionalisation and fetishisation of art and culture in general. They preferred instead a Dada/Surrealist-influenced critical methodology based in direct action and a radicalising negativity. In contrast to these ‘art-critical’ movements — and extremely influential since — are Pop Art and Minimalism. Though related superficially at some levels to the anti-art aspects of Dada and the anti-authorial tendencies of Constructivism, they reflect a significant reappraisal of the socially critical potential of contemporary art. The profound critical ambivalence of both already points to a crisis in the agency of earlier avant-garde practices.

1: 1 (l) **International critical modernism: Dada and Constructivism**

Despite criticism of its effects, the critical *intention* of the avant-garde has rarely been doubted. This is the case insofar as the avant-garde envisioned a broadly social, rather than purely aesthetic agenda. The historical moments at which this could be said to be truest are those that saw the birth of Dada in Germany and Constructivism in the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Both movements, despite the breadth of their differences, imagined society, not the canvas, as the only suitable locus for arts’ activities. This shift sought to wholeheartedly discourage the consumption of art as a rarefied class-product supposedly indicative of higher

⁶ ‘Transform the world, Marx said; Change life, Rimbaud said. These two watchwords are one for us.’ Andre Breton, speech to the congress of writers, Paris, June 1935.
sensibilities. Whilst Dada is most often regarded as nihilistic,7 Constructivism, as its name suggests, is generally associated with constructive attempts to culturally realise the revolutionary project of historical materialism espoused by Karl Marx in contemporary cultural terms.8 As we will see, though, Constructivism is also deeply connected to a negative impulse.9 Overall, both movements not only share a conviction in the radicalisation of the procedures of art as a means of directly influencing contemporary society, but support this also on an international rather than a merely local front. At the same time, they recognise the revolutionary potential of critical negativity as a means of aggressively overturning cultural and social stereotypes.

Dada established important international links to various European cultural centres, from Holland, Germany and Czechoslovakia to Poland and as far afield as Britain.10 Constructivism, in terms of the initial theoretical program proposed by its leading figures, El Lissitzky and Aleksandr Rodchenko, pursued the internationalism of the Communist revolution and succeeded in theoretically re-envisioning the social dimension of art per se on a potentially global scale. The overall concern to establish a critically aware and politically progressive internationalism in Dada and Constructivism is echoed in this statement, which was included in a Parisian Dada tract from 1921 and authored by the Dadaist agitator Tristan Tzara: ‘The signatories of this manifesto live in France, US, Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium but have no nationality.’11 More evidence of this overt desire for the transnational intertwining of the various international critical avant-gardes was the seemingly unlikely union of Dada and Constructivist artists at the Dada–Constructivism congress held in Weimar, Germany in 1922.12 Indeed, the socialist internationalism of the Constructivist agenda openly encouraged the participation of sympathetic artists and theorists from around the world, as part of a general outlook that was more political than aesthetic. Linked to their belief in a contemporary socially transformative art was the Constructivists’ emphasis on material and industrial processes that strove to dislodge art from its previous reified identity as primarily a museological fetish and capitalist commodity.13

7 See, for example, Terry Hale, ed., 4 Dada Suicides, Hans Richter, Dada: Art and Anti-Art, and Uwe M. Schneede, The Essential Max Ernst.
8 See Viktor Margolin, The Struggle for Utopia.
9 See Boris Groys, ‘The struggle against the museum: or, the display of art in totalitarian space’.
10 See Robert Motherwell, ed., The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology.
11 Tristan Tzara, quoted in Lucy Lippard, ed., Dadas on Art, p. 162.
12 See Serge Lemoine, Dada.
13 Viktor Margolin, The Struggle for Utopia.
Dada, at its most politicised, and especially in Berlin via the activities of a number of artists and agitators — John Heartfield, Hannah Hoch, Raoul Hausmann and Johannes Baader — sought to harness the newness of mechanical and journalistic media. These artists proposed that by disguising the obviousness of the creative process through photomontage, the work produced would be comprehended on the same terms as popular journalistic imagery. However, they corrupted and inverted the message of the image in ways that were highly critical of the leaders of Weimar Germany. Such pointed political manipulation of popular photographic imagery revealed what was implied but could not be contained by the commercially reproduced magazine or newspaper reproductions. At the same time, Dada also questioned the inherently commercial nature of the media and the types of images it portrayed. John Heartfield’s collage methodologies, in particular, were very much undertaken from within the parameters of the populist press but were at the same time critically aimed at capitalism’s successful control of contemporary political and media agenda’s. Likewise, resistance to the unquestioned bourgeois commercial status of art is reiterated in many Dada statements, like this one by the Berlin based Dadaist John Huelsenbeck: ‘The bourgeois must be deprived of the opportunity to buy up art for his justification.’

In contrast to the overt aggression of such critique, Constructivism wanted to radically re-propose art as a form of anti-representational immanence. Its focus was to be shifted from external narrative to a radical emphasis on materiality. Materiality, however, was regarded not as an expressive addition to an artwork but as the means by which art and society might be radically fused in the utopian post-revolutionary moment. Part of this reformation of the role of contemporary art relied also on utilising industry to assist its production. As a result, art was seen as simultaneously functional and ideological, rather than as opposed to the decorative or capitalistically rarefied. No longer, the Constructivists hoped, would art be the isolated product of the individual creator; instead it would be the kind of collectivised social practice that lay at the heart of the revolutionary restructure of Soviet and world socialist societies. Like Dada, Constructivism aimed to use socio-critical means to displace art as previously defined by bourgeois capitalist standards — as a series of valorised and marketable ‘originals’. As the

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15 See Douglas Kahn, John Heartfield.
16 John Huelsenbeck, quoted in Lucy Lippard, ed., Dadas on Art, p. 68.
contemporary Russian theorist Nikolai Tarabukin noted, Constructivism encouraged industrial, non-expressive techniques aimed at fully integrating creative procedures with daily revolutionary and industrialised existence. ¹⁸

The critical differentiation between Dada and Constructivism is also useful in illuminating the distinction between different modes of criticality still evident in contemporary art. For example, movements commonly grouped together under the banner ‘neo-Dada’, as well as those deemed ‘neo-abstractionist’, are instructive in terms of the degree to which they do or do not support the socio-critical motivations underlying movements like Dada and Constructivism, to which they are historically linked. In fact, the critical legacy of Dada and Constructivism has extended into many subsequent manifestations of socio-critical culture. This would also account for the eventual transformation of Dada by Andre Breton’s Surrealism. Indeed, Surrealism, if only partially successfully, conjoined the socialist revolutionary critique of the Constructivists, via its union with the Communist Party in the 1940’s, with the generally anti-capitalist nihilism of Dada. Ultimately, both tendencies were to have significant consequences for later international critical cultures.


The avant-garde legacy of Dada and Constructivism in particular proved highly influential amongst artists and artist collectives determined to further their agitational critiques. Such outlooks continued to conceive art as a mechanism for inciting social change and as a means of criticising and complexifying art’s relationship to the ever-widening domination of Western commodity culture. Like their predecessors, the drive of these later movements is also explicitly internationalist. Their collective desire is to increase the socially critical role of contemporary culture in as many global contexts as possible, while remaining aware of the crucial differences between locations.

The Funk movement, based in Los Angeles, was strongly connected to the politically critical Beat counter-culture of the 1960’s. Funk referenced North American popular and commercial culture, but unlike U.S. Pop Art, it did so in highly critical ways. At the same time, ‘Funk’ exploited the anti-aesthetic tendencies of Dada and Surrealism to produce works that were deliberately rough-hewn and ‘unfinished’, and whose form and content were potentially


¹⁸ See Nikolai Tarabukin, ‘From the Easel to the Machine’, pp. 135–42.
offensive to contemporary audiences. The work of Funk's foremost practitioners, the artists Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, was of an overtly socially aware and critical nature, as it responded with particular vehemence to contemporary political events such as the United States' entry into the Vietnam War.

The collaborative practice of Ed and Nancy Kienholz, although utilising discrete objects, contextualised these within complex large-scale sculptural tableaux, from which no part could be successfully isolated or removed. The emphasis of such work therefore was firmly placed on its critical and social meanings, not on its market identity. This is especially obvious given the sheer ambitiousness and immovability of their larger projects. Furthermore, the Kienholzes, overwhelmed by the prevailing conservative climate of U.S. domestic policy during the 1950's and early 1960's, eventually internationalised their joint output. From 1974 they divided their practice between the secluded North American rural setting of Lake Pend Oreille, Hope, Idaho, and the central European metropolitan context of Berlin. It has also been claimed that although roughly contemporary with Pop Art, Funk's mixing of abject and discomfitting aesthetics and critical subject matter led to its comparative marginalisation in the U.S.

Nevertheless, the Kienholzes' politicisation of American art was to have far-reaching consequences for the separate practices of LA artists Mike Kelley and Paul McCarthy, who were highly influential during the 1980's and up to the present. The practices of both these

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19 'Borrowing from the parlance of hip, Funk, means something visceral and earthy, often so powerful and primitive [as] to threaten the perimeters of "good taste".' The word 'funk' is also associated with bodily excretions such as shit or semen, and therefore lends the movement deliberately aberrant connotations. Jonathan Fineberg, Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being, p. 278.
20 Prior to his marriage to Nancy Reddin in 1972, Edward Kienholz worked alone. After their marriage, all their works were co-authored, while Edward Kienholz retrospectively assigned his earlier individual output to his wife and collaborator.
22 'With the Beats, Kienholz shared a strong distaste for the state of postwar American society ... he expressed the desire for social change, the ambition to discover a fissure in a social order ... perceived to be oppressively stable': Ibid, p. 14.
23 Their welcome in Berlin was occasioned partially by evidence in their work of a forthright critical stance in opposition to the contemporary global influence of U.S. commercialism there. This was because United States economic and cultural influence in post-World War II Berlin was not simply passive and benevolent; it was also enforced. 'The Allies had introduced an educational policy meant to demonstrate the power of Western democracy' as 'German culture was made to function in parallel with American culture': Hannah Higgins, Fluxus Experience, pp. 171–72.
artists sought to critically inflect further, the inherent capitalistic Puritanism of U.S. popular culture as critiqued by the Kienholzes.

Also emerging during the late 1950's and early 1960's, the Fluxus movement was intimately connected to the absurdist and performative spirit of Dada. It was also eminently transnational in its outlook. Fluxus drew together artists from diverse global locations — from Korea (Nam Jun Paik), Japan (Yoko Ono, Takako Sato), Germany (Joseph Beuys, Wolf Vostell), France (Robert Filliou, Ben Vautier) and the United States (George Brecht, John Cage, Alan Kaprow, La Monte Young). Meanwhile, its leading spokesman in many respects, George Maciunas, was a Lithuanian who later settled in Boston. Fluxus was also marked by its thorough inter-textuality, as it united within it the cross-pollinating practices of visual artists, writers, musicians and theorists. Together, Fluxus participants put non-traditional mediums or distorted conventional ones to unexpected ends. Fluxus also deliberately explored unconventional practices in its search for public but non-institutional locations for its diverse performances and events.

Through emphasising chance, temporality and the immaterial, often through staged or spontaneous actions, Fluxus artists challenged art’s commodity status while arguing its capacity for transforming everyday experience. As has also been suggested of Dada, Fluxus avoided coherent and unifying theoretical proclamations, choosing instead to pursue a radically discontinuous cultural imagination in which impermanence was celebrated over the production of aesthetic objects. Of course given this emphasis on strategic and deliberately ‘irrational’ spontaneity, Fluxus often contradicted itself.

For example, the extremely influential German artist, Fluxus-affiliated Joseph Beuys, aside from his participation in Fluxus events, was also politically organised enough to assist in the foundation of the German Greens movement, one of the postwar world’s earliest ecologically driven political parties. At the same time, he implemented a politics of ‘direct action’ aimed against the entrenched institutional hierarchies of contemporary art education.

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24 See Robert L. Pincus, On a Scale that Competes with the World: The Art of Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz.
25 See Hannah Higgins, Fluxus Experience.
27 Beuys formed the German Student Party (DSP) in 1967. The party called for: ‘total disarmament, the elimination of nationalistic interests and of civil emergency laws, the unity of Europe and of the world, the dissolution of all dependence on East and West, and the formulation of new attitudes toward training, education, and research as the foundations of a world economy, world law, and world culture’. On 10 October 1972, Beuys, by then a professor of art, and 54 rejected applicants to the Dusseldorf Academy
In general, Fluxus opposition to institutionalised culture and politics was evident in its repeatedly symbolically destructive performances. Such acts were staged to illustrate not simply the inter-connectivity of art and everyday life, but their actual interchangeability. Art was not just part of life; it was also life itself. Fluxus presented an anti-materialist philosophy that was both virulently and playfully opposed to the increasingly institutionalised value of contemporary art and culture. It opposed, in principle, the passive acceptance of capitalism's appropriation of art for endless commercial circulation. Instead, Fluxus proposed 'art' as a transnational, transcultural and anti-authoritarian form of anarchic contemporary cultural production that was deeply distrustful of the self-sustaining stasis of industrial-capitalist rationality.

The many paradoxes of global Fluxus activity have found many critics. For example, it has been suggested that Joseph Beuys, a 'mega-celebrity' of the international postmodern art scene, also constantly engaged in self-mythologising rituals. Although 'heroic' and 'redemptive' rather than ironic in intent, Beuys' ritualised and 'mythic' performances seem little different, in a media sense, from the self-promoting, capitalist-friendly activities of U.S. Pop Art 'guru' Andy Warhol and his 'factory'. Through such self-promotional acts, the cult of the individualist artist displaces claims that the art produced is critically opposed to the institutionalisation of international art and to institutionalisation in general. Furthermore, and curiously, Fluxus' emphasis on impermanence and immateriality has not succeeded in resisting a museological identity. Still, the basis of such a criticism can also be reversed if we take into

occupied the institution's administrative offices, hoping to have the rejected students registered. Beuys was dismissed from his post as a result. Ibid., pp. 88–89.

Many Fluxus performances involved the destruction of common objects, especially musical instruments, most notably grand pianos, which were either completely destroyed as part of the creation of a Fluxus musical 'score' or filled with detritus such as leaves, dirt and branches. Indeed today in Modena Italy it is possible to visit Francesco Conz' Fluxus prepared piano collection.

Andy Warhol's famous 'factory' was a warehouse in downtown New York where Warhol produced much of his work, and which large numbers of contemporary artists, musicians, celebrities, assorted media stars (including porn actors and actresses) visited, often at Warhol's express invitation. Warhol took many photographs of such celebrities, but more importantly, viewed them as sharing essentially the same cultural realm as himself as a contemporary artist.

For instance, Beuys' role as an educator has been described thus: 'His self-presentation in fact had the opposite effect, [by] replicating the most damaging aspects of traditional education: attendance to a leader and intentional mystification': Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience*, p. 204.

'Recent exhibitions, criticism, and archival analysis ... have channeled Fluxus toward [a situation] ... in which art moves from underground contexts into commercial galleries and, finally, large museum shows and art expositions.' Ibid., p. 248.
account global capitalism’s prodigious ability to appropriate means of social or cultural dissent.  

The global phenomenon of Conceptualism, which was related to the activities of Fluxus, was also opposed to capitalist market and commodity emphases. Conceptualism, which was truly transnational, shares much with the anti-object, anti-materialist drive of Fluxus. Conceptualism was also, like Dada, by no means a holistic ‘movement’, but rather a globally scattered trend that valued contemporary art as a mode of critical thinking. Its progenitors were Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, whose criticism of modern art as purely ‘retinal’ is well known, and Surrealist René Magritte, whose work is deeply embedded in textual and semiotic concerns. Both artists helped redefine art as a process-orientated means of critically thinking, though the seemingly arbitrary social and commercial values ascribed to it as supposedly autonomous category. Such thinking critiqued not only restrictive and often repressively traditionalist definitions of art biased wholly towards aesthetics, but also art’s sites of display. For example, the maverick and subsequently highly influential Belgian conceptualist, Marcel Broodthaers, momentarily transformed his private residence in 1969 into a ‘Museum’ as means of indicating the simultaneously random and politically strategic importance ascribed to ‘official’ cultural institutions.

For the occasion of the opening of his ‘Museum’, Broodthaers disseminated invitations promising an auspicious cultural event of national significance. What visitors met instead was an exhibition of the transport crates of old-master paintings, loaned from the collection of Brussels’ National Gallery, the artist names bureaucratically stamped on the outside of each. Such an act was not merely playful, but represented a highly self-conscious critical recognition of the hierarchical and class-based distinction institutionalising the practice of ‘art’. Incidentally, Broodthaers had earlier taken part in the widespread revolts of May 1968 as one of a group of

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33 Actually, the expression ‘concept art’ was used in 1961 by Henry Flynt, in a Fluxus publication. However, it was ultimately to take on a different meaning with regard to Conceptualism.  
34 Duchamp had said, early in his career, that he wanted ‘to put painting once again at the service of the mind’, and he frequently ‘expressed his disgust with “retinal” painting’: Anne D’Harnoncourt, in *Marcel Duchamp*, p. 35.  
36 See 4 (iv) Global protest and a-centrist opposition.
students and intellectuals who staged a ‘sit-in’ of Brussels’ National Gallery, protesting the exclusionary cultural policies of its curators and directors.\textsuperscript{37}

Other artists associated with global Conceptualism included the Frenchman Yves Klein. Klein continued the critique of art’s unquestioned institutionalised identity while aiming to address capitalism’s reductive valuing of art merely as a series of isolatable objects. In his 1958 institutionally critical work \textit{Le Vide} (The Void), Klein actually ‘exhibited’ the empty Galerie Iris Clert as an artwork, having removed all furnishings and painted the space stark white.\textsuperscript{38} The only remaining object in the gallery was an empty glass vitrine said to be exhibiting the air it contained.\textsuperscript{39} For the opening, Klein also hired two French Republican Guards in full dress uniform to flank the gallery entranceway, as a means of signifying a formal state occasion. In this way, the Conceptual artist makes the covert socio-politically status of art obvious.

Yet other Conceptualists, such as the Italian Pierro Manzoni, produced related institutionally critical work. Manzoni’s 1961 \textit{Merda della Artista} (Artist’s Shit), for example, consisted of labelled and signed cans supposedly containing Manzoni’s own excrement. This work further questioned the arbitrary and institutionally commodified status of art as well as the way in which it is inscribed by dominant social and econometric ideologies.\textsuperscript{40} At the same time, it indirectly referred to Sigmund Freud’s earlier psychoanalytical equation of shit with money.\textsuperscript{41} Later, the Australian Conceptualist, Ian Burn, produced a series of works revealing the socio-critical inter-relatedness of culture in general. One such work from 1967, ‘No object … mirror’, consisted of a framed mirror across whose surface are the words ‘No object implies the existence of any other.’ Of course the critical irony of the work resides in its explicit revelation of everything else in the room: the assumed autonomy of the art object is instantly dispelled. In another series of provocatively titled works from 1993, Burn wrote the work’s title ‘Artists Think’, across a series of benign Australian landscapes. In general, the artist, through such means, questioned assumptions about art’s apparently essential subjective expressivity as well as about its supposedly ideological neutrality. He also implied that the contemporary practice of

\textsuperscript{37} See Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, \textit{Thinking About Exhibitions}.

\textsuperscript{38} See Brian O’Doherty, ‘The gallery as a gesture,’ in Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, eds, \textit{Thinking About Exhibitions}.

\textsuperscript{39} This gesture recalls Marcel Duchamp’s \textit{Air de Paris} (1913), a 50cc glass vial said to contain Parisian air.

\textsuperscript{40} See Lucy Lippard, ed., \textit{Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972}.

\textsuperscript{41} Sigmund Freud, \textit{The Interpretation of Dreams}, p. 439.
art inherently demands critical self-awareness of art’s intrinsic co-dependence on a range of contemporary ideological and institutional assumptions. 42

Overall, Conceptualism intended to demonstrate the viability of art as an ever-mutating process for critically rethinking the cultural and institutional specificities that shape the production of art. In fact, recognition of the very immateriality and mutability of ideas and their ultimate non-reliance on mere issues of representation encouraged many Conceptual artists to turn away from producing aesthetic artefacts. Such de-materialisation of the practice of art was considered a means of rendering it more or less resistant to its whole-scale co-option by commercial and institutional definitions. However, this has certainly not prevented Conceptual art, like Fluxus art, from escaping its thorough contemporary museological institutionalisation. In lieu of such appropriations, other critical cultural tendencies, appearing at roughly the same time, argued for far more radically negative and socially militant approaches to the question of art’s possible socio-political roles.

1: 1 (iii) The Internationale Situationniste

The Internationale Situationniste was founded in Paris in the early 1950’s and sought to galvanise the political and social radicalism of Dada and Surrealism. This radicalism was later filtered through the social and political activism of the 1960’s. Even more so than Dada, ‘Situationism’ was deeply ambivalent towards art, 43 although the movement included the ‘post-expressionist’ painters Constant and Asger Jorn, previously members of the Dutch CoBrA group. The chief theorist of the Internationale Situationniste, Guy Debord, believed that if art had any revolutionary role to play it was precisely in displacing the idea of ‘art’ altogether. In his magnum opus, Society of the Spectacle, Debord went on to harshly criticise the way in which international capitalism replaced individual and collective desires with a culture of spectacle, which included art, and was founded on inflated entertainment values and the cult of the ‘pop’ star. 44

To counteract such a capitalist diversion of collective social desire, Debord called for the complete dismantling of art as either a form of entertainment or a commodity; the two concepts were mutually dependent. 45 The term ‘Situationist’ was used to denote the creation of

42 See Ian Burn and Ann Stephen, Artists Think: The Late Works of Ian Burn. See also Ian Burn, Art: Critical, Political.
43 See Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
‘situations’ whose purpose was the re-territorialisation of urban space according to individual fancy or collective inclination. In this way, Situationism aimed to politicise play and seemingly aimless urban ‘drifting’ (dérive) as deliberate practices opposed to the instrumental positivism of capitalist production, which depends on the coercion of desire through work.\(^{46}\)

Also central to Situationist theory was the notion of détournement, loosely translated as ‘re-directing’. The practice of détournement was aimed at dislodging personal, social and cultural habits and as a means of destabilising the restrictive social and cultural expectations of mainstream bourgeois society.\(^{47}\) Indeed, Debord and the Situationists were wholly committed to principles of negativity, and to the destruction of everything dominant capitalist societies upheld as valuable. This included not only the principle of productive work but also generalised notions of social duty and personal sacrifice and the ever-widening celebration of culture as a privileged and elitist capitalist spectacle. Nevertheless, and despite Situationism’s antagonism to art, it relied heavily on a reappraisal of the aesthetic dimension of ‘life’. Yet it was life, as lived experience, not art as an institutionalised container of aesthetically presented ideas and a mere representation of life, that was important. Under no circumstances was art to be upheld as an autonomous entity valuable in its own right.

*Internationale Situationniste* was, as its name suggests, also determined to emphasise its internationalism; this was an emphasis highly reminiscent of the earlier avant-gardes, particularly Dada and Constructivism, and of the historical project of Marxist socialism. Thus although ostensibly based in Paris and using that city as the principal focus for its social experiments, Situationism was actually founded at Cosio D’Arroscio in northern Italy. Furthermore, its activities attracted affiliates from all over the world: from Italy, Spain, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium and England, but also — and perhaps most tellingly in terms of the extent of its global reach — from Japan, Palestine and the Middle East.\(^{48}\) Additionally, one of Situationism’s primary influences was the Jewish Romanian writer and socialist agitator Isadore Isou, who had earlier formed the Lettriste Internationale, upon which the *Internationale Situationniste* was based.\(^{49}\)

For their part, the ‘Lettrists’ aimed at utilising text as a material means of revolutionising and subverting language’s blandly accepted communicative and utilitarian function in bourgeois culture and life. Letters and consonants were isolated in concrete fashion, as a way of

\(^{46}\) Ibid.
\(^{47}\) Andrew Hussey, *The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord*, p. 104.
\(^{48}\) Ibid, p. 255.
simultaneously discrediting the literary humanism of what, in postwar Paris, had become a fashionably ‘existential’ culture. This emphasis on the concrete and material character of words, too, is highly dependent upon prior examples of both Dada and Constructivist experiments in poetic-agitational word and image play.

A scathing recent appraisal of Situationism comes from the populist British art critic and television presenter Mathew Collings. In his 2000 BBC television series, *This is Modern Art*, Collings effectively ridicules the proposed socio-revolutionary aspects of the *Internationale Situationniste*, abruptly curtailing his discussion of Situationism by asking, ‘Situationism ... was it good or was it crap?’ Not surprisingly, Collings answers his own question entirely in the negative; if anything, this proves Situationism’s continuing capacity to irritate and affront those opposed to its ‘negative’ and critical socio-cultural orientation. This is especially true with regard to those who, like Collings, basically support the recent emphasis in contemporary ‘global culture’ on cultural populism, accelerated commercialism and an uncritical embrace of a capitalist spectacle-determined entertainment ethos.

1: 1 (iv) Pop Art and Minimalism: Critical ambivalence and the crisis of the avant-garde

The contemporary popularity of U.S. Pop Art and Minimalist movements is significant in its illumination of the crucial shift in the critical function of the avant-garde and of the ‘post’ avant-garde tendencies just mentioned. This is because, unlike the socially agitational activities of the historical avant-gardes, as well as the related activities of movements such as Funk, Fluxus, Conceptualism and Situationism, both Pop Art and Minimalism are marked by an underlying socio-critical ambivalence. Such ambivalence, though connected, is vastly removed from French Dadaist Marcel Duchamp’s celebration of an aesthetics of indifference via the pursuit of ‘non-

50 ‘Existentialism’ was a French philosophical trend dominated by the thinker Jean Paul Sartre (1905–80). It emphasised the primacy of individual experience, and free will, in the face of the alienation of contemporary existence. During the 1950’s, Existentialism had become extremely fashionable in France; this is ironic, given its elevation of outsiders and social misfits. Existentialism’s popularity at this time came to assume a hegemonic dimension for other, particularly younger, French intellectuals.
51 See Chapter 2 — The empire and its allies: ‘Enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus, 2: 2 (ii) Britain’s lost empire: The invention and contemporary popularisation of ‘global’ British culture.
52 Mathew Collings, *This Is Modern Art*.
Pop Art has been cited, by critics such as influential North American post-modern art writer Lucy Lippard, as a form of ‘neo-Dada’, and curiously like Funk art, while Minimalism, grouped by contemporary U.S. cultural theorist Hal Foster under the generalised heading ‘neo avant-garde’, is said to share Constructivism’s desire to exploit the materialist and site-specific dimension of art. Similarly, Minimalist art, like its Constructivist counterpart, is predicated on processes of industrial fabrication and on a de-authored, trans-personal aesthetic devoid of expressive individuality. Pop Art also shares this impersonal utilisation of industrial methods, albeit for dissimilar ends. However, and in stark contrast to the deliberate internationalism of the founding avant-gardes from which they draw, both Pop Art and Minimalism are quintessentially products of United States industrial and post-industrial culture: Pop Art repeatedly emphasised the postwar primacy of U.S. commodity culture, and Minimalist artists and the Minimalist movement generally were based explicitly in the U.S.56

The question of the continuing and indisputable influence of a generalised Pop Art ethos — and its aesthetic, in particular — is crucial to an understanding of contemporary art’s critical orientation. This is because Pop Art’s emphasis on populist, commercial and Western consumerist culture has been wide-ranging, especially as global neo-liberal capitalist culture has since rapidly expanded. At the same time, historical interpretations of Pop Art’s effects are widely divergent. From one vantage point, Pop Art has been promoted as a serious critique of the chauvinism of elitist cultures, with their emphasis on ‘high’ cultural values. From an opposed viewpoint, it has been criticised for its intrinsic valorisation of reductive commercial

54 Lucy Lippard, ed., Pop Art.
55 See Hal Foster, The Return of the Real.
56 Minimalism’s major artists, Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Donald Judd, Sol Le Witt, Robert Morris, Richard Serra and Frank Stella, were all born and lived in America. Minimalism itself was centred principally in New York, and its proponents were also almost exclusively male.
57 In this regard it is revealing to consider the subsequent extent of the success of United States post-modern ‘post-Pop’ artists Jeff Koons and Matthew Barney, both of whom have skilfully adopted contemporary popular culture equally as a means of self-promotion. See Chapter 2 — The empire and its allies: ‘Enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus, 2: 1 (ii) Case study: The global artist as hero: Matthew Barney’s empire.
58 See Lucy Lippard, ed., Pop Art.
imagery and its ultimate uniting of cultural criticality with global U.S. style neo-liberal capitalism.  

Central to both these views, which have been identified by a range of art critics and theorists, is the question of Pop Art's original sites of production and reception. For instance, outside the United States — and particularly in Britain and Germany — Pop Art, with its serialised representations of Coca-Cola cans and comic strips, was considered an attack on the hierarchical biases of 'high' art and the conventional seriousness of contemporary art critiques. It was regarded as ultimately challenging established cultural values. From an alternative perspective, Pop Art, which preceded the widespread international student/worker activism, political and cultural radicalisation of the late 1960's and was promoted directly by groups like the Internationale Situationniste, was attacked for simply eulogising the worldwide triumph of capitalist commodification and U.S. corporate advertising.

In the end, however, and in spite of its championing by some as an essentially critical and oppositional tendency, Pop Art remains deeply ambivalent critically, particularly in terms of its relationship to the social effects of the spread of Western commercial culture. From the perspective of its purported criticality, the nature of its forms and representations nevertheless encourage, directly or indirectly, rather than oppose, art's ultimate collusional identification with such culture. Also relevant to this reading of Pop Art, despite the claim that it first appeared in Britain, is the fact that unlike many earlier avant-garde movements, Pop Art never encouraged an internationalist outlook. Instead, its imagery is irrevocably connected with

59 Unlike its British and European counterparts, which retained alternative non-art or anti art stances, 'American Pop Art sought to locate itself at the very heart of the mainstream, [and] all its artists had backgrounds in commercial art': Lynne Cooke, in Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, eds., Modern Art and Popular Culture, Readings in High and Low, p. 204.


61 For example, it has been suggested that, 'For members of the [Pop Art-related] Independent Group in London, the elimination of distinctions between high art and popular culture was a vanguard political statement — they wanted to democratise art and anticipate a more egalitarian future. The work of American Pop artists, on the other hand, was largely a-critical': Jonathan Fineberg, Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being, p. 246. See also Lucy Lippard, who notes, 'In Europe the manifestations related to Pop tend to have sociological intentions frowned upon in America': Lucy Lippard, ed., Pop Art, p. 10.

62 See Roy Boyne and Allan Rattanasi, Postmodernism and Society.

63 'The "cynical smile" of Pop Art [Warhol], is one of the obligatory signs of consumption: it no longer indicates a humour, a critical distance ... Ultimately, in this "cool" smile, you can no longer distinguish between the smile of humour and that of commercial complicity ... [I]t is not the smile of critical distance, it is the smile of collusion.' See Jean Baudrillard, in Paul Taylor, ed., Post-Pop Art, p. 44.

64 Lucy Lippard, ed., Pop Art, p. 9.
internalised and nationalistic invocations of the commodity culture of the United States.\textsuperscript{65} As a result, Pop Art also achieved early popularity among wealthy North American art collectors that led also to its rapid institutional acceptance.\textsuperscript{66}

Part of the phenomenon of Pop Art's almost immediate institutional acceptance in the United States was predicated on its attempt to popularise the reception of contemporary art in general by making it appear less 'obscure' and less challenging to general audiences versed in populist industrial culture. Thus Pop Art was also strategically successful in bolstering and promoting the public profiles of the relatively new phenomenon of postwar 'modern' art museums.\textsuperscript{67} Furthermore, Pop Art's success in post-World War II Germany can be considered as arising from a Cold War, pro-capitalist, anti-Communist ideology that saw Germany dramatically rift into Western capitalist and Eastern Communist zones.\textsuperscript{68} Therefore, the overtly populist-commercial orientation of U.S. Pop Art, regardless (in many respects) of any residually critical intentions of its artists, symbolically aided the perceived consensual world domination of U.S. style capitalist commodity culture. This was especially the case in its implied relation to alternative, politically Leftist or generally socially dissenting contemporary cultural manifestations.

Furthermore, it has been argued generally that the populist and commercially 'mechanical' vision of U.S. Pop Art, in its self-consciously overt utilisation of graphic design and art techniques, ultimately succeeded in obliterating the division between art as a broad and 'experimental' form of social critique and art as a business-directed activity.\textsuperscript{69} Such a stance is especially evident in the mass productions of Pop Art's possibly most renowned practitioner, Andy Warhol, who originally trained as a graphic artist. The contemporary vision of art presented by Pop Artists such as Andy Warhol is fully embedded within, and implicitly supportive of, the capitalist ideology of sustained business productivity that was core to post-World War II North American culture, and supportive of its continued worldwide influence.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} The West German filmmaker Wim Wenders wrote about this situation, saying, 'The need to forget twenty years created a hole and people tried to cover this ... by assimilating American Culture. One way of forgetting the past, and one way of regression, was to accept American Imperialism': Wim Wenders, quoted in Hannah Higgins, Fluxus Experience, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{69} Warhol's activities at the 'Factory' testify to this, as does his statement that what he ultimately hoped to produce was 'business art', rapidly produced and commercially attractive. Jonathan Fineberg, Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being, p. 257.
Equally, the elegant industrialism of Minimalist art, while aimed initially at critiquing and exposing contemporary art’s growing reliance on ‘modern art’ institutions, has since assumed, paradoxically, a decorative and functionalist appearance, much closer to high-end industrial design. In fact, like Boris Groys’s revelations of the ironies inherent in the anti-museum impulses of the Russian Constructivists, Minimalism too has ended a museum art par excellence. Curiously, such a situation, and the burgeoning of contemporary art museums, only makes Minimalism more attractive to current practitioners. This is especially so as its blankness can also be read as the invocation of an aesthetics of universality. At the same time, it uncannily parallels the universalist ideology underpinning globalisation as a Western econometric phenomenon.

Finally, it may be forcefully argued that there can be no ‘outside’ to the critical ambivalence of Pop Art and Minimalism. Nonetheless, Pop Art’s repeated iteration of an explicitly American Way of Life not only insistently quotes the iconography of modern Western capitalism, but also uses it as an exclusionary basis for contemporary cultural production. In doing this it reveals an overweening — and unchallenged — optimism. If there is a critical negativity underlying Pop Art, it lies in the residual and implosive passivity of its partial irony. Alternatively, the critical ambivalence of Minimalism is evident in its (ironic) success in presenting contemporary art as a critically ‘emptied’ capitalist-industrial product that is able, as a result of its apparent lack of content, to be universally circulated among a potentially limitless number of global sites.

The critical ambivalence of Pop Art and Minimalism raises questions about the international and transnationally socio-critical drives of earlier avant-gardes. Consequently, the historical avant-garde’s attempts at social effrontery and constructive socio-political

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70 See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*.
71 See Hal Foster, *Design Crimes and Other Diatribes*.
73 See Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*.
74 The crisis of transparently oppositional critique becomes particularly obvious in the various post-structuralist treatments of it. These vary significantly, from Foucault’s intricate historicist ‘archaeology of knowledge’, in which critique arises from specific discourses of power, to Baudrillard’s nihilist rejection of criticality for the sake of implosive principles based on ‘hyper-conformity’. See Chapter 1 — 1: 3 post-structuralism and the crisis of dialectical critique.
75 See Chapter 2 — The empire and its allies: ‘Enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus, 2: 2 Cementing cultural alliances in the English-speaking world.
76 See Lucy Lippard, who writes, ‘Pop is nowhere a nihilist trend ... the underlying mood everywhere seems one of determined optimism’: Lucy Lippard, ed., *Pop Art*, p. 10.
transformation now appear increasingly opaque and problematic. Such a situation is particularly evident in the many critical readings of the avant-garde discussed below. In these, the avant-garde is not simply taken at its word, especially once significant disparities emerge between what it proclaims, what it manifests, and how it is received socially and culturally. Nevertheless, many such analyses do not necessarily denounce the avant-garde outright as an entirely failed project. In fact, what emerges instead is recognition of the tension between avant-garde intention and the significant alterations to the very nature of what constitutes contemporary ‘critique’. Such alterations become particularly evident with the institutional emergence of the self-referring disciplines of ‘art theory’ and sociology.

Furthermore, the critical ambivalence of Pop Art and Minimalism and their ambiguous relationship to traditions of avant-garde oppositional internationalism are to have highly significant consequences, not only for post-modern critical culture generally, but also for post-modernism’s critical function within globalisation’s econometrically weighted world ideology.

1: 2 The avant-garde as critical ideal versus the growing influence of art theory and sociology

As the discipline ‘art criticism’ emerged during the late 1970’s and the ‘post-modern’ 1980’s as a generalised branch of sociological discourse distinct in its own right, it came to exert a powerful influence over the production of art. Today art criticism represents a specialised dialogue about art and its place within society. It explores art’s meanings and effects through analysis of the connections between varieties of differing cultural phenomena as well as within the discourse of art history.

The significance of the appearance of Conceptual art practices during the 1960’s and 1970’s had already been regarded primarily as a ‘contribution to art criticism’.77 Meanwhile, other artists intentionally adopted a dual role: they produced criticism themselves, aware of the central place manifestos had played within critical cultural movements such as Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism. The American Abstract Expressionist artist Robert Motherwell, for one, also edited and compiled an influential book on Dada and Surrealist artists.78 Others, such as the socially conscious performance artist generally considered to be the founder of ‘Happenings’,79

79 ‘Happenings’ were an experimental and performative manifestation of 1960’s ‘counter-culture’. Happenings usually involved group participation and an emphasis on spontaneous, improvised, transitory
in the United States during the 1960’s, Allan Kaprow, promoted theories aimed to destroy a 
*priori* distinctions between ‘art’ and ‘life’, between social engagement and aesthetic production. 
Accordingly, Kaprow wanted to abandon the term ‘art’ entirely. Still other artist-theorists, 
such as U.S. Conceptualist Joseph Kosuth, responded to contemporary developments in the 
study of semiotics and structural linguistics. Utilising knowledge of these, Kosuth and other 
artist like him came to regard art as a language-oriented semiological tool to be deployed 
analytically to question assumptions about how art was socially and culturally constructed. 
However, common to much of the discipline of ‘art criticism’, as well as to the art it 
provoked, is the principle of dialectical materialism developed by the German economic 
thorist, social reformer and founder of international Communism, Karl Marx (1818–83). Prior 
to Marx, though, the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) 
elucidated the theory of *dialectics*, a form of critical thinking about the nature of historical and 
cultural process. Hegel’s dialectics are indelibly connected to the idealism of 19th century 
German Romanticism, but their influence, especially on politics and art, extends much further. 
Hegel’s concept of dialectical critique is notoriously dense and refuses to suggest an overall 
unifying critical method. For Hegel, the principles of dialecticism are applicable only in accord 
with the specificity of its various applications. 

Hegel proposed that it was philosophy’s task to achieve a totalised conception of history 
that would combine all previous systems of knowledge and unite them with worldly temporal 
affairs. Hegel, unlike earlier rationalist philosophers, does not draw a neat line between spiritual 
and state issues. Indeed, he places philosophy on a historical footing that actually allows it to 
emerge as a politically transformative force. He argues that the freedom of individuals must 
come about for specific historically determined reasons. As a result, his philosophy, which 
dwells heavily on aesthetics and the role of art, allows for the intermingling of previously 
separate disciplines. Art could thus serve a socially and politically active role in transforming 

and semi-ritualised acts. Their purpose was to oppose a commodified vision of contemporary culture by 
restoring to such culture a non-object, non-directive outlook, through emphasising the close 
interconnection of art and everyday life.

80 Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*.

81 See, for instance, Joseph Kosuth’s famous ‘One and Three Chairs’ (1965), which features an actual 
chair, a photograph of the chair and a dictionary definition of the word ‘chair’. Kosuth’s point, following 
Duchamp, is that art’s meaning depends on the hidden interrelationships between the object and its 
context that in turn produces the concept, ‘art’.

82 Overall, Hegel’s ambition — to employ philosophy as a culminating practice for totalising history and 
experience — is immense. The resulting interdisciplinary nature of his thinking encompasses politics, 
religion, law, natural science, the Enlightenment, reason, culture and civilisation. See, for example, 
Hegel’s most significant work, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. 

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reality as part of the philosophical drive to achieve the historical synthesis demanded by his conception of ‘totality’. Hegel’s emphasis on ‘totality’ also pre-empted debates about the current ‘globality’ of contemporary politics and culture. Curiously, in Hegel’s time, his philosophies indirectly encouraged social activism aligned with Romanticism’s demand for spiritual and political independence, which in fact aided the rise of various nationalisms in Europe. Nations and individuals under the yoke of empires and their conglomerates seized the political implications of Hegel’s thought, and autonomy became a new international ideal. However, this ideal was still firmly ensconced within the framework of national identity.

For Marx, the socially transformative nature of Hegel’s dialectics needed to be attached to a more ‘realist’ definition of the term ‘philosophy’. Marx took Hegel’s lead, similarly questioning conceptions of political and cultural autonomy. In essence, he asked why, if people actually had the freedom to choose liberty, were so many still constrained by the material circumstances of their lives? However, rather than hoping to reach a totalised, idealised conception of history, Marx, deeply affected by the social inequalities he witnessed arising from new forms of capitalist industrialisation, particularly at the time of the industrial revolution in England, sought concrete organisational principles based not on historical synthesis, but on direct social restructuring.

Marx’s theories of historical and dialectical materialism\(^{83}\) are founded in what he perceived as the fundamental split between classes, and locate critique as a form of socially transformative opposition. Such opposition aims to expose and ultimately alter the fundamental and exploitative structural inequities endemic to industrial capitalist societies. Marx believed that capitalist commodification first effectively transformed relations between subjects into relations between things, and then claimed that these things, including relations between individuals, could be attained only through the pursuit of capital.\(^{84}\) Significantly, Marx’s theorisation of the negative effects of commodification also heavily implicates the production of culture. Culture, it was suggested, needed to resist its transformation into the exchange of mere ‘things’, stripped of any notion of critical or socially transformative agency. Art, therefore, had to resist its transmutation into an essentially class-determined high-end commodity, a neat circulatory cultural package.

\(^{83}\) See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto.*

1: 2 (i) 'Critical theory' and negative dialectics

After World War II, a specifically dialectical materialist approach to art criticism strongly indebted to Marxism, and known as 'critical theory', became particularly influential in Europe. Critical theory has been described as an 'aesthetic Marxism' because of its emphasis on the important social function of art and culture. Predominantly German critics such as Hannah Arendt, alongside the very influential Frankfurt School of sociologists, which included the socio-cultural theorists Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse, championed such theory. The Frankfurt School opposed the proliferation of U.S. style industrial capitalism in Europe, which they viewed as having a retardant effect on the critical and research function of culture. Such a situation was negative because it redefined culture on the basis of its commodity status, as Marx had already indicated; also, it generally displaced art's potential contribution to global class struggle that sought the general liberation of societies from the work-based instrumentalism of modern industrial capitalism. The ascendency of ever-increasing worldwide capitalist markets, they argued, not only restricted society but also disqualified alternative social and cultural possibilities. The overall attraction of dialectical materialism for these writers was its conviction in its ability to expose and then address the social inconsistencies and hierarchical biases underlying industrial capitalist societies.

The machinations of art and its related cultural networks are also part of the formation of the strategic social biases underlying world capitalism. Aware of this, proponents of critical theory highlighted the social dimensions of art production, stressing art not as aesthetically autonomous but as a revelatory container of contemporary social meanings. Careful attention is paid by Critical Theorists to art's contemporary social effects and public reception, as well as to how art's accepted cultural meanings evolve in conjunction with the core values underpinning the societies responsible for producing them. This attitude to art obviously rates its social role highly — indeed, as indispensable to the proper overall functioning of modern democratic societies. Critical Theorists therefore argue against the conception of a democracy primarily determined by the embrace of modern free-market capitalism. As a privileged site of meaning capable of reflecting, as well as of effectively criticising, prevalent social and political attitudes, especially in their conservative bourgeois forms, art re-acquires a critical agency capable of realistically transforming society.

Frankfurt School sociologists further envisioned for art a proto-revolutionary critical function that could, through opposition, successfully undermine the cultural and social
restrictions of unfettered market capitalism. Art, they believed, could be deployed as a tool to undermine all manner of socially enforced systems, especially the rigid systems of cultural commodification dominating Western culture and increasing its global influence. As early as 1923, the Frankfurt School sociologist Gyorgy Lukács suggested that art was an ideal discipline in which to redress the estrangement of subjects from nature and from themselves that resulted under the regime of capitalist commodification. For him art was a ‘very real and concrete field where [such issues] may be brought to fruition …’

In *One Dimensional Man*, another Frankfurt School theorist, Herbert Marcuse, claims that the conditions in which post-industrial humanity lives are not only detrimental, but actually contradict core democratic values such as ‘liberty’ and ‘equality’. Industrial capitalism, he claims, forces individuals and societies into circumstances of servitude which they believe themselves to be inextricably and powerlessly bound by. Indeed, capitalism, he says, through its strategic identification of material wealth with individual and social well-being, has displaced varieties of other possible communal freedoms and rendered the individual ‘one-dimensional’. From this perspective, humankind is regarded as having been overrun by its fixation with economic realities, to the detriment of every other type of experience. Art was regarded as a vital mechanism in counteracting such a world scenario, especially through its symbolic enabling of socially suppressed desires. Art and culture were regarded as genuinely engaged in attempts to locate alternatives to capitalist instrumentality. For such theorists, art accelerated the possibility of truly socially and libidinously liberated communities through the positing of new creative structures.

Possibly the most widely known and subsequently influential example of critical theory’s attitude to art and culture came from yet another member of the Frankfurt School. Theodor Adorno’s (1903–69) conception of a modern ‘Culture Industry’ was first elucidated in 1944.

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86 Much Frankfurt School theory expounds the essentially Marxist opinion that capitalist work forms based in the production of commodities assist in the social and cultural alienation of workers. This is because industrialisation depends on types of specialisation that rob workers of creative satisfaction because they are denied an investment in the totality of material work produced. Marx forcefully argued that this effectively reduced the worker to a slave, a cog in the capitalist machinery. For cultural theorists like those of the Frankfurt School, the example of art production was especially instructive, as it evidenced a dedication to the entirety of the material work.

88 See Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*.
89 Marcuse (Ibid.)
90 See Theodor Adorno, *The Culture Industry*. 
Via this notion, Adorno, working with another Frankfurt School cultural theorist, Max Horkheimer, severely criticises what he saw as the final transformation of culture into entertainment. Adorno’s major work, *Negative Dialectics*, is in turn a detailed rumination on the negative totalising implications of Hegelianism.\(^9\) Whereas Hegel’s idealist conception of history dispenses with apparently singular historical aberrations and man-made catastrophes such as wars, Adorno’s opposes this. Through his theorisation of recent, overwhelmingly negative historical events — World War II’s Holocaust, for example\(^9\) — Adorno concludes that history is a ‘bad totality’.\(^3\)

Importantly, the Holocaust as a product of history has been strongly linked to the Nazis’ ‘aestheticisation of politics’, further illustrating the interrelationship of aesthetics and politics in general in this case in an especially negative way.\(^4\) As a result, art as a potential form of social criticism is constantly forced to struggle against itself as well as against dominant and oppressively regulatory social systems and representations. Ultimately, however, this internalised struggle, believed to preserve the continuing relevance of criticism by maintaining it in a state of perpetual tension, is unable to prevent the domination of society by negative social trends such as capitalist commodification, which instead statically suspend liberationary social possibilities. Therefore criticism, now cut off from the once radical social possibilities promised by Hegel’s totalised view of history and Marx’s anti-capitalist dialectical materialism, is limited to a micro-political arena.\(^5\)

Curiously, this arena is dominated by cultural questions, including questions regarding art’s limited influence over prevailing political and social attitudes. However, by identifying the close parallels connecting Fascist aesthetics and political negativity, Adorno more generally undoubtedly proves their proximity and interdependence of art to politics. Also central to Adorno’s critique is his enthusiastic support for the avant-garde as a cultural ideal. For Adorno it is the avant-garde’s task, as cultural producers evidencing the highest awareness of

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\(^9\) See Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*.

\(^9\) The Holocaust refers to the German Fascist Nazi party’s ‘final solution’, espoused by its leader, Adolf Hitler, to eradicate the Jews and other racial and political undesirables from Europe. The Holocaust ultimately resulted in the mass industrialised slaughter of millions of Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, homosexuals, Communists and other political dissidents.

\(^3\) Adorno’s conception of history as a ‘bad totality’ is a negative reworking of Hegel’s idealism in which history moves, despite insignificant setbacks, towards its synthesis as a positive ‘totality’.

\(^4\) Walter Benjamin rightly recognised the overt aesthetic dimension of Nazi spectacle as a means of subverting political process through disguising its violent and opportunistic will to power. In this way appearances substitute for any political plan able to be genuinely implemented. See Walter Benjamin, ‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction,’ in author, *Illuminations*, p. 241.
contemporary social and political processes, to further culture and save it from popularisation. It will achieve this through constantly posing challenges to mainstream Western capitalist industrial culture via the development of new open forms, techniques and modes of critical and communal cooperation. In this way art is conceived as indelibly critical in its intimate links to social and political processes.

1: 2 (ii) Critique of the avant-garde as ‘negative dialectic’

Such elevated notions of the avant-garde as a network of effectively engaged socially critical movements has been systematically subjected to a range of counter-interpretations and attacks. This is especially true since the 1980’s, when many feminist critics in particular targeted, rightly, its excessively masculine, colonialist and regularly ‘a-historical’ dimensions. In fact, the avant-garde has since been rethought in terms of its attempts to negatively suppress history through proclaiming its radical difference from everything preceding it.

Authors such as prolific U.S. art theorist Rosalind Krauss, in her seminal work The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths, provides a wealth of arguments aimed at exposing many of the original critical objectives proclaimed by avant-garde artists as essentially modern myths. It is suggested here that the avant-garde, as a historical phenomenon, was not concerned with genuine social critique except in terms of simulating a scandalous form of ‘freedom’ that concealed its actual underlying reiteration of the capitalist-industrial concept of modern ‘progress’. Other cultural critics agree, supporting, for example, a view of Dada as quintessentially a-political and opposed to social and political programs of all types. Much additional criticism of the avant-garde is aimed at its dependence on frequent denial of its cross- and trans-cultural referents and on the overall concealment of its many colonialist ‘borrowings’. The unacknowledged ‘primitivist’ dimension of avant-garde agitation raises complex questions about an authorial authenticity already challenged through

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96 See John E. Grumley, History and Totality: Radical Historicism from Hegel to Foucault.
98 Rosalind Krauss, The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths. Krauss’s work became a hallmark for post-modern revisions of the role of the avant-garde.
99 Such acclaim places the avant-garde on very shaky footing by illustrating the structural weaknesses of its claims to social criticism especially on anti-capitalist economic grounds.
100 Lippard does not doubt the social dimension of Dada and the seriousness of its attack on post-World War I European society. She does, however, make the point that its critique was deliberately chaotic and resistant to organisation in an imitated party-political sense. Lucy Lippard, Pop Art, p. 22.
appropriating representations of Otherness, facilitated by the global dispersion of industrial technologies of Western capitalist economies.  

Aligned with such a critique of the actual socio-critical dimensions of avant-gardism are others exposing the avant-garde's direct complicity with the bourgeois culture it claimed to detest. In fact, it has been argued that the avant-garde was entirely co-dependent on an educated bourgeois audience open to its deliberate effrontery and staged provocations. As simple as such a situation sounds, it simultaneously undermines both the avant-garde's regularly espoused hatred of bourgeois conventions and its supposed desire to eradicate them. Actually, from this particularly critical viewpoint, the avant-garde becomes, despite its occasional capacity to shock, yet another convention, and an institutionalised genre with its own limits. This is especially the case when attempts at social disruption are gladly consumed as a yardstick for what is meaningful in contemporary culture, a situation that has been described as representing the 'legitimation of the subversive'.

The related criticisms of other cultural theorists forcefully argue a similar point — but, revealingly, without completely discrediting avant-garde critical cultural intentionality. What is often refuted, instead, is what is seen as the negative pretensions of an art proclaiming itself 'beyond' the comprehension of most audiences and therefore (seemingly contradictorily) capable of altering social reality. Indeed, the frequent negativity and destructiveness of avant-garde enunciations raise numerous contradictions. One such enunciation was the Russian Suprematist Kasimir Malevich's (1878–1935) apparently earnest wish to destroy all Russia's museums. Such a desire is so aggressively proclaimed that it disavows, paradoxically, the

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100 Krauss succinctly illustrates this point by providing the example of Alberto Giacometti, whose many surrealist and post-surrealist sculptures bear an uncanny resemblance to ancient Aztec and Egyptian ritual objects. In this way Krauss problematises the notion that the work of avant-garde artists issues from unique and subversive origins determined by their innate ultra-modernism. See Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*, pp. 44–85.

101 Such a drive is perhaps most forcefully exemplified by Surrealist leader Andre Breton's (in)famous statement that the most truly Surrealist act would be to shoot randomly into a crowd. Through such a statement, the eradication of the bourgeoisie is then lent quite a literal connotation. See Andre Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*.

102 See Lionel Trilling, *Beyond Culture*, p. 23.

103 See Frederick Jameson, 'Post modernism and consumer society', in author, *The Anti Aesthetic*.

104 Suprematism was a Russian modernist movement related to its Russian contemporary counterpart, Constructivism. It emphasised the primacy of spatial and architectural forms and was radically non-representational. Suprematism was invented by Russian artist Kasimir Malevich.

possibility of ever creating a genuinely socially transformative, or indeed Socialist, art at all. This is the negative promise, frequently ignored by art historians, which nevertheless underscores the constructive dimension of ‘Constructivism’. Additionally, the aggression evidenced by the statements of Soviet artists like Malevich mirrors not only the violent discontinuity wreaked by the 1917 Russian Revolution, no matter how positive and constructive its original intentions, but, more problematically, the subsequent violence of the Stalinist rhetoric that was levelled against Russian modernism, and that forced it to assume the reactionary mantle of ‘Socialist Realism’.

Indeed the parallels between the avant-garde’s activities and other socially negative forms are most obviously confirmed by the politicised activities of another avant-garde movement, Futurism. This 20th century Italian movement, led by the author and political agitator Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876–1944), openly embraced the socio-reactionary regime of Italy’s Fascist dictator Benito Mussolini (1883–1945). In this instance, the social negativity of avant-garde gesture became formalised in a similar manner to Fascist spectacle. As a result, Futurism’s pseudo-political program, proclaiming the rebirth of the Italian nation through the valorisation of technological violence, seems ludicrously unconvincing, as its logical outcome is self-destruction. Once Futurism is voided of any socially sustainable concepts, its regenerative implications for culture via the industrial processes of modernisation are completely forfeited. Like the un-representable Romantic sublime, avant-garde failure is conditioned by the apparent unrepresentability of the modernist revolutionary moment, which is therefore

106 Ibid., pp. 150–53.
107 Stalin’s Communist Party emphasised a style of visual populism known as ‘Socialist Realism’. Artists were expected to produce ‘realistic’ depictions of Soviet life, including the glorious, larger-than-life omnipresence of its leaders. This was effectively the death knell for Constructivism and Russia’s avant-garde, although some of Constructivism’s principal artists, most notably El Liisitsky and Alexandr Rodchenko, continued to produce graphic and photographically based art, albeit under censorial ‘supervision’.
108 See, for instance, Marinetti’s first 1909 Manifesto of Futurism, in which he says, ‘We will glorify war — the world’s only hygiene — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman. We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice.’ Marinetti officially joined the Fascist Party in 1919, and in 1922 ‘took part in the Fascists’ “March on Rome”, which made Mussolini dictator of Italy’. See Bob Osborne, ‘Futurism and politics’.
109 Aestheticised mass spectacle was crucial to Fascist populism. For a discussion of Fascism’s ‘aesthetisation of politics’. See Chapter 1: 3 (i) The politicisation of aesthetics beyond Marxism.
110 The notion of the ‘sublime’ is central to the 19th century Romantic conceptions of art. The ‘sublime’ suggests a unified aesthetic experience that is simultaneously attractive and repulsive, and which is ultimately un-representable, being essentially experiential and therefore lying outside the domain of pictorial representation.
conceived instead as the absolute negation of society. Similarly, this conjunction of Romantic and avant-garde negativity is often allied to forms of reactive nationalism that, like Mussolini’s, are diametrically opposed to the creation of a truly transformative internationalist culture of the sort generally imagined by the various avant-garde movements.

At its extreme, such an emphasis on negativity tends to shed a paradoxical politically conservative, even ultra Right-wing, cast over the avant-garde’s actions. From this perspective, the avant-garde reveals its reliance on the same humanist metaphysics — demanding sacrifice to a greater social ‘good’ — that underlies Fascism. However, it also supports Adorno’s conception of Fascism as the culmination of the repressive instrumentality of monopoly capitalism, the ‘paradigmatic form of contemporaneity’. Therefore, the capitalist commodity united with Fascist politics oppresses societies economically and politically, whilst at times avant-garde culture seems to inadvertently support this marriage. In partial agreement, Hans Richter, a member of Zurich Dada, has also noted that the proclamations of the Berlin Dadaists, the most politically engaged members of that movement, often came dangerously close to Fascist rhetoric. Isadore Isou, the founder of the Lettrist Internationale, later criticised Guy Debord’s transformation of it into the Internationale Situationiste as a betrayal, and described the Situationists as a ‘reactionary neo-Nazi group’. More recently, Paul Virilio has theorised avant-garde practices as essentially ‘pitiess’ and barbaric, and more intent on subjugation than liberation. Baudrillard, likewise, compares the neo ‘avant-gardist’ criticality of contemporary art with the rise of ultra-Right politics in France, saying that ‘the problematization of contemporary art can only come from a reactionary, irrational, or even fascist mode of thinking’.

Despite the harshness of such criticism, from this particular critical perspective it is generally supposed that the avant-garde’s negativity simply camouflaged its duplicitous conservativism and guilty attachment to bourgeois culture. Such negativity as a form of effective cultural critique is regarded as fatally flawed for its deliberate denial of its connections to the society and values it criticises. However, this avoids the avant-garde’s critical success as a

111 See John E. Grumley, History and Totality: Radical Historicism from Hegel to Foucault, p. 175.
113 Isadore Isou, quoted in The Game of War: The Life and Death of Guy Debord, p. 37.
114 Paul Virilio, Art and Fear. Virilio uses as an example a statement by the Dadaist Richard Hülsenbeck, freely supporting World War I, ‘We were for the war. Dada today is still for war. Life should hurt. There is not enough cruelty!’ (p. 29).
115 Jean Baudrillard, ‘A conjuration of imbeciles’.
'negative dialectic' as well as the considerable critical successes of its agitational activities. Similarly, outright attacks on the limitations of avant-garde critique at the same time often devalue alternative evidence of the genuine social conviction many of its practitioners. Likewise, generalised denouncements of avant-garde activity as simply misguided and phallocentrically 'heroic' disregard the genuine 'urban heroism' and risk of persecution experienced not only by many of its artists but also by various committed social and political groups that formed especially as a reaction against Fascism.

In fact, avant-garde art, in as far as it saw itself as a means of re-envisioning society through cultural critique, arose as a response, no matter how varied, to genuinely dire political and social circumstances such as those occasioned by the World War I and World War II as well as those arising from the crippling economic depression of the inter-war years. Furthermore, and especially during the 1960's and 1970's, artists regarding themselves as affiliates of socially critical European movements such as Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism (in this context one could mention Fluxus, Conceptualism and Situationism, to name a few) were similarly responding, even if not overtly, to repressive and ethically dubious political and social phenomena. In the United States this included the McCarthyist persecution of left-wing intellectuals and cultural producers, the infamous 'Watergate' scandal involving U.S. president Robert Nixon as well as the U.S. entry into the Vietnam War in 1961. It was

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116 See Lucy Lippard’s appraisal of Berlin Dadaist agitation. She writes, ‘In its own perverse way theirs was an outreaching public art, its ideas best conveyed by “events,” posters, advertisements, pamphlets, publications and the sloganized “Dadastickers” with which they plastered Berlin. Dada in Berlin, where street fighting, agit-art and revolutionary theatre were unavoidable, reached the public as diffused part of a broad social disillusionment rather than as an “art” experience. Those who went to the performances to throw eggs and tomatoes participated for the most part unconsciously in the Dada catharsis, seeing themselves as adversaries rather than participants. It was here in the domain of surprise, this neutral ground between art and life, that Dada had its greatest effect’: Lucy Lippard, Get the Message, A Decade of Art for Social Change, p. 71.

117 Many of the Surrealist artists and writers, including its leader, Andre Breton, and the core Surrealist poets Louis Aragon and Paul Eluard, joined the French Communist Party during the 1940’s and were openly hostile to the German Fascist-directed French collaborationist leadership of Marshal Petain’s Vichy government.

118 During the 1950’s, at the height of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, and in a U.S. climate of intense anti-Communism, Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908–57) led a crusade to rid American cultural life of Communist-sympathising intellectuals and artists. World-renowned cultural figures such as the U.S. author Arthur Miller and German ex-patriot socialist playwright Bertold Brecht were amongst those interrogated by McCarthy.

119 The 'Watergate' scandal (1972–74) involved the break-in, by members of the United States Counter Intelligence Agency (CIA), of the Watergate hotel complex in Washington, under directions of U.S. President Richard Nixon (1913–1994). The break-in was aimed at stealing government documents, obtained by the opposition Democrat Party, and which the government did not want publicly known;
precisely such negative political and social occurrences that avant-garde and ‘neo’ avant-garde artists hoped to at least partially redress by inundating their contemporary cultures with critical, unpopular or socially contentious gestures that questioned art’s social function. However, the ultimate ‘success’ of the avant-garde as a ‘negative dialectic’ within the very cultures it set out to challenge means that its innate reliance on negative critical methods needs to be addressed from another perspective.

The avant-garde’s frequent dependence on ‘negative’ models of critique has further implications for the discourse of dialectical materialism, as well as for critical theory. In fact the ‘failure’ of avant-garde criticality, which in many instances was broadly a critique of the instrumentality of industrial capitalist societies, can be best illustrated by the avant-garde’s shift from Europe to the United States, the epicentre of postwar capitalist expansionism. It is in the U.S. that theoretical support emerges for a cultural theory of the avant-garde as essentially embodying an autonomously aesthetic, rather than a socially critical, position.

1: 2 (iii) ‘New Left’ criticism: For a social theory of art

The relocation of avant-garde activity from Paris to New York after World War II was not simply an issue of altered geographical contexts. In fact, it effectively heralded a move away from an art whose very claim to being considered avant-garde was its outward challenge to accepted social and cultural values. Replacing this type of social criticality was a variety of criticism focused on formal issues. Thus the socially critical dimension of movements such as Abstract Expressionism, that quintessentially North American form of ‘avant-garde’ modernism, is turned inwards, away from the social arena. 120 In fact, since this time, the question of art’s criticality has been split between an analysis of art as either an aesthetic paradigm founded on the discussion of formal values, or a social paradigm engaging in experiment and dissent.

The postwar emphasis on aesthetics tends to value art as a reified and isolated entity relegated to a specific specialised field that is otherwise distinctly separate from broader social issues. The sociological approach to art indicates the manner in which art, as a social construct, is heavily encoded and influenced by important factors such as class, education, race and

they included including sensitive and compromising information regarding the war in Vietnam. The uncovering of this scandal led directly to the fall of the Nixon government.

120 Serge Guilbaut discusses the way in which Abstract Expressionism was used as a means of deliberately propagating internationally the notion of a specifically American avant-garde. The author also relates how this was done strategically, as a means of increasing the financial value of such work in the New York art market. See Serge Guilbaut, How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art.
gender. Traditionally, such issues are precisely those that are ignored or strategically concealed in the public reception of art. This would also explain why certain types of artistic production, particularly those dedicated to addressing social inequalities within the art world also, are often accorded a position of secondary importance. In this view, it is assumed that the revelation of contemporary political and social concerns compromises the aesthetic validity or ‘purity’ of the art produced because the unified formal parameters of the artwork have been ‘transgressed’.

Significantly, such an opinion has been most strongly promoted by highly influential U.S. critics such as Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg. These critics argue strongly for maintaining the concept of an avant-garde. The type of avant-garde these writers describe, however, is one that remains firmly within the parameters of a liberal/humanist tradition based on the cult of the individual ‘genius’. It is therefore distinctly unlike many earlier European avant-gardes, which were theoretically directed at the collective and active transformation of society and utilised provocation as a catalyst.\(^{121}\) Indeed, Fried in particular disregards as merely ‘theatrical’ art which values social content over the dispassionate contemplation of its formal values.\(^{122}\)

Curiously, Clement Greenberg (1904–94), like the Marxist Adorno before him, regards the penetration of high culture by the traces of mass culture as responsible for art’s general decline and subsequent need for ‘redemption’. The author also deems art that references popular culture as irredeemably ‘kitsch’ and thereby inherently debased.\(^{123}\) However, the dominance of postwar theories of the superior role played in art by aesthetics does not necessarily exclude issues of ‘content’. The question of art’s critical function is therefore not simply a question of representation versus abstraction. Indeed, many modernist works, while wholly representational, do not envision a socio-critical function for art; nor do they encourage social questioning. Instead, such works rely on the serialised repetition of acceptable iconographies, most noticeably the portrait, the nude, the landscape and the still life. Traditionally, these spheres are seen to encapsulate certain irrefutable dimensions of human experience. Faith in the innate

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121 Ibid.
122 See Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood*.
123 Interestingly, in terms of his subsequent reputation as an arch-cultural conservative supported by the CIA (see, for example, Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters*, p. 158), Clement Greenberg initially subscribed to the idea of a socialist renewal of culture. He concludes this essay with, ‘Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look toward socialism for a new culture — as inevitably one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism simply for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.’ See Clement Greenberg ‘The avant-garde and kitsch’, in Clement Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, pp. 9–15, p. 21.
humanist dimension of such genres effectively exempts them from having a socially critical role.

This would also explain why, to give but one example, the work of an artist such as the early 20th century German Expressionist Emil Nolde could be valued despite the artist’s adherence to Nazi doctrine. The formalist theories of critics such as Fried and Greenberg (alongside many curators and collectors) implicitly assume that the aesthetic and expressive dimensions of the work of artists such as Nolde simply transcend historical circumstance and the contemporary politics underlying its production. Yet such an overtly ‘aesthetic’ reading is only possible because while the aesthetic mode utilised by the artist was contemporary, its subject matter was unerringly traditional, consisting mainly of portraits, nudes, landscapes and still lifes.

Furthermore, the content of such subject matter, rather than functioning in a socially aware or critical manner, is linked to the rhetoric of respectable bourgeois visual/poetic tradition. Therefore, despite the basis of such work in representation, its ‘radical’ ‘avant-garde’ aspect is considered in terms of the extent of its formal inventiveness. Paradoxically, it could also be claimed that because Nolde was vilified alongside other contemporary practitioners in the infamous 1937 Nazi exhibition of modernist art in Berlin, Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art), such a vilification instantly places the artist in a historically sympathetic position automatically opposed to Hitler’s despised regime, regardless of the artist’s actual support for it.

These are not simply ‘historical’ issues, though, and more recent reversals of such instances also occur. In 1983 the North American Conceptual artist Hans Haacke, for example, drew a direct lineage between the formal dimensions of Minimalism and the brutally repressive practices of the United States’ military in his work, U.S. Isolation Box, Grenada. Here, the artist subtly aligned the invocation of abstract geometric aesthetics, aimed at promoting universal and altruistic trans-historical values, with contemporary practices of the torture and subjugation of specific disobedient Others (in this case the enforced isolation of prisoners — these people were considered Others precisely because of their open criticism of U.S. imperialism). However,

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124 Emile Nolde was a member of the German Expressionist movement Die Brücke, which extolled a primitivist ‘return to nature’. Nolde became an ardent member of Hitler’s National Socialist Party after Hitler came to power in 1934.
125 See Janet Wolff, Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art.
126 See Douglas Crimp, ‘The art of exhibition’.
the social concerns demonstrated in this work were ultimately ignored, and it was condemned instead on aesthetic terms — for its lack of any discernible artistic quality.  

Other critics support the appraisal of art primarily in terms of its formal aesthetic values. Some, including the British cultural theorist Christopher Butler, also argue that so-called post-modern ‘avant-gardes’ remove historically prescient definitions of what art is, thereby allowing a cultural situation in which ‘anything goes’. Such a situation is negatively construed as an excuse for unregulated self-affirmation via historically suspect operations such as the pursuit of self-publicity and institutional support — garnered, one assumes, by the mere skill of the artist’s self-promotion. By implication, self-determination is seen as essentially negative because it also loosens qualitative ‘aesthetic’ and formal standards normatively associated with notions of art as a product of bourgeois high culture.  

What is most troubling to Butler, and to other similarly inclined theorists, is the ‘undecidedness’ of contemporary post-modern forms of cultural production. As far as Butler is concerned, this results in an art that can no longer be justified through recourse to a priori historical models (such as the portrait, the nude, the landscape and the still life) whose ‘objective’ value is supposedly set. Of course it has always been a basic tenet of avant-garde critical process, at least as it was initially conceived in Europe, to throw into ongoing crisis fixed preconceptions regarding the nature of culture and its contemporary social effects.  

Not supporting the validation of art on purely aesthetic grounds, certain sociologists have instead sought to locate a mid-point at which the aesthetic and social aspects of art can be simultaneously and equally affirmed. For example, Janet Wolff, in The Sociology of Art, claims that the reception of art is ultimately critically located somewhere between its sociological and its ‘purely’ aesthetic apprehension. But such an appraisal is also curiously non-committal. For instance, if the considerable influence social circumstances play in the creation and reception of art can be clearly illustrated, how then is it possible not to draw conclusions about the socially critical potential of contemporary art? The relationship between art and its social and political context are here claimed to always be, at least partially, irreducible. That is, at some point the artwork will assert itself as a primarily aesthetic experience over and above what it communicates, without necessarily simply absenting issues of content altogether.

129 See Janet Wolff, Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art.
In fact, the devaluing of the potential socio-critical function of art that occurred after the postwar shift of the avant-garde from Europe to the United States, where it came to be valued primarily for its formal inventiveness, was a central concern of a type of critique loosely known as ‘New Left’ criticism. Such criticism has also been referred to as ‘The New Art History’, especially in Britain. Such an approach is historically indebted to critical theory and the sociology of the Frankfurt School. Conditioned by the essentially socially progressive and politically Leftist cultural theory of both, New Left criticism pursued a concerted and specific reappraisal of the paradigmatic shift in the meaning of the avant-garde as it appeared in the United States, and specifically in New York. Such criticism incorporated a methodological tracing of the trajectory of tastes and movements in the New York art world from the 1960’s through to the 1980’s.

Through such a revised historicist approach, the historical ascendency of movements such as Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, Photo-Realism, Minimalism and Conceptualism are shown to occur under very specific social, political and historical circumstances. For instance, the critical shift from Abstract Expressionism’s emphasis on internalised and aestheticised psychological states to the more apparently populist and extrovert representations of Pop Art is viewed as reflecting a concurrent social shift. That shift, it is argued, reflects a desire to fracture the hermeticism of Abstract Expressionism and its attendant individualistic interiority by opening it out to the pervasive influence of the contemporary popularity of commodity culture. This similarly represents a shift away from non-representational and back to representational modes of cultural production. It is curious, though, that both these movements, despite their considerable differences, appealed to a particularly U.S. cultural sensibility, considered quintessentially modern. Furthermore, Pop Art’s re-emphasis on representation did not prevent it from seeming as acritical as Abstract Expressionism’s deliberate avoidance of any obvious representational ‘content’.

In contrast, Conceptualism’s first critics supposed that the passivity of its method, and the suggestion that ‘appearance’ was a language, not the terrain of subjective expression, was ‘anti-

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130 The New Art History initially emerged from the deeply reactionary cultural and political climate provoked by the Vietnam War, which likewise saw the birth of the broader New Left movement internationally. Many of the ‘new art historians’ were therefore pro-Marxists — Dawn Ades, Victor Burgin, Terry Eagleton and Dick Hebdige, for example.


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Likewise, critical antagonism to Conceptualism was based on a deeply conservative celebration of the artist as the originating locus of creativity. Such a view runs alongside the fundamentally individualist orientation of capitalist production. Such production favours the dominant social/commercial codes enacted by private enterprise; at the same time, these codes are able to emphasise culturally conservative myths that present the artist as inherently ‘different’ — mad, impulsive, violent, irrational — in order to increase art’s commercial desirability.\(^{132}\)

In contrast, a critical art tendency like Conceptualism promoted a communal encoding of contemporary experience, as it is founded in identifiable codes and collective critical manoeuvres. As a result, markets and audiences alike initially disfavoured such work because of its attempts to dematerialise the art object, especially in relation to its capitalist identity as a high-culture commodity. Such a rejection reinforces the fact that the aesthetic value of the art object is generally the principal means by which it is recognised as such.\(^{134}\) Of course such a prognosis — the inevitability of critical art’s consumption as a commodity via its reception on purely aesthetic grounds or its marginalisation as either anachronistic or ‘unartistic’ — has numerous negative implications for the continuation of the avant-garde ideal of art as a form of socially engaged criticality.

1: 2 (iv) A ‘neo’ avant-garde? Attempting to reinvent the critically ‘real’

Blanket condemnations of the historical avant-garde as a failed project often reveal an outright antagonism that seems overly biased today. In fact, this one-sidedness is, ironically, comparable to the criticisms originally levelled at the avant-garde: that it was irreconcilably monocular and oblivious to self-criticism. Art critic Dawn Addes challenges this anti avant-garde bias on behalf of Dada, which ‘is seen as contributing to the “negative cast” of modernism, and this alone becomes its token value. Not only does this token categorization simplify to the point of caricature, it also narrows the context for specific works of art or specific artist’s practices and distorts the nature and extent of the involvement of Dada … in the visual arts as a whole.’\(^{135}\)

Yet if we consider the avant-garde from a micro-political perspective, its activities display an


\(^{133}\) Here one can mention the repeated mythologising of Jackson Pollock as self-destructive genius, especially after his early death in a car accident and the subsequent and typical escalation of prices for his paintings.

\(^{134}\) See Eleanor Heartney, *Critical Condition: American Culture at the Crossroads.*

array of vastly differing, often contradictory objectives. Such contradiction is inevitable, because the avant-garde was never a united entity; nor were the members of its various branches always united.\textsuperscript{136}

Though many have claimed that the avant-garde was not an effectively engaged critical body, some have attempted to extend its contemporary relevance. First among these is U. S. art theorist Hal Foster. Foster’s \textit{Return of the Real}\textsuperscript{137} is an intricate and forcefully argued study aimed at locating genuine critical opposition in a range of artists of his generation. He proposed that in particular such artists were dedicated to an ‘anti-aesthetic’ critique of the various modes of power embedded in cultural representations, from the role of art criticism to the negative effects of post-colonialism. The artists most regularly championed by Foster include the predominantly conceptual practitioners Hans Haacke, Daniel Buren, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Barbara Kruger and Sylvia Kobolwski. Significantly, the practices of all these artists are located resolutely within a socially critical framework. Foster argues that for this type of art to function critically in opposition to social and political conservatism, highly evidenced by the U.S. presidency of Ronald Reagan during the 1980’s, for example, it must necessarily reconnect with a clear conception of contemporary socio-political ‘reality’. Foster’s conception of the critically ‘real’ involves culture’s reacquaintance with a broadly Marxist model. Via such a reconnection, Foster argues, contemporary art will once again be able to successfully influence other domains, most notably politics, in ways that do not simply emphasise a historicised ‘avant-garde’ tradition. As a result, art’s criticality will be greatly enhanced as it relearns its capacity to challenge society via partial recourse to critical avant-garde examples.

In \textit{Return of the Real}, Foster argues that to imagine post-modernism as an ultimate break with modernist tradition, as Butler argues on behalf of Abstract Expressionism, is in fact to reinstate modernism’s basic tenets. Such an attitude views history and time as an essentially discontinuous series of discrete temporal entities. The traditionalist outlook is to view time as continuous, and art history as the smooth transition from one tendency to the next. Foster, however, claims that neither view is entirely possible in isolation. History is neither entirely

\textsuperscript{136} Here one is reminded specifically of the many Surrealist ‘expulsions’, in which members were forced to leave the movement by its leader, Andre Breton, for breaching its ‘rules’. Alternatively, there are many examples of supposedly ‘opposing’ avant-garde movements collaborating, such as the Dada Constructivist conference held in Weimar, Germany in 1922 and the earlier union of Dadaist and Futurists in Paris in 1921, in which the Futurist leader, F.T. Marinetti, publicly presented the latest Dada manifesto by Tristan Tzara, who then (typically) terminated proceedings by loudly shouting the Futurists down. (see Lucy Lippard, ed., \textit{Dadas on Art}, p. 162).

\textsuperscript{137} Hal Foster, \textit{The Return of the Real}.
continuous nor discontinuous. From this perspective it becomes possible to propose the existence of a 'neo' avant-garde. It would be the neo avant-garde's task to reconnect with those moments at which the historical avant-garde was at its most socially engaged. Thus the historical examples of Dada and Constructivism, for example, achieve a renewed contemporary validity, without their procedures simply being repeated.

Such an outlook suggests that critical art arises at critical times and at times of cultural and social crisis. Furthermore, contemporary culture is always traceable to surrounding historical and political circumstances, as it critically re-forms in reaction to mutating social inequalities. Such inequalities can then be addressed and if not resolved, at least confronted discursively in ways that reactivate contemporary art's potential for critical agency. At the same time, contemporary art's precedence as a high-end commodity, itself a symptom of the structural inequalities arising in the overwhelmingly commercialised context of Western post-industrial capitalism, is challenged. Similarly, art further enters into a debate about the hierarchical nature of its own post-industrial forms and institutions. At that time, art again readily accepts the social imperative to challenge dominant institutional attitudes once they are accepted as given.

The usefulness of Foster's conception of a neo avant-garde privileged in its connection to a new critical reality is open to contestation. Indeed, one-time Dadaist Raoul Hausmann remarked that the related term 'neo-dada' was 'a fraud on both time and art', because neo-dada sided with the object as a 'thing in itself — which dada denied'. In other words, neo avant-garde activity effectively fetishises the avant-garde by turning it into a static historicised object, a mere model of critical cultural agency. The highly influential Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the Universities of Leeds, Zygmunt Bauman (1925–), disclaims the possibility of the existence of any avant-garde, let alone a 'neo' avant-garde, within the context of post-modernism. This might seem surprising, as Bauman utilises a temporal non-linearity that is actually highly sympathetic to the one proposed by Foster in his Return of the Real. According to Bauman, post-modern time is fragmentary, floating, and prone to constant backward and forward slippages.

The avant-garde, however, traditionally requires a sense of time that overemphasises contemporaneity as a hypostatised path to the future. By doing so, it assumes its literal identity as an 'advance guard', responsible forever pulling the 'now' into the future. Eventually this

139 Zygmunt Bauman, Postmodernity and Its Discontents.
avant-garde will be rewarded for its initially contentious actions, as everyone lagging behind, enslaved by tradition, will be forced to catch up. Even Foster’s neo avant-garde artists are represented as necessarily working on a controversial cutting edge. Whilst this historical frontier posited by Foster is by no means identical to that experienced by the avant-garde Dadaist or Constructivists, for instance, it still supposedly marks the ‘forefront’ of contemporary social and cultural discourses. Similarly, the ‘neo’ avant-garde falls along a fault-line absolutely separating its practitioners from the prevailing practices of a contemporary United States dominated by corporate culture.

Refuting such idealist suggestions, Bauman denies the very frontier to which this model pertains. Such frontiers, he suggests, have dissipated to such an extent that the shifting and overlapping temporalities of post-modernism tend to credit critical and artistic multiplicities at different times, though randomly, as if on a whim, and not in the critically strategic manner Foster envisages. In this way, the critical model of the avant-garde displacing the present and pushing it into the future or simply dislocating the present is replaced instead by a series of random accidents and isolated experiments. Such a view problematises not only Hegel’s early critique of history as an imminent totality synthesising philosophical, political and artistic systems, but also Marx’s dialectical materialism and its commitment to a structured model of social justice. If there is a quest at all in post-modern culture, Bauman argues, it is to disassociate art from its traditions and representation from its communicable function. The ‘non-sense’ that results, whilst not necessarily a-critical, is not necessarily devoted to social criticism, even of an absurd or neo-dadaist variety, either. The type of art such a view of contemporary art suggests is hybridised in both formal appearance and critical orientation. And as a result of its inevitable fragmentation, such art can no longer claim to simply culturally oppose social injustice.

Bauman’s criticism represents the major trend in current critical thought regarding the avant-garde’s contemporary relevance. This does not reduce the avant-garde’s historical importance as an example of socially critical cultural production; however, avant-garde terminology has become both overloaded with prior associations and untenable under vastly altered global conditions. Similarly, if we consider the influence and complexities of French post-structuralist theory and its reshaping of contemporary critical thought, it becomes ever

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140 Such a view of contemporary culture is further supported by post-modern French theorist Paul Virilio, who specialises in an analysis of the cultural effects and effects on art of various post-industrial technologies, such as computers and the internet. See, especially, Sylvère Lotringer and Paul Virilio, The Accident of Art.
more difficult to reiterate the types of oppositional practices employed by the historical avant-garde. In fact, by finally abandoning the terminology of the avant-garde — and that means the terminology of Foster’s championed ‘neo’ avant-garde as well — the types of critical strategies available to art are potentially expanded, rather than annihilated. This possible expansion of the role of art’s criticality is, however, subject to a radical and problematic complexification of the basis of contemporary critical thinking about culture. The implications of the complexities of the varieties of post-structuralism are by no means utopian; nor, at times, are they at all positive.

1: 3 Post-structuralism and the crisis of dialectical critique

Claims supporting the notion of a socially engaged and critically oppositional culture made by the avant-garde and ‘neo’ avant-garde, by Critical Theorists and sociologists and New Left critics, have all been rigorously challenged by a range of contemporary philosophical discourses normatively referred to, in the English-speaking world at least, as ‘French Theory’.\textsuperscript{141} Such theory is perhaps better served by the term ‘post-structuralism’.\textsuperscript{142} Post-structuralism, related to but distinct from the broader critical project of post-modernism, seeks to analyse and revise, in a multitude of ways, resistant structures already identified through earlier critical forms, such as dialectics.\textsuperscript{143} Indeed, much post-structuralist thinking about the role of culture casts serious doubt on the continued effectiveness or relevance of either Hegelian dialectic or Marxist dialectical materialist orthodoxies to discussions about its contemporary social or political effects.

The types of critiques posited by post-structuralist philosophers, however, whilst united in their rejection of both humanist metaphysics and orthodox Marxism, nevertheless differ drastically from one another. In fact, it would be more accurate to instead speak plurally of the varieties of post-structuralisms. The post-structuralist challenge to the critical discourses of dialectical materialism and critical theory are far-ranging, and its implications dramatically complicate assumptions about what constitutes critical thinking in culture and generally. This, in turn, raises numerous questions about the function of criticism once it abandons opposition and once the binaries traditionally separating justice from corruption, or form from content, for


\textsuperscript{142} Such theory is deemed ‘post-structuralist’ specifically in its relativity to early French Structuralist thought propounded by theorists like Jacques Lacan (1901-1981), Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), Claude Levi-Strauss (b.1908-), and the early Roland Barthes (1915-1980), and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Structuralism is based primarily in semiology, the critical analysis of signs in culture.

\textsuperscript{143} The term ‘post-modernism’ actually covers a range of re-interpretive critiques of the modernist project. Many of these like Hal Foster’s theorisation of a ‘neo’ avant-garde are broadly Marxist and unlike post-structuralism, still committed to a generalised project of political and cultural liberation.
example, have been radically dislocated. A consideration of the work of several major theorists of post-structuralism takes the definitions of ‘criticism’ into radically altered territory without simply dispensing with it.

1: 3 (i) The politicisation of aesthetics beyond Marxism

Whilst by no means technically a post-structuralist, the writings of the German cultural theorist Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) pre-empt much post-structuralist thinking on the critical dimension of contemporary culture. What is particularly illuminating about Benjamin’s critique is its mingling of theory with practices resistant to theory. Thus, for Benjamin, critique is not simply enacted against the objects of criticism, but instead enters the very domain of the object being criticised. In this respect criticism cannot stand apart and on higher ground from the terrain upon which it draws. Instead, for Benjamin, critique utilises contemporary and historical materials to form broadly discursive theoretical entities. These crucially imply reading as a constructive undertaking; readers responsible for piecing together for themselves the nature of the critique being presented.\(^{144}\) This ‘understanding’ between author and reader is necessarily plural, and frustrates attempts to ascribe meaning to an originary authorial presence.\(^{145}\) This is certainly part of what ultimately estranged Benjamin from his friend and contemporary Adorno, whose initial faith in modernist progress stands in stark contrast to Benjamin’s emphasis on a highly idiosyncratic historical materialism.

Also significant is Benjamin’s assessment of Marxism, which he simultaneously supports and rejects. Part of his rejection enables Benjamin to empathise with the commodity form. This is because he sees in commodities, and especially in their proximity to popular culture, evidence of the revolutionary capacity of relatively new technologically mass-produced representational modes such as photography and film.\(^{146}\) At the time, such practices were largely considered unworthy of serious critical investigation. For Critical Theorists like Adorno, they were often subjected to attack for what he saw as their innately populist emphasis and their supposedly

\(^{144}\) Benjamin’s opus *Passagenwerk* is a reinvestigation of the 19th century arcades of Paris. It is significant in that it is composed entirely of fragments, theoretical ‘found objects’ relating to the shift in bourgeois consciousness at the dawning of the modern capitalist era. It is therefore without an overall proscribed theoretical framework; it is the reader, instead, who is filling in the gaps between the represented conceptual entities.


\(^{146}\) In fact Benjamin expressly celebrated Dada and Surrealist experimental uses of film because they challenged contemporary institutionalised categories of ‘art’. However, he also believed that such uses of an increasingly popular medium would also resist its capitalist commodification. See Walter Benjamin, ‘Surrealism: The last snapshot of the European intelligentsia’ in Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings.*
commercially homogenising tendencies — and their attendant lack of critical self-awareness. Once again, Benjamin reads this lack of depth differently: he sees it as an indication of a rejection of bourgeois inwardness. This attitude indicates Benjamin's unorthodox conception of Marxism (especially compared with that supported by Adorno and many other adherents of critical theory).

Benjamin also recognised the interdependence of political and aesthetic discourses. He demanded that art 'politicise aesthetics' because the opposite was the 'aestheticisation of politics' (most notably enacted in Nazism).\textsuperscript{147} The 'aestheticisation of politics' within the context of broader culture results in the treatment of art as a mystified realm of transcendent meaning in which politics has no place. Thus aesthetic reification, rather than simply removing art from its crucial role in social and political debate, directly contributes to the encouragement of repressive social institutions and their related politics. Such reification assists those in power to objectify contemporary politics by drawing on deeply ingrained cultural stereotypes.

Similarly, through the seemingly opposed tradition of Western liberalism, the domination of societies through capitalist appropriation objectifies issues of social welfare by always representing them at a distance. In this way happiness can only be 'bought' somewhere 'else', just as originary nature as 'goodness' and 'truth' can only be appropriated in terms of individual ownership. This site, possessed by these means, likewise indicates the boundaries of subjectivity, and must be protected, according to the 'objective' rights of the individual, from the incursions of those without the 'natural' capacity to own.\textsuperscript{148}

Benjamin's discourse in this case strongly implicates liberalism, as the social theory of individualism, as one of the principal agents of social domination. Liberalism dispenses with art's potential critical agency, preferring instead aestheticisation enabled through private ownership. Liberalism therefore comes to regard art primarily as an object of economic and institutional worth, whose value systems are set according to the objective, rational and scientific principles of capitalism. In his classic 1936 text, \textit{The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction}, Benjamin empathises with the commodity as a potential object of liberation, yet he does so contrary to liberal capitalist ideology.\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{148} See Michael Ryan, \textit{Politics and Culture: Working Hypothesis for a Post-Revolutionary Society}.
\textsuperscript{149} Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Walter Benjamin, \textit{Illuminations}.
The recuperation — or ‘redemption’, as Benjamin would say — of the commodity happens in spite of the system of commodification.\(^{150}\) Similarly, its revolutionary potential undermines the instrumental limits set by the institution of the commodity. Overall, Benjamin’s multi-disciplinary approach to critique confirms his contemporary relevance to philosophers. Benjamin drew from many discourses, including history, psychoanalysis, poetics and literary theory, without being a ‘master’ of or ‘expert’ in any of them in an institutionalised academic sense. Indeed, Benjamin’s decentralised theoretical stance places him at a considerable distance from an intellectual milieu that was still attached to the limitations of strictly delineated and fiercely protected theoretical territories. More importantly, it pre-empts a plethora of critical discourses, including the discourses collectively known as post-structuralism.

1: 3 (ii) Critical fragmentation: De-Constructivism

This question of institutional domination is central also to French philosopher Jacques Derrida’s (1930–2004) critique of the institutions of language (all language, including art), and to his philosophy, known generically as ‘Deconstruction’. Actually the relegation of art to a purely aesthetic and therefore supplementary position dates as far back as Classical Greek philosopher Plato’s (c. 428–c. 347 BC) assessment of artists and artisans as the group demonstrating the basest understanding of the ‘real’ problems of existence due to their attachment to representation.\(^{151}\) Plato regarded speech as the locus of philosophical understanding, grounded as it is in the very physicality of the subject. For him, the plastic arts lag far behind written culture, as simulacra of simulacra; a language thrice removed from the originary speech-event. Art is represented as the diversion of the un-wise, those naturally incapable of possessing nature’s truth.

In contrast to the self-assuredness of such longstanding Western philosophical traditions, Derrida demonstrates philosophy’s unstable, indexical and prodigiously hierarchical dimensions. Through his philosophical theories of deconstruction, Derrida refutes assumptions

\(^{150}\) In his consideration of the work of Charles Baudelaire (1821–67), Benjamin notes how Baudelaire is struck by the rise of the commodity form and its appearance in the innumerable shops of the bourgeois Parisian arcades, those precursors to today’s ubiquitous shopping malls. Baudelaire’s emphasis on the display of such exchangeable goods is as phantasmagoria — that is, as objects with autonomous lives beyond their purely monetary or utilitarian value. These objects haunt bourgeois culture at the turn of the 19th century and their increasing fetishisation already indicates the transformation of human relations into relationships between things, as predicted by Marx. Curiously, the phantasmagoric, anthropomorphic and dehumanised dimensions of such objects also proved fertile subject matter for the Surrealists. See Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*.

\(^{151}\) Plato’s *Republic* (written around 360 BC), a book central to the historical project of the Enlightenment, is notorious for its negative assessment of the artists and artisans.
that meaning, as defined through language and speech, simply ‘represents’ truth. For Derrida, all meaning is discursive rather than representational. At the same time, the act of writing is seen as a means of inscribing the Self. But the critical notion of subjectivity, which is crucial to such a notion, is inherently inventive and non-repetitious.\textsuperscript{152} Plato insists on language and speech as objective models of subjectivity around which democratic society is organised; Derrida shows these to be arbitrary, as well as perpetually changeable. Still, and like the majority of post-structuralist thinking, Derrida does not posit the subject as an originating point; he posits it instead as a point in a network of unstable and mutating structures and positions. The ‘undecidability’ underlying Derrida’s deconstruction therefore also means that previously separate discourses are able to interpenetrate each other.

For Plato, the hierarchical subdivision separating practices, whether of aesthetics or politics, is ‘natural’, as it is for an Enlightenment philosopher such as Immanuel Kant (1724–1804).\textsuperscript{153} That is because the Enlightenment as a process is theorised to occur from above, under the direction of those best equipped to understand the true nature of history.\textsuperscript{154} Derrida, however, regards the emergence of hierarchical strata as fundamentally textual and strategic, occurring as institutions increase their power and influence primarily by illustrating their specialist separation from others. This allows certain spheres to effectively dominate as a demonstration of their ‘natural’ exclusivity and of the organic stratification of the different modes of social and cultural production. In this model, the law, supposedly lying closest to the speech-event, precedes politics, which in turn precedes aesthetics by some considerable distance. What deconstruction aims to expose is the arbitrary differences of rank enabled by such a system.

By exposing the \textit{a priori} assumptions of institutionalised privilege, culture becomes open to inter-textual ‘pollution’. Furthermore it has been assumed that the logical outcome of deconstructive operations was simply the overall levelling of tradition.\textsuperscript{155} Knowledge, it was assumed, through undergoing radical democratisation, would simply render every statement equally valid and therefore equally valueless. Likewise, it was assumed that any text could be grafted onto any other and that culture could be viewed as an endlessly arbitrary and

\textsuperscript{152} See Jacques Derrida, \textit{Difference and Repetition}.

\textsuperscript{153} Kant furthered Plato’s hierarchical reading of culture and of representational practices in his speech delivered in Konigsberg, Prussia, on 30 September 1784 and entitled ‘An answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?”’

\textsuperscript{154} See Immanuel Kant, ‘An answer to the question “What is Enlightenment?”’
interchangeable series of potential hybrid ‘texts’. In it no individual text could dominate another
or reconstitute a pre-existing meta-narrative. What was most often deduced from this scenario
was the emergence of a utopian, but ultimately meaningless, culture from which all forms of
judgement had been banished. However, this is not the case, for judgements are always being
made on culture and its objects.

Deconstruction in fact disallows the truly arbitrary, for such arbitrariness suggests that
existing narratives have no prior frames of reference and no history. Such a position also
assumes that it is possible to commence deconstruction from any perspective and at any point of
any text. Instead Derrida demonstrates that within any existing text lie a series of propositions
that may be questioned and dismantled. This process therefore requires a certain adherence to
the spirit of the text being deconstructed and to what that text might subsequently reveal about
the suppositions upon which it is based.156 The theory of deconstruction, however, dispenses
with the concept of revealing the latent ‘truth’ of a work. Instead it claims that there is a
multitude of possible truths arising from the reworking of particular texts, texts that were
previously assumed known and thus historically ‘intact.’ Deconstruction is not simply a method
of random fragmentation and recombination; it suggests that certain philosophical propositions
regarding, as an example, distinctions between art and critique, are not historically fixed and
therefore ‘true’ but rather, endlessly and differently, interpenetrable.

According to Derrida’s deconstructionisms, the critical role of art always already exists in
relation to other a priori models, in the constructed environment for instance, the models
supplied by the Platonic solids; the sphere, the cone and the cube. Such models, Derrida has
argued at length, are never ‘originary’ in the sense that what is presented as an original (such as
geometric forms like the circle, the triangle and the square) are automatically assumed to
possess an innate priority over less ‘pure’ forms that are seen as mere deviations of those
originals. Derrida refutes the hierarchical separation such recourse to origins suggests. Therefore
his critique implies that the plastic arts, rather than autonomous and ‘pure’ in their emphasis on
formal concerns derived from original models, are in fact open to their penetration by other
languages, including the impure languages of politics and social criticism.

As a result, deconstructionism throws attempts to disentangle the formal practice of art
and the social practices of criticism into endless fluid crisis, allowing these practices to
continually mingle in different and potentially hierarchically destabilising ways. Similarly,

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156 See, for example, Jürgen Habermas’ interpretation of Derrida’s deconstruction, which he regards as
fundamentally negative and empty, in The Philosophical Discourses of Modernity: Twelve Lectures.
deconstruction refuses a unitary method, that is, there is no one practice of deconstruction but instead many modes of deconstructionism and these are dependent on the singularity of every particular conceptual event or problem. Thus its critique promotes thinking practices that are strategically discontinuous and not determined by say, the predictable repetitions necessary to constitute a ‘style’ or unified ideology. Additionally, it encourages the critical apprehension of art in terms of the socio-political specificities of its related ‘texts’ and contexts and their inseparability. Some regard the practice of deconstruction as ultimately sceptical of culture and politics. Others see deconstruction as essentially positive and productive in its ability to apply to a diversity of fields, including those of culture and politics. In fact commentators of the latter variety have accredited deconstruction with having theorised the ‘constructivist dimension of thought’.

1: 3 (iii) Style as critique

The complexity of Derrida’s practices of deconstruction have often led him to be accused by critics — from both Left and Right — of reducing social critique to a type of intellectualised overly baroque aestheticism. In other words, he is accused of collapsing content into form. Roland Barthes (1915–80), originally a structuralist concerned primarily with linguistics, later developed a concept of writing which similarly questions this division between form and content. For Barthes, ‘writing’ is to be understood in its broadest sense, as a combined practice of theory and poetics that may be equally called ‘style’. Many orthodox Marxist critics question an emphasis on style — in fact formalisms of all kinds — as quintessentially superficial and counter-revolutionary. For Barthes though, style is significantly tied to social critique and has an ethical dimension. It therefore cannot be simply thought of, as it is traditionally by the Left, as a superficial veneer applied to a work’s content.

From this perspective style is conceived as equivalent to the limits set by the subject’s actual body and biography. Rather than merely ‘natural’ though, style is equally ethical insofar as the subject — the author or artist, for example — deliberately chooses, notwithstanding self awareness of such limitations, a particular milieu as the locus of his or her ‘writing’. This

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156 Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin, What is Deconstruction?.
157 See Dick Hebdige, Hiding in the Light, p. 201.
158 See Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin, What is Deconstruction?.
159 In fact the opacity of Derrida’s critical methods has found numerous opponents in Marxist-orientated cultural analysts, such as Terry Eagleton (The Illusions of Postmodernism), Frederic Jameson (especially in Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism) and David Harvey (The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry in to the Origins of Cultural Change, p. 117).
practice of ‘writing’ socially conceived, responds to a range of communally encoded messages and possible readings. These structure society in particular hierarchical ways that beyond requiring mere disembodied intellectual deciphering, are at the same time inherently connected to the subject’s corporeality. Therefore, because style cannot be disassociated from the body, the self as a figure of writing, aware of the productive tension between language and the self, between culture and nature, is capable of enacting possibilities through viewing the self as a kind of text, writing itself as much as being written.

Later ‘New Left’ writers inspired by Barthes’ theories like Dick Hebdige and Greil Marcus, further recognised the subversive dimension of style as a form of social display and therefore a form of politics. Hebdige and Marcus focused particularly on Punk and other ‘youth’ cultures. As neo-Marxists they furthered Barthes’ critical interpretation of style as a politically active and socially aware practice. Marcus in particular made analogies between the dandyism of the Dadaists and Surrealists and the aggressiveness of Punk dress codes and rituals. At the same time, both he and Hebdige redrew a lineage from other avant-garde traditions and showed that emphasis on style or form should not automatically be considered superficial and ‘shallow’ and therefore expelled from the panoply of leftist critical thinking. Actually both writers view particular social expressions of ‘style’ as genuinely popular, (in the sense of it being communal), means of contesting dominant conservative and pro-capitalist values. The problem with this essentially socialist and dialectical view of popular culture however is that it does not acknowledge the ease with which (and degree to which) it is shaped by capitalist appropriation, despite arguments that such subversive subcultures, like Punk, continually engage in their own acts of reappropriation. Similarly, this outlook also overlooks the power capitalism exercises over the actual formation of subcultures in general.

1: 3 (iv) Art and the critique of power

Style is a product of power relations and of discourses of knowledge. Taking this into consideration, it is then difficult to conceive of style as the play of surface effects and their diffraction, no matter how critical or subversive, as the primary constituent of identity. This is because power dictates all relations, including those determined by style. Thus the notion of culture as an elucidation and recombination of particular styles or texts from pre-extant forms of knowledge needs to be challenged: if knowledge is intrinsically connected to issues of power,

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162 See Dick Hebdige, *Hiding in the Light.*
then power must exert itself culturally, both within the discourse of style and also, crucially, beyond it. Referring to the analyses of French post-structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–84), especially influential for his rigorous 'archaeological' theorisation of the manifestations of power in culture, the critic Philip Barker writes, 'knowledge is not something that pre-exists power and controls it from a value-free cultural perspective ... knowledge and power are intimately and productively related'.

Further to this argument is the notion that any set of values (and in values one includes the values encoded in cultural styles) has only emerged out of a struggle for domination. Once again, knowledge and power are inextricably linked. Suggested in this critique is the concept that the domination of certain styles (of art, for example), as far as they are commonly understood as representing discrete historical 'movements', only arises out of their successful domination of others. This would also explain why modernism is traditionally understood as the culmination of a series of historical moments superseding and displacing one another, a trajectory that links it to the historical project of the Enlightenment.

The success of an operation involving successive practices of domination is only possible through the exercise of power as knowledge, an action brought about from outside. That is, social, political or cultural practices contain no inherent power; any power they are believed to embody emerges expressly out of a specific relation between power and knowledge. In the same way, the struggle to comprehend contemporary culture as a form of knowledge, connected to historical processes, is also a drive to identify and reveal this relationship between culture and power. Like Derrida, Foucault criticises obsessions with origins and attempts to locate a starting point from which history ultimately unfurls. Foucault regards such a tendency as contributing to history as a practice of cumulative subjection. Such a proclamation obviously has negative connotations for the comprehension of art primarily on the basis of its formal characteristics, as though one style 'naturally' superseded another. What is actually hidden in such a concept is a drive to domination founded on attempts to discredit alternative methodologies.

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163 Foucault's theoretical position is intimately connected to this notion of an archaeology of knowledge. Much of Foucault's philosophical concerns and methodologies involve a rigorous examination of the historically inscribed meanings of a wide range of social practices and institutionalised behaviors. See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences.

164 Philip Barker, 'Power, truth and strategy', in Philip Barker, Michel Foucault: An Introduction, pp. 24-25.

165 See Jürgen Habermas in Hal Foster ed, The Anti Aesthetic, p. 83.

166 See Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge.
Understanding the role of power in a cultural context also raises questions about concepts of subjectivity. Discourses of subjectivity have long been tied to discourses of art; in fact they are inextricably bound, historically. This is insofar as the practice of art is meant to reveal something of the artist’s, the author’s, ‘deeper’ subjective identity, and to act as an indicator of the subjective order of an otherwise rationally instrumentalist (industrial-capitalist) reality. Foucault regards subjectivity very differently: as a site at which discourses of power and knowledge intersect, subjecting the individual to the truth of historical example.

This is the ‘negative’ understanding of history. Subjects are not free in themselves, just as art can never be free to simply ‘express’ the subjective truths or ‘reality’ of the artist. Instead, subjectivities form at the intersection of externally determined social trajectories of power. Selfhood, therefore, is externally, historically — not internally — determined. In this argument, the subjective self is effectively understood as a complex of discourses about selfhood that are exterior to the subject and that cannot be entirely ‘mastered’ by the self as though they were a pre-extant ‘reality’. Any critique of truth is then necessarily processual; part of an active practice of knowledge that is continuous not fixed. As Foucault argues, the subject is only granted agency in his/her critical recognition and embrace of the metamorphosing possibilities of such conditions of discontinuity ‘because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting’.

Knowledge as a form of cutting and breaking with accepted and over-determined theoretical precepts complicates the oppositional model of cultural criticism: in order to oppose, the subject-as-critic needs to understand him/herself a priori, as a fixed point of truth challenging an equally fixed point of non-truth. When no such beginning or end points can be affirmed due to their endless subjection to flux, this model collapses. Yet this does not suggest a universally fatalistic theoretical position either, as cultural critic Dick Hebdige has noted, ‘Foucault offers us the intellectual-as-partisan, producer of “socio-fictions” which despite their equivocal truth status may have “reality-effects”, and the intellectual-as-facilitator-and-self-conscious-strategist.’ Effective critique, then, is ultimately strategic because it is carried out in a deliberate awareness that knowledge is continuously made and not merely given. In this way pretensions to ‘truth’, even dialectical truths, are seriously undermined.

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167 Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, p. 153.
1: 3 (v) Reality and simulation: The critical vacuum

While most of these post-structuralist philosophical outlooks are generally constructive and positive in terms of their implications for a socio-critical function for culture, other post-structuralist philosophies are far less hopeful. On this note, French philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s (1929–) significant contribution to theories of technology, representation and commodification places art’s contemporary political and social role in an untenable position. For Baudrillard, it is absurd to re-imagine, as Foster does, art’s re-engagement with reality, as the ‘real’ it refers to no longer exists. For Foster, as for many of his Marxist-leaning critical theory precursors, the ‘real’ is a dialectical relation in which radical culture contests the violent irregularities of the commodified system of capitalist industrialisation. For Baudrillard, to imagine that art contains any political, revolutionary or even critical agency is to miss the fundamental shifts in the meaning of contemporary culture.

Baudrillard argues that contemporary culture is predicated on the randomised exchange of images and information. No longer does representation connect to an existing reality. As Baudrillard states, ‘I do not believe in a pedagogy of images ... I do not believe in a dialectic between image and reality, nor therefore, in respect of images, in a pedagogy of message and meaning.’ For Baudrillard, ‘critique’ is not so much undesirable as impossible, because there is no place remaining from which to critique that is not already represented, through accelerated technological interventions, simultaneously somewhere else. Meanwhile and under the same conditions, politics becomes everything that is not political, the social that which is not in society, reality everything that is not real. To imagine specificities of contexts in this thoroughly globalised, endlessly circulatory reproduced and reproducible world, is to hanker nostalgically for a world and a consciousness that has been thoroughly obfuscated and lost.

In the contemporary hyper-technologised world, the flow of representations overtakes their meaning and renders them as the event such that circulation, rather than signification, is everything. Yet this contemporary event is without agency and without a locus in individual action: regardless of the representations produced by individuals the nature and source of such representations is by now unredeemably equivalent and scattered. This is because the event of representation is essentially a televisual event. In this sense, Baudrillard’s theories on technological representation are related to existing theories especially those of Canadian critic of

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169 See Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations.
modern and communicational technologies Marshall McLuhan (1911–80). McLuhan hypothesised that in the modern technological era the nervous system is no longer contained within the limits of the body but has instead been exteriorised in screen form. According to this view, collective and political consciousness has been stupefied into unconsciousness by the perpetual ‘massage’ of electronic media.

For McLuhan, though, as for Benjamin, technology also conceals possible and radically transformative potential. Earlier still, the Constructivists’ commitment to industrial technology, as we have seen, was attached to faith in that technology’s culturally transformative and socially galvanising capabilities. This was especially so because technology was regarded as a possible means of demystifying art through integrating it with processes of industrial manufacture. From such a perspective, technology is what promises to unite, in a truly internationalist and global sense, previously disparate cultures, societies and individuals. In order to do this it needs to be embraced, not criticised from a conventional humanist viewpoint. Opposing the spread of technology only alienates individuals and communities from the promise of their uniting in the ‘global village’.

Baudrillard’s argument, like McLuhan’s, is partially aligned with Benjamin’s The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. However, Baudrillard refuses the potential collectivisation of the creative act that Benjamin envisages in a culture where art has been stripped of its mythic aura. Thus Constructivism’s attempts to materialise culture by abandoning representational languages and adopting the spirit of industrial collectivisation fail, but not because its premises are overrun by reactionary oppositional politics. Its failure is rather tied to the appropriationary practices of Western industrial capitalism, which are founded on representational procedures. These procedures are likewise united with the rapid acceleration of the processes by which everything — including art, politics and every form of critical culture —

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171 Marshall McLuhan was the influential theoretician of the role of technology within modern capitalist society, especially that of the United States. The primary concerns of McLuhan’s work most definitely anticipate those of Baudrillard, although the latter’s interpretation of modern techno-society is undoubtedly more negative.

172 See Marshall McLuhan, The Medium is the Massage. Actually according to McLuhan’s son Eric, the title of McLuhan’s seminal text on the effects of contemporary media culture, The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects (1967), was originally to have been The Medium is the Message but was the result of a printing error. McLuhan apparently endorsed this mistake to encompass the meanings of message, massage and mass age.

173 McLuhan’s attitude to the spread of technological culture is far more positive than Baudrillard’s. In fact McLuhan coined the phrase ‘global village’ to describe a global society united through technological means. See Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, p. 63.
is transformed into mere information to be endlessly, meaninglessly and unstoppably circulated.\footnote{See Jean Baudrillard, \textit{Simulacra and Simulations}.}

Capitalism, as a united and illusory monolith, does not direct this operation; this would enable it to be isolated as an enemy. The procedures of global capitalism have generated a reality from which capitalism as a singular systemic entity can be neither isolated nor exposed. The levelling of meaning that occurs as a result of this radically displaces existence as fundamentally based on questions of identity and meaningful or critically aware interactions. Instead, reality is replaced by an endless unstoppable flow of information whose meaning is forever opaque and unlocatable. Unlike the creative, constructivist and socially democratic possibilities suggested by Derrida's deconstruction, in which art and politics are implicitly ever-present,\footnote{See Michael Ryan, \textit{Politics and Culture: Working Hypothesis for a Post Revolutionary Society}.} Baudrillard's theories of \textit{simulation} effectively efface these as socially active agents.\footnote{See Jean Baudrillard, 'The art conspiracy', in author, \textit{Screened Out}.} As simulations, art and politics partake of a radical immanence of the sort dreamed of by the Constructivists; however, it is an immanence devoid of both specific referentiality and collective control.

The 'hyper-conformism' said to be promoted by this branch of contemporary thought\footnote{For many Marxist-influenced cultural theorists, Baudrillard's position and avocation of a 'hyper-conformist', rather than actively Left, oppositional critical stance, proves him a reactionary political conservative.}\footnote{See Jean Baudrillard, 'The art conspiracy,' \textit{Screened Out}.} provokes a multitude of questions, paradoxically. For instance, if culture has been stripped of all critical potential, its only 'choice' is the non-choice of conformity — or, rather, hyper-conformity. Through uncritical agreement with prevailing modes of power and their simulations, a consensus is reached about the absence of any alternative possibilities. Herein lies a crucial problem: once criticality has been banished, what potentially arises is a new edifice, a totality whose every base is already occupied and which therefore refuses all \textit{difference}. The inundation of Western societies by the inextricable baggage of their representational codes, codes of an overwhelmingly commercial nature, enables Western capitalism to appear as the only possible or relevant cultural edifice remaining. It is an edifice that devours everything, and is everywhere at all times, endlessly circulating 'non-meaning' around the globe.

In fact for Baudrillard, contemporary art is an essential example of this absurd scenario, as it repeatedly reiterates meaning in a meaningless system.\footnote{Art's actual meaning in this context is not explicit, but it implies a critique of the role of art in this system.}
flagrantly capitalist ethos lies precisely in its exchange-value\textsuperscript{179} and its potential to command astronomically high prices on the art market. Through such procedures, art, as a tool of critical signification, is superseded by its identity as a sign of pure exchange. Its value, no longer able to be determined by what it has to ‘communicate’, is instead predicated on its facile emptiness, its ability only to ‘achieve superficiality in superficial terms’.\textsuperscript{180} Such superficiality is doubled precisely once the endlessly repetitive superficiality of capitalist exchange is echoed in prized art works, no longer incidentally, but self-consciously, deliberately executed, without complexity or ‘depth’. In Baudrillard’s proscription the art market and the artwork reflect their final joint implosion, an implosion disguised only by high prices.

For Baudrillard, such a view is further supported today by the fact that art, according to him, traditionally believed to hold a privileged relationship to meaning, thereby guaranteeing its social or ‘critical’ value, is today practically worthless in such terms.\textsuperscript{181} This is because its traditional claims to functioning in a socially critical way are dependent on an unsustainable faith in the ‘reality’ of its referents. In this way, high culture has become its other; the most meaningless attempt to restore meaning to contemporary reality. If there is any modicum of meaning left for images, he claims, it is purely sensational and devoid of any critical agency. As a result, ‘There is a kind of primal pleasure, of anthropological joy in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgements. It is because of this that I suggest they are immoral, and that their fundamental power lies in this immorality.’\textsuperscript{182}

1: 3 (vi) Aesthetics and ethics: Autonomy, nomadism and the politics of expression

Leagues removed from Baudrillard’s ‘aristocratic nihilism’\textsuperscript{183} are the collaborative writings of the French post-structuralist philosopher and psychoanalyst Gilles Deleuze (1925–95) and of Felix Guattari (1930–92). Deleuze and Guattari have frequently elucidated potential forms of protest through critique in which both the role of critique and its place in art are viewed in a radically productive (yet by no means simply positivist) light. Most famously, the co-authors

\textsuperscript{179} In this sense Baudrillard reveals his schooling in Marxist economic theory, which suggests that capitalist exchange value transforms relations between consumers into relations between things. See Baudrillard’s early ‘Marxist’ text, The Mirror of Production.
\textsuperscript{180} Jean Baudrillard, ‘The art conspiracy’ in Jean Baudrillard, Screened Out, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{181} Actually Baudrillard has referred outright to the ‘complete worthlessness of contemporary art’. See Jean Baudrillard, ‘A conjuration of imbeciles’.
\textsuperscript{182} Jean Baudrillard, The Evil Demon of Image, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{183} See Christopher Norris, What’s Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical theory and the Ends of Philosophy.
distanced themselves from prevailing Freudian theories of subjectivity by denying Freud’s (and later Jacques Lacan’s) continuing reliance on Oedipal conflict as the foundational locus of desire, action and art.\textsuperscript{184}

In their magnum opus,\textit{ Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}, as well, as in other works, individual and collective desire is conceptualised as ultimately political, although not in an orthodox sense. Desire is political because it has the capacity to unite disparate possibilities once it is no longer conceived as a negative and alienating force.\textsuperscript{185} The possibilities opened up through their combining of disparities allow Deleuze and Guattari to invent a terminological repertoire that includes such conceptual entities as ‘desiring machines’\textsuperscript{186} and ‘machinic assemblages’.

The ‘desiring machine’\textsuperscript{187} is connected to the entire network of possible concepts, and is capable of endlessly plugging into and unplugging from an infinite skein of desiring possibilities. Desire, no longer conceived as a fundamental lack — as it is in ‘negative’ conceptions of critique — becomes instead a mechanism working through individuals and societies, galvanising change and animating various social strata. Similarly, the ‘machinic assemblage’\textsuperscript{188} momentarily binds concepts, activating them in new and unpredictable ways. In this way, theory or critique, rather than being an isolatable and detached means of objective questioning, becomes instead a revolutionary productive mode of thought and action. Likewise art, rather than being a tool of critical opposition in which meaning is conceived as essentially \textit{representational}, semiotically ‘readable’, is theorised instead as an immanent \textit{expression}.

Actually, the concept of ‘expression’ has not fared well in recent philosophy, primarily because it is taken to suggest the pure ‘authentic’ agency of the acting subject. In this sense expression is a traditionalist notion, intimately connected to ideas of an autonomous individuality that are also central to the capitalist imagination; this has therefore resulted in its widespread demonisation by the cultural Left, Marxist theorists, art critics and artists. For such cultural theorists, expression conjures a de-historicised and idealised concept of creativity. In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{184} Freud’s and later Lacan’s definition of desire is classically negative. Both argue that the subject’s relationship to reality is necessarily Oedipal and therefore conflicted. Desire maintains subjects in states of perpetual tension. Desire, defined as a lack, can never be fulfilled. Reality therefore must remain always at a distance and excluded from individual possession; thus the ensuing conflict. Art, then, as a form of sublimated desire, is an attempt, always approximal and necessarily always failed, to join desire and reality. In this scenario, art, if it is critical, is so despite, not because of, its intention.
\item \textsuperscript{185} Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}.
\item \textsuperscript{186} See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}.
\item \textsuperscript{187} See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, \textit{Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia}.
\item \textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
contrast, Deleuze and Guattari do not attempt to elevate ‘expressionism’ or to invoke expression as a value; rather they hope to free thought (and, by inference, art, as the product of active thought) from prescriptive readings based on interpretation.

Such a rejection of interpretation has counterparts elsewhere within the practice of art criticism as well, especially in U.S. based writer and art theorist Susan Sontag’s (1933–2004) famous collection of essays, Against Interpretation.\(^{189}\) Here the author rejects what she sees as the literalism of much contemporary art criticism, especially as it relates to the dominance of text-based North American Conceptualism, for example. Deleuze and Guattari extend this stance, albeit in a radical mode, in their complex ruminations on art, literature and cinema. For them, expression is a mode of productivity that allows the unorthodox combination and recombination of concepts. Such action discounts the ‘truth’ of concepts as entities that bind thinking to a fixed point. Instead, concepts are thought of as ‘nomadic’.\(^{190}\)

Refusing the stasis of consensual meaning, the social status quo particularly endemic to capitalist societies, also encourages conceptual ‘lines of flight’\(^{191}\) connecting and propelling concepts in myriad directions as a means of evading the instrumentalism of dominant societal structures.\(^{192}\) Such trajectories are reminiscent of the transcendentalism of Hegel’s ‘totality’, but in Deleuze and Guattari such transcendentalism is partial and political. It disallows critique as a form of ‘pure’ transcendence in which a concept is proven ‘right’ through oppositional testing. This further complicates the traditional definition of criticality in terms of its dependence on clearly defined and static conceptual territories.

Furthermore, whilst superficially seeming only obliquely related to the question of art’s critical function, Deleuze and Guattari’s Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature is in fact central to such a discussion.\(^{193}\) Deleuze and Guattari’s work on Kafka is crucial precisely in its theorisation of the unfinished dimension of writing and of radical culture generally. ‘Minor’ literature, and here we can read ‘literature’ in similarly inclusive terms as Barthes’ ‘text’, is radical and transformative in its potential to connect with a multiplicity of other minor texts without simply providing a model. A minor literature is that ‘created by a minority within a

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\(^{189}\) Susan Sontag, Against Interpretation.

\(^{190}\) See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Nomadology: The War Machine.

\(^{191}\) See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.

\(^{192}\) See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘Capitalism: A very special delirium’ in Kris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer eds, Hatred of Capitalism: A Reader.

\(^{193}\) Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature.
major language', and it is characteristically marked by ‘the de-territorialization of language and the connection of the individual to a political immediacy’. The concept of a minor literature, as a creative form that utilises but ‘de-territorialises’ dominant language in order to destabilise it from within, is applicable to all types of creative production, including the visual arts.

Indeed, Guattari’s final work, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, suggests that ‘aesthetics might occupy a privileged position for a radical ethics in our fin de millénaire’. De-territorialisation of the dominant cultural language problematises its authoritarian assumptions, and in doing so allows those engaged in ‘minor’ modes of cultural production to access a politically charged and subversive language. Similarly, such cultural production is not conventionally analytical and does not depend on the ‘depth’ metaphors central to dialectical critique, as Australian artist and art critic Stephen Zagala notes: ‘Deleuze and Guattari clearly have no interest in participating in, or even reacting against, the avant-garde notion of dialectical Hegelian “progress”’. The conceptualised field of ‘minor literatures’ is therefore inherently charged with political meaning and possibilities. This is because the artist is seen as connected to an intensified terrain of expression in which everything, including culture, is endlessly and productively political, and all solutions are creative.

1: 3 (vii) Resistant corpses: Cultural amnesia and critical spectres

While the varieties of post-structuralism seriously de-site the traditional tenets of Left criticism, whether Hegelian or Marxist, they by no means simply abandon them. In not abandoning them, what is opened is an interpolation of forms of critical thinking with significant critical voices of the past. Yet this engagement with the past should not be regarded as simply nostalgic. Denigrating a complex body of theoretical investigation which has had a marked effect on the history of critical thinking usually discounts that work’s very complexity in an attempt to ‘make things clearer.’ For example, the contemporary notion that ‘Marx is dead’ fails to appreciate the genuine complexity and density of Marx’s critical thought and therefore its capacity for renewed investigations and applications. A philosopher like Derrida further identifies in Hegel’s

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194 Ibid, p. 16.
197 Ibid., p. 22.
retroactively unravelling concept of history an endlessly fertile potential for ongoing critical investigations and interventions.199

Even more, Derrida reconceptualises the importance of Marxism. He discounts the relatively conventional Marxism of Frankfurt School critical theory, but in doing so also challenges those critics, including Baudrillard and (especially) North American cultural and economic theorist and supporter of global neo-liberalism Francis Fukuyama (1952–)200 who have sought to discredit Marx’s critique of commodification and its contemporary effects.201

Derrida proposes that Marx should be conceived not as representing a fixed ideological edifice known simply as ‘Marxism’, but as representing, more productively, one of multiple ‘Marxes’.202 In this pluralistic conception in which Marxism now become Marxisms, Marx’s theories ‘haunt’ a number of simultaneous critical discourses; Derrida calls this ‘hauntology’. The ‘spectres of Marx’203 inhabit contemporary critical social, cultural and political discourses, replacing orthodox Marxist ideology with a Marxist ‘spectro-poetics’ whose complexities cannot be discounted simply through binary opposition. Because there is no longer one Marx, it is the critic’s task to reaffirm those spirits of Marx that are still vital to contemporary debates, and to refuse the orthodox view that Marx’s time is over. Of course in terms of the histories of Marxist critiques of culture — and, especially, its commodification — such a position is especially productive. It thus becomes impossible to simply state that nothing more can be said about the ideological basis underlying contemporary culture’s relationship to global markets. So problems regarding the alienating social effects of culture’s commodification do not conveniently go away, despite the lack of interest in them common among contemporary art critics.

If we extend the critical project of the historical avant-garde in a similar way, discounting the need to uphold it as a critical or academic ideal, we would likewise discover in certain key statements of its practitioners a view of dialectical criticism as innately flawed because of the evenness of its critique, its apparently implosive ‘Baudrillardian’ suspension of the prevailing

199 See, for instance, Jacques Derrida’s reading of Hegel in Of Grammatology, p. 35.
200 See a discussion of Francis Fukuyama’s post-Communist ‘end of ideology’ claims in Chapter I: 4 (i) Contemporary global division and the collapse of the Left.
status quo. \(^{204}\) Indeed, Dadaist leader Tristan Tzara remarked in the early 1920’s that ‘the system of quickly looking at the other side of a thing in order to impose your opinion indirectly is called dialectics … The dialectic is an amusing mechanism which guides us / in a banal kind of way / to the opinions we had in the first place.’\(^{205}\) Even more surprisingly, Andre Breton, Surrealism’s instigator, supports such a sceptical attitude to dialecticism, writing, ‘we found it, the dialectical method, in its Hegelian form … inapplicable for us too. There was, for us too, the necessity to put an end to idealism properly speaking.’\(^{206}\) Such statements disprove the idea that the avant-garde’s strategies of critical antagonism were simplistically oppositional in a binary sense. Even if avant-garde terminology is crucially flawed today, and often invoked in reactionary and traditionalist ways, the contemporary relevance of its critical procedures cannot be totally ignored.

Overall, the implication of these collective ‘hauntings’, Marxist and avant-garde, is that to imagine all political and social ideologies like Marxism as unsalvageably anachronistic and all critical modernist culture as irredeemably finished is wrong. Even if we dispense altogether with avant-garde — and, of course, neo avant-garde — terminology, while fully comprehending the avant-garde’s significant internal paradoxes, including its often complicitous relationship with bourgeois capitalism, we do not need to dispense with its example altogether. In fact, doing so, based on the need to curtail absolutely particular forms of cultural criticality, would resonate more closely with the type of closed ‘critique’ inherent to contemporary Western capitalism. Capitalism’s ‘closed critique’ allows, even at times encourages, dissenting positions in culture as long as they are ultimately able to be suspended, if only temporarily, in the regulatory space of the markets. Significantly, globalisation’s global market culture welcomes the difference indicated by critical and dissenting positions as the market assumes a ‘benevolently’ dominating cast. Yet underlying the contemporary invigoration and global expansion of ‘world’ capitalist culture remain the spectres of historically encoded and antagonistic modes of political and cultural critique. And these cannot simply be uniformly replaced by that system’s invention of an ascendant ‘global culture’.

\(^{204}\) For Baudrillard, critique is implosive: critique’s subversive potential lies in its hyper-conformity with prevailing socio-cultural norms. See Jean Baudrillard, In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities.

\(^{205}\) Tristan Tzara, quoted in Lucy Lippard, Dadas on Art, p. 17.

\(^{206}\) See Andre Breton, The Second Surrealist Manifesto.
1: 4 The global scenario: Criticism without opposition?

Currently, globalisation is regularly promoted as fundamentally and radically decentralised. Similarly, post-structuralist philosophy frequently draws on geographical and spatial terminology. Continual emphasis on such terminology is also common to both. Derrida’s ‘deconstruction’ identifies the spatial architectonics of language and emphasises these as ideologically coded metaphors. Others, such as Foucault, frequently cite terms such as ‘position’, ‘displacement’, ‘site’, ‘field’, ‘territory’, ‘domain’, ‘soil’, ‘horizon’, ‘archipelago’, ‘geopolitics’, ‘region’ and ‘landscape’. Indeed, Foucault has remarked on how such spatialised mechanisms facilitate both the functioning of knowledge as power and its global dissemination. Similarly, the critical language employed by Deleuze and Guattari also regularly draws from spatial language: ‘de’- and ‘re-territorialisation’, ‘nomadism’, ‘plateaus’, ‘strata’, ‘flows’ and ‘lines of flight’. Theorists of globalisation also repeatedly emphasise its procedures, as the term ‘globalisation’ suggests, along the lines of spatial flows and an overall global inter-connectivity. Yet the spatial dimension of globalisation is inherently tied to discourses of power and its effects, particularly as they correspond to a world market model. Nonetheless, according to both post-structuralist theory and contemporary globalisation discourse, power has been detached from the notion of both a centralised enemy and an opposing ideological monolith.

De-centralised theories of spatialisation, linked to the similarly conceptualised de-centralisation of identity, have significant consequences for the functioning of critical culture: they imply a new necessary self-awareness in the artist, critic or philosopher of their crucial enmeshing within the very operations of power they set out to criticise. The diffusion of critical discourse allows it to surface in a multiplicity of diverse locations simultaneously. Under globalisation, which has been significantly aided by a general collapse and theoretical denigration of critical meta-narratives such as those of international Communism, everything, including critique and cultural practices once identified with specific geographic locations, is dispersed. For some, this process has great future potential in that it frees up and accelerates multiple and diverse global political, social and cultural exchanges. Globalisation’s supporters

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207 See Christopher Norris and Andrew Benjamin, What is Deconstruction?
208 See John Allen, ‘Power as an immanent affair: Foucault and Deleuze’s topological detail,’ in John Allen, Lost Geographies of Power.
209 See Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge.
211 See Jean François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.
claim that the promise of an era of well-being brought about by global neo-liberalisation is contained within this process. What enables such claims to be made is the thorough discrediting of the historical program of the political Left. What the process of globalisation activates, essentially, is a greatly expanded space for Western economic expansion.

1: 4 (i) Contemporary global division and the collapse of the Left

The dispersal of the Eastern bloc, of the ‘old East’ with its ‘tribe’ of Communist states, symbolically rendered irreversible by the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, marks a crucial moment in the ascendancy of contemporary notions of globalisation. Of course critics dedicated to the analysis of globalisation have remarked that in many respects it is not solely a contemporary issue. In fact some claim that processes reminiscent of current globalisation patterns were occurring as far back as Classical Greece, during its crucial development of the concept of the polis, or city-state. Some argue that globalisation processes are actually marked by a vacillation between two distinct modes of historical reality.\(^{212}\) The first, it is claimed, is distinguished by contemporary faith in history and an enthusiastic willingness to participate in a historical moment. Such moments are often indicated by periods of expansion, resulting in the acceleration of trade alongside an emphasis on the acquisition of material goods. Modernism could be described in this way. The second process is claimed to occur after such periods of expansion, and is characterised by the destabilisation of previous, usually empirical modes of historical reality. Post-modernism could be viewed in this way: its eclecticism dominated by a questioning of the historical sanctity of embedded and fixed cultural codes. These are deliberately paraphrased and redeployed to problematise the assuredness of history as a progressive trajectory.

Globalisation is, therefore, regularly presented not as an edifice, but as a process swinging between alternating historical modes. This theorisation of more or less reliable historical patterns is instructive in that it promises to demystify globalisation as an entirely ‘new’ discourse by citing related historical processes. Similarly, it undermines positivist claims made on behalf of globalisation — that it is a fundamentally emancipatory process — by claiming that that process is always going to unravel at some point. What is more problematic about such theories, though, is their tendency to simply revert to historical example to explain complex and singular contemporary circumstances, as though there were few essential differences between the two times. Similar reservations arise because of the un-ironic transculturalism of such texts,

\(^{212}\) See Thomas McElviley, *Art and Discontent: Theory at the Millennium.*
which repeatedly borrow examples from diverse cultures, claiming them as their own. More seriously, such theorising conceals the fact that its references are utilised to perform a very specifically Western form of cultural critique.

The positivist and opportunistic aspects of globalisation are taken much further by some of its other major supporters. For them, globalisation is an event, superficially like Hegel’s ‘totalising synthesis’, and therefore ultimately desirable as global networks spread ever wider in their supposed rational drive towards universal order. Such commentators argue that it is for the sake of this order that globalisation must be fully encouraged. Not surprisingly, U.S. theorists such as Fukuyama explain the collapse of Communism as resulting from that system’s innate structural flaws. Not only are these flaws made visible upon the collapse of the system; they also further illustrate the inherent superiority of the alternative system, Western liberal democracy, which ‘in reality constitutes the best possible solution to the human problem’.

Fukuyama claims that Western capitalism is not an ideology like Marxism, and indeed because it contains no ideological kernel it should be viewed naturalistically: Western liberalism is the ‘natural’ form existence takes when ‘totalitarian’ theories, like those of Marxist-orientated Communism, are deemed unworkable and therefore false. Conveniently, Fukuyama and his supporters happen also to be entrenched in privileged positions within the Western liberal capitalist system. Of course such writers decry their own privilege or, more pertinently, imply that such privilege is potentially available to anyone willing to wholly embrace the system responsible for bringing it about.

Viewed from another perspective, however, it is easy to note in such positivist espousals of globalisation a dramatic absence of criticism. Somewhat like the conceptualising of an Athenian historical period, contemporary globalisation is presented by its advocates as a brand of historical necessity and as an opportunity to seize history at a crucial moment in its evolutionary progress, on its path towards a final and achievable totality. Not surprisingly, history assumes a formalist dimension as its fluctuating events are considered expressions of a naturally ordering system and as systems, of economics in particular, are reiterated constantly, often without explanation. Likewise, economics becomes the language most indispensable to power. This language is similarly jargonistic, and effectively mystifies those not directly privy to it. It is a language usually shrouded in secrecy, but one that the consumer is obliged to

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213 Ibid.
214 See Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man.
215 Ibid., p. 338.
participate in.\textsuperscript{216} Economics, not culture nor politics, becomes the machine that orders the global network. In fact, it is the apparent rational order of this system that is used, time and again, as its defence.\textsuperscript{217} Furthermore, this lack of critical perspective actually denies the possibility of present or future opposition, for opposition simply obstructs the order of the ‘naturalised’ system and attaches an ideological significance to it when ideology is said to no longer exist.\textsuperscript{218}

More radically, ‘hyper’-globalists such as Fukuyama actually endorse the erosion of the system of politics that this emphasis on economics leads to.\textsuperscript{219} For them, economics, unlike politics, is scientific, and devoid of the duelling rhetoric of opposing ‘Right’ or ‘Left’ parties. They argue that to fight economics is futile, for its role is to calculate and secure the benefits of the overall capitalist system for as many individuals as possible. If problems arise, it is simply because errors have occurred in the calculation of the globalised distribution of commerce. Once these structural problems are addressed, they can be rectified, and the system returned to its optimal functioning.\textsuperscript{220}

Others strongly condemn this proposed rational ‘shaping’ of the world along unoppositional economic lines. The contemporary French thinker, and director of the interdisciplinary Centre for Research on Peace in Paris, Alain Joxe, states, ‘Shaping is the catchword of the moment: “to shape the world,” ... And if this is not politics, what is it? Politics does not disappear; it is merely relegated to “shaping” the political world so that it is favourable to direct actions by corporations.’\textsuperscript{221} Such a criticism is aimed against a very specifically U.S. orientated neo-conservative conception of freed global flows that is highly strategic in its attempts to discredit an apparently dissolved Left. Therefore, as Joxe writes, ‘In Europe, it all goes through the state, while the United States does not need the state. They only need the fluxes to flow ... as long as they are the first to profit from them.’\textsuperscript{222} Ultimately, this ‘collapse of the Left’ does not actually mean that its criticisms are either unjustifiable or impossibly outdated; it just means that its supposed failure must be addressed from a different position.

\textsuperscript{216} See Jean Baudrillard, The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures.
\textsuperscript{217} See Martin Wolff, Why Globalisation Works.
\textsuperscript{218} Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{219} For a critique of the ‘end of ideology philosophies’ of pro-globalists such as Francis Fukuyama, see Carl Boggs, The End of Politics: Corporate Power and the Decline of the Public Sphere, pp. 311–19.
\textsuperscript{220} See, for instance, Thomas L. Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization.
\textsuperscript{221} Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder, p. 35.
1: 4 (ii) Globalisation and the post-modern impasse

If the Left has seemingly failed in both political and cultural terms, one must ask why. This question needs to be posed beyond prevailing discourses which claim it has merely been occasioned by the inevitable collapse of Communism. Of course in the decentralised languages of both globalisation and post-structuralism, theoretically there can be no true Left or Right. If, however, we extend criticisms regarding the superficial similarities between globalisation and post-structuralism to a broader critique of the relationship between globalisation and the looser project of critical post-modernism, interesting intersections arise.

French post-structuralism and what is generally referred to as post-modernism are related insofar as the former participates in the overall project of the latter. However, as has already been shown, the cultural discourse of post-modernism is often predicated on the practices of a Marxist-leaning critical theory. In principle, critical theory is traditionally aligned with the Left in its critique of the predominantly negative effects of global capitalism on contemporary culture (in particular). Yet some see the denuding of effective opposition in critical theory occurring precisely as a result of critical theory’s popular transposition to a United States academic context, just as earlier the meaning of the avant-garde changed radically as a consequence of this same geographical shift.

From this position it is argued that what results from critical theory’s social and cultural critique in the U.S. is nothing but a ‘paper tiger’, completely lacking any radical challenge to authority. In fact critical theory’s popularity in the United States may be regarded as symptomatic of the fact that its negativity simply compensates for excesses of merican optimism. This would also explain why critical theory has found such a privileged position within the American Academy; precisely because it has divorced itself from the real challenges of radical social and political transformation, replacing them instead with an academicised and, unlike much post-structuralist discourse, none too obtuse criticality. In this way Marxism has been adopted because of its commodity critique, albeit in a watered-down form which fails to address issues of the class bias underlying the means of production, which are central to an understanding of it.

Such issues are discarded precisely because they implicitly question academic privilege as well as the critical privileges granted particular exponents of an academically framed ‘socially

222 Sylvère Lotringer, ‘The empire strikes back’, Ibid. p. 34.
223 See Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen eds, French Theory in America.
224 Ibid.
committed art. Here one may recall the championing by the editorial committee of the internationally influential art journal October, and by individual critics such as Hal Foster, of the socio-political work of the artists Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger and Krzysztof Wodiczko, among others. In the end, critical theory fails precisely because its oppositional tactics are too freely available for appropriation by institutions. This would also explain why much of the work of the artists mentioned seems contradictory and critically implosive today; its criticism functions according to a pre-existing agreement between critics and dominant cultural institutions. Not surprisingly, this would also account for perceptions of such work among generations of younger artists as ‘academic Puritan agitprop’. 

From a vantage point such as this, even the ‘radical’, ‘New Left’, ‘neo’ avant-garde version of post-modern American art is defused by its dependence on powerful cultural and economic institutions. In a spirit of parody, contemporary Slovenian philosopher and cultural commentator Slavoj Žižek furthers this criticism of the academic Left who effectively say:

Let’s be realists: we, the academic Left, want to appear critical, while fully enjoying the privileges the system offers us. So let’s bombard the system with impossible demands: we all know these demands won’t be met, so we can be sure that nothing will actually change, and we’ll maintain our privileged status! 

Žižek extends such a criticism when he considers the contemporary dominance in U.S. academies of the generalist discipline of ‘cultural studies’, a discipline significantly indebted to critical theory. Reflecting on the popularity of cultural studies, specifically in relation to the terrorist attacks on the twin towers of New York’s World Trade Center that occurred on September 11, 2001 and dramatically affected subsequent globalisation discourse, Žižek writes, ‘the WTO [sic] attacks revealed the substanceless character of post-modern cultural studies, their lack of contact with “real-life”’. By this Žižek suggests that cultural studies, with its emphasis on the contemporary primacy of media culture that includes spectacularised representations of the destruction of modern technological civilization, nevertheless failed to imagine that its phantasies

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225 October, published by MIT Press, was founded by Rosalind Krauss and Annette Michelson in 1976. The October editorial board includes the influential New Left and generally Marxist-orientated theorists Yves-Alain Bois, Benjamin D.H. Buchloh and Hal Foster. It was especially influential during the 1980’s in its championing of the work of textual and socially critical artists, especially in America.

226 Kelley’s statement refers specifically to the dry and institutionally critical work of American conceptualist Haans Haacke. See Mike Kelley and John C. Welchman, eds. Foul Perfection, p. 145.


228 Slavoj Žižek ‘Reappropriations: the lesson of Mullah Omar’, Ibid., pp. 48-49.
might actually occur.

In such a dramatically negative instance, the varieties of post-modernism, especially those popularised via cultural studies, fail to identify or are capable of analysing ‘real life’ political dangers. At the same time the academicisation of such thinking appears all too complete. Žižek’s criticisms, however, are in no way aimed at supporting the post-September 11 identity of the United States as a ‘special case’ victim. Instead they are institutionally directed, towards types of post-modern critique, particularly contemporary cultural studies, from which opposition arises only in generalised and academically acceptable forms.

Such a sceptical view of post-modernity has even more recently been criticised further by alternative theorists of globalisation such as North American political-cultural theorist Michael Hardt and Italian philosopher and political activist Antonio Negri. In their co-authored book, Empire, published in 2000, Hardt and Negri, while not explicitly discrediting the critical achievements of post-structuralism, claim nevertheless that dominant processes of ‘post-modernisation’ have inadvertently aided the neo-conservative course of recent global politics.

Critics opposed to Hardt and Negri’s negative appraisals of post-modern theory challenge such refusals by claiming that, ‘There is actually a political variety and indeterminacy to the post-modernist project which it is all too easy to smother in blanket judgements of condemnation.’ Therefore it is not only variety, but also critical indeterminacy, that grants the post-modern project its continuing validity. Its refusal to take sides is represented as irrevocably positive. However, as Hardt and Negri anticipated, this lack of clarity and deliberate avoidance of critical positioning could also be cited as contributing to the dominance of a particular neo-conservative polarity of post-modernism. This is especially true in a climate dominated by primitive, reductionist and binary political rhetoric — of which U.S. President George W. Bush’s anti-terrorist ‘with us or against us’ speech is a primary example.

Curiously, such a climate has also tended to breed types of contemporary art practices in which a diverse and de-authored utilisation of multiple cultural references, rather than functioning in a spirit of social criticism or awareness, is geared ever more towards glibly

229 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire.
230 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, ‘Postmodernization, or the informatization of production’ in Empire, pp. 280–303.
232 Such a polarised and binary perspective on global politics was made flagrantly obvious in American President George W Bush’s post-September 11 speech, delivered at the anti-terrorism summit in
dispersed sensational aesthetic and technological effects. Pertinently, the sophisticated ‘neo’ Pop Art dimension of such practices favours the language of global capitalism through repeatedly reiterating its forms and imagery.

1: 4 (iii) *A neo-Enlightenment and the continuation of modernity?*

The emphasis on the spectacularisation of formal invention in contemporary art can also be tied to current theories that espouse a possible continuation of modernity. For such theorists, post-structuralism fails because it is ethically and politically ambiguous and therefore ‘uncommitted’. This is represented as a danger, because in an era of globalisation, the transparency of political and economic procedures is already consistently occluded. As an antidote to this situation of critical opacity, prominent social theorists such as German post-idealist philosopher Jürgen Habermas have pursued a reinterpretation of the historical project of the Enlightenment, itself inherently linked to the progressivist spirit of modernism.

This reinvestment in Enlightenment values is an attempt to critically reapply essential humanist tenets based on the universality of human rights — which are, supposedly, achieved through the pursuit of Western democratisation. It is argued that within this system, despite its flaws, abuses of power may still be addressed and corrected. However, the traditional Leftist foundation of such an approach to critique, which is sceptical of both post-structuralism and the un-self-reflexive avocation of globalisation, is faced with a serious double-edged dilemma. Attempting to resurrect the spirit of the Enlightenment, even if in a contemporary critically enlightened manner, risks that spirit’s appropriation by neo-conservative governments who believe that Western democracy can and should be universally applied in an expanded global context, regardless of the specificities of national or geographic interests or desires.

Such a strategic appropriation could function despite the multivalent and complex critical dimensions of globalisation as a process of proliferation. In fact the complexities of such a process are intentionally simplified in the recent political rhetoric of Western leaders such as the United States’ George W. Bush, Britain’s Tony Blair and Australia’s John Howard. The language of such figure-heads and the actions of their governments, rather than promoting a spirit of universalised justice in opposition to a perceived global loss of clarity or idealism, is increasingly deeply insular and reactionary.

Warsaw, in which he implied that those not willing to unquestioningly support the United States‘ ‘war on terrorism’ were opponents of that country. See ‘You are either with or against us’.

233 See Julian Stallabrass, *Internet Art: The Online Clash of Culture and Commerce.*
Similarly, while the multinational corporations buoyed by globalisation processes promise imminent well-being in a globally disseminated flood of advertisements and neo-liberalist consumer representations, the chasm separating the wealthy from the destitute — and not only in poorer countries, but within the wealthiest of Western nations as well — grows larger more and more quickly.\textsuperscript{235} Indeed, even though he is a noted supporter of progressive neo-Enlightenment ideals, Habermas admits that countries under globalisation are increasingly separated into winners and losers.\textsuperscript{236}

What is not admitted, however, is that the pursuit of modernity as a continuous moment through readapting humanist Enlightenment values can also become an excuse for the reinscription of critical and social models that lend themselves to radical oversimplification and to hierarchical exploitation, both tendencies clearly evident under present conditions of globalisation.

The hierarchical and traditionalist theories of highly visible pro-globalisationists such as Fukuyama, who pursue positivist and ‘quasi-evangelical’\textsuperscript{237} ideals, deny negativity absolutely. In this way they approximate also the apparent absolutism of Western — and especially U.S. — territorial and cultural interests, which itself further testifies to the representation of the global market economy and its attendant political and ideological bases as divine and therefore impervious to opposition.\textsuperscript{238} Importantly, negativity, as we have seen, has constituted the very basis not only of the historical avant-garde and its followers, but also of the practice of critical theory generally. Similarly, the related practices of these interconnected critical entities, whilst by no means simple, ultimately advocates the redressing of the balance of power through critical debate and opposition to institutionalised injustice, as a way of achieving a semblance of social equality and accountability. In this way they are also, in a sense, products of neo-Enlightenment idealism.

\textsuperscript{234} See Jürgen Habermas, in \textit{Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida}, [interviews by] Giovanna Borradori.
\textsuperscript{235} Ibid.

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The reinvestment in theories of the Enlightenment via the reinvigoration of modernism as an 'unfinished project'\textsuperscript{239} appears flawed today. In fact, as has been noted by post-structuralist theorists such as Baudrillard, the exaltation of criticism founded in humanist opposition can do nothing but achieve an equilibrium that supports the status quo demanded by capitalism's 'minimum differential requirement',\textsuperscript{240} (that is capitalism's tendency to disguise the unerring sameness of its exchanges under an aura of diversity).\textsuperscript{241} Such theory, in practice, it is argued, merely simulates systems of justice and imitates the outward appearance of equality, without ever effecting its realisation, which is said to be impossible in any case. This limit seems doubly apparent in the light of the current global activities of multinational corporations.

The critical venture, a supposed altruistic concern to supply the interests of all people, mirrors the corporate venture, which is based solely on the generation of profits at all costs; this is in the sense that critique faced with serious and growing complexity is tempted to revert to a 'state of grace' and to reduce its methods only to those that make 'sense', just as capitalism's aim is to make sense to as many people (representing markets) as possible.\textsuperscript{242} The kind of 'sense' corporate reason in particular engenders though has led many critics of globalisation to note that it is no longer states that are able to command power today but international business affiliates.\textsuperscript{243} Statistically, this results in a situation where global corporations account for the top 51 per cent of annual global profits while the remaining 49 per cent is attributable to whole nations.\textsuperscript{244} Thus nation states (as supposed representatives of the will of the people), are replaced by multinational businesses devoid of specific allegiances other than to their own ongoing expansion.

The idealised perception of a critique opposed to the supposedly non-committed labyrinthine textual complexities of post-structuralism therefore helps engender, rather than redress, within a globalised context, actions that are far from just or equal. Similarly, those who discredit contemporary critical complexity in an attempt to restore simple 'clarity', whether in theory or politics can cite such motivations to justify the 'enlightened mistakes' arising from the globally magnified pursuit of neo-liberal capitalism. The increase in corporate crime that has

\textsuperscript{239} See Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity, an unfinished project,' in Hal Foster ed, \textit{The Anti-Aesthetic}. \textsuperscript{240} See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, 'Capitalism: a very special delirium' in Kris Krauss and Sylvère Lotringer eds, \textit{Hatred of Capitalism, A Reader}. \textsuperscript{241} See 1: 3 (v) \textit{Reality and simulation: The critical vacuum}. \textsuperscript{242} Alain Joxe, \textit{The Empire of Disorder}, pp. 154–56. \textsuperscript{243} Ibid., p. 155. \textsuperscript{244} See Manfred B. Steger, 'The power of transnational corporations' in Manfred B. Steger, \textit{Globalization}, p. 49.
seen the public collapse of huge transnational corporations such as Enron\textsuperscript{245} comes about precisely because the corporate monolith, an abstract and formally anonymous collective of shared interests, displays an appearance that is benign while it covertly exploits every avenue, legal or otherwise, to increase its profits. Yet when operational functions are exposed as illegal, there is always enough ambiguity relating to the relatively new phenomenon of the global deregulation of markets to allow corporations to cry ignorance as part of their defence.

Such instances imply therefore that globalised economic systems are too opaque and unapproachable. They imply further that the lack of managerial clarity resulting from the globalisation of corporations makes any clear understanding of what is legally acceptable and what is not problematic, and as a result this leads to increasingly labyrinthine and extended legal cases.\textsuperscript{246} Claims of corporate exploitation or corruption arise then because the complexities endemic to the globalised terrain of contemporary capitalist activity allow ethically or legally accountable actions to become hopelessly complicated. This perfectly reiterates the ironies of neo-Enlightenment attitudes that rhetorically call for a renewed ‘democratic’ transparency in both critical and corporate capitalistic operations. The attempt to re-establish historical continuity in the face of the radical discontinuities of contemporary globalisation promotes the same injustices, albeit on a globalised scale, that were endemic to the historical models of the Enlightenment and modernism. And it is not surprising under such conditions, that the attributes of globalisation’s contemporary ‘enlightened’ individual are reflected in its prized multinational corporations that are also granted the legal status of individuals.\textsuperscript{247}

\textbf{1: 4 (iv) Global protest and a-centrist opposition}

From the claim that globalisation is an essentially rational and ‘enlightened’ process that aims to set history finally on the ‘right track’, that it is merely a system requiring structural adjustments,\textsuperscript{248} there arises one especially undeniable paradox. This concerns the growth, under globalisation, of transnational communities opposed to the rampantlly profit-orientated practices

\textsuperscript{245} Enron, the huge Texan energy corporation, was forced to file for the ‘largest bankruptcy of all time’ in December 2001. During the legal proceedings, it was discovered that the company had maintained intimate covert dealings with the U.S. Government; it was subsequently faced with over 2000 counts of mail and wire fraud, insider trading, fraud felony and obstruction of justice after shredding thousands of incriminating documents. See John R. Wilke and Nicholas Kulish, ‘Encounters with justice’. See also Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder, pp. 69–72.

\textsuperscript{246} See Frank Clarke, Graeme Dean, Kyle Oliver, eds, ‘HIH — unfettered hubris’, in Corporate Collapse: Accounting, Regulatory and Ethical Failure, pp. 222–45.


\textsuperscript{248} See Martin Wolff, Why Globalization Works.
of global neo-liberalism. Rather than celebrating a new era of streamlined global flows and interactions, such vocal critics have an entirely opposite view of globalisation. Importantly for such critics, it is precisely the anti-systemic decentralisation of power that occurs under globalisation that promotes the collectivisation of those opposed to the effects of global capitalist power. Yet the sense of community that arises now is devoid of a unitary collective method or ideology of the sort believed to be necessary by the ‘Old Left’. In fact contemporary protest actions often occur in the absence of either charismatic leaders or propagandists issuing tactical instructions.249 Some acts of defiance under globalisation emerge in autonomous and collective terms, without recourse to master-narratives.

Now, as the propagation of globalisation as a global rationalist ‘new world order’ is presented as vital to the health and effectiveness of contemporary global networks, its other, disorder, is isolated as a threat. This is despite pro-globalisationists’ claims that opposition has been rendered impossible and despite the fact that globalisation makes it difficult to limit the actions of the globally mobilised critics it inadvertently encourages. This may explain as well the frequent vilification of anti-globalisation protest movements for their ‘disorderliness’, because disorder opposes from a multitude of positions the supposed unity of globalisation’s New World Order.250 The anti-globalisation ‘rabble’, a ‘lumpen proletariat’251 if ever there was one, is represented as threatening not so much because it represents an organised oppositional front but because it is essentially shapeless and unpredictable as well as socially diverse. This is crucial when considering contemporary notions of social critique. If, for instance, the anti-globalisation movement, itself a ‘movement of movements’252 deemed ‘anti-globalisationist’ by their neo-liberalist critics,253 were able to voice a single united criticism against neo-liberal globalisation, it would be reverting to a tradition of dialectical criticism demanding coherent centralised organisation that has been historically proven to provide an easy enemy. That is in

250 The British political commentator, Hugo Young, for instance, attacked anti-globalisation protesters for making ‘a virtue out of disorderliness’, and a spokesman for the World Wildlife Fund referred to the same protesters as a ‘formless howling mob’. See Notes From Nowhere (anonymous), eds, We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism, p. 66.
251 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari refer to Marx’s famous ‘lumpenproletariat’, saying that under the dominant capitalist system those not easily identifiable as representing a particular sub-group (such as the ‘working class’, for example) are simply dismissed as ‘residue’ and their collective desires condemned. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘Capitalism: A very special delirium,” in Kris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer eds, Hatred of Capitalism: A Reader, p. 212.
the spirit of orthodox Marxist dialectical materialism, the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement would be simply expected to provide the ‘negative’ to globalisation’s ‘positive’ thus maintaining their antagonism in a state of perpetual suspension.

This critical dialecticism fixes enemies in a system of mutually acknowledged disagreement. Of course the anti-globalisation movement has its historical precedents. The most pertinent of these, at least from the viewpoint of the success of staged critical opposition, occurred in Paris in May 1968, but was significantly echoed internationally. On that occasion a wave of spontaneous street protests broke out as students and workers united in opposition to the repressively traditionalist and economically driven policies of French government under Charles De Gaulle. These protests, enacted in a popular spirit of anti-capitalist anti-authoritarianism, successfully shut down Paris, albeit briefly. This series of events became a critical focal point for both the ‘New Left’ and, more obliquely, the development of post-structuralism. In fact it was out of this popular revolutionary moment that the post-structuralist rethinking of forms of social critique emerged. Deleuze and Guattari specifically address this significant critical event — and, more pertinently, its apparent failure.

In their essay, ‘May ’68 did not happen’, the co-authors use the May 1968 protests in Paris as an example of how revolutionary social dissent is curtailed. What is particular to their critique is their claim that the failure of direct social action does not result so much from the brutal physical suppression by the police or government authorities as from a failure on the part of the protesters to recognise the potential opened by the situation. They claim that once the Paris protesters reorganised along Marxist oppositional lines, after the initial chaotic eruption of radical activity, they effectively abandoned any chance of future liberty.

As the formless mass of protesters, united under a loose umbrella of differing desires, became increasingly factionalised and increasingly organised, the potential for revolutionary actualisation receded. As a result, the groupuscules making up this spontaneous anti-authoritarian phenomenon coagulated and the flow of desire as a directly acting revolutionary force was stemmed. Once again an oppositional network, inadvertently sympathetic to the prevailing system, arose as the whole was suspended again between obediently organised but

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253 Immanuel Wallerstein, ‘New revolts against the system’, Ibid., p. 270.
255 Deleuze and Guattari apply the invented term ‘groupuscules’ to suggest a social mass that is non-hierarchical, dynamic and free-flowing, and which is activated equally on a cellular and a biological level. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘May ’68 did not happen’, in Kris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer eds, Hatred of Capitalism: A Reader, pp. 209–211.
opposing groups. After a while the chaos released by the protests dissipated and the situation returned more or less, to normal. Furthermore, the regulatory nature of contemporary capitalist culture reasserted its primacy and imperviousness to change. Either that, or global capitalism extended its ability to include some differences and alter others just enough so that opposition is effectively neutralised.

Recent commentators on the ‘anti-globalisation’ ‘movement’ have also cited its lack of centralisation as a critical strength. It has also been suggested that, ‘Since 1968 there has been a lingering search ... for a better kind of anti-systemic movement, one that would actually lead to a more democratic, egalitarian world.’ Other theorists agree, at the same time using the anti-systemic action of May 1968 as an example of a social revolutionary movement that is innately celebratory rather than dryly oppositional. Such a viewpoint is echoed also in the subversively chaotic and ‘carnivalesque’ aspects of anti-globalisation rallies.

This search for an anti-systemic form of opposition locates social critique in a multitude of often overlapping, though crucially differentiated, positions.

In fact such critics expose global capitalism as highly implicated in co-opting concepts of difference that are vital to post-structuralist social critique. For example, public acknowledgements of difference, whether based on culture, race or gender, appear publicly through such tactics as the repeated representations of minorities in the global media. The media popularisation of minorities has also been referred to as ‘globalisation with a human face’. However, such representations can also be seen as yet another example of the global reinvention of an Enlightenment ethos which is itself dependent on a humanist neo-liberalist tradition of capitalist appropriation.

Today it has been deemed unacceptable — or, more pertinently, ‘costly’ — to simply ignore difference or to portray it negatively. Yet even with the emergence of growing numbers of representations of Others, it is still only a minuscule proportion of minorities — certain ethnic groups, sexual subcultures and women, for instance — who are portrayed positively by

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257 See Julie Kristeva, Revolt, She Said.
259 See Verity Burgmann, Power, Profit and Protest: Australian Social Movements and Globalisation.
global capitalist media networks. Yet those who are targeted are those most likely to be opposed to the effects of global capitalism. Indeed, viewed together, the community of ‘third world’ minorities — racial, religious and sexual underclasses — form a potential and potentially ever-expanding subversive ‘multitude’. Indeed the capitalist acknowledgement of Otherness generates ever-multiplying sites of possible opposition. As a result, the representational apparatus of global capitalism must remain always alert to issues of difference.

However, globally disseminated representations of minorities allow them to participate only at the symbolic level of a disembodied exchange of visual information. And as Baudrillard predicted, such representations ‘from above’ function symbolically, as they supersede and replace opportunities for directly challenging the established hierarchical structure of globalisation’s neo-liberalist world-view. Therefore, images of previously excluded Others represented in contemporary media channels, for instance, do not in fact signify a genuine acknowledgement of alternative pre-existing desires, nor the emergence of a new corporate ethical idealism. The recognition of minorities in popular visual forms simply places them as untapped commercial resources.

Like the shapeless ‘rabble’ of ‘anti-globalisation’ protesters, minorities who were once denied access to Western economic and representational systems now form, under globalisation, a significant barrier to its unregulated exploitation of them. That is because the sheer extent of global difference resists convenient generalisations and because awareness of this multiplicity of difference requires an ever-vigilant acknowledgement of geographical and cultural specificities. In this way the micro-political minutiae of global difference opposes globalisation as a type of easy positivist universalism. In fact some commentators have suggested that the strategic and ideological aspects of globalisation actually preclude its supposed inevitability and render it eminently reversible through principles of state self-regulation and an insistence on the primacy of local needs. This resistance to global universalism also arises in contemporary art, as its economic and ideological values are often wholeheartedly embraced.

262 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Multitude.
264 Notes From Nowhere (anonymous), eds, We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism, p. 66.
265 See Waldon Bello, Deglobalization.
1.5 The displacement and re-invention of art as a form of social critique

The function of criticism as it applies to contemporary art is marked by a double challenge, as it faces the intertwined legacy of post-structuralism and the complexities of globalised discourse. The globalisation of the social and political spheres is, as we have seen, increasingly marked by an invigorated capitalistic neo-liberalism. This in itself poses significant problems for the contemporary identity of art as a socially critical and genuinely resistant medium. Overall, globalisation has had a profound effect on the production of art and on contemporary global art networks. These effects have related to not only the influence on art of expanded and expanding global markets, but also the global popularisation of often specifically Westernised visual iconographies. Consequently the roles contemporary artists see themselves playing have radically altered, as artists are encouraged to adapt their sense of national and historical identity to suit a decentralised globalised context. At the same time, this new context and its inherent debunking of individual statehood and of cultural and geographic specificity sets up the practice of art as one increasingly determined by market demands. This shift further complicates and displaces the concept of art as an autonomous tool of critical agency that is able to subvert dominant social and economic structures, especially since those structures are constantly being relocated, redefined and reappropriated according to global economic and institutional desires.

Such a situation also undermines the varieties of ‘aesthetic Marxism’ that sustained a critique of the so-called culture industry during the 1980’s and through the 1990’s. In fact the proposed continuation of modernity and of avant-garde ideals embodied by the so-called neo avant-garde, in which the largely socialist promise of art as a form of critique founded in an analysis of societal structures and dedicated, at least partially, to the democratic radicalisation of Western culture, has not occurred. The post-modern ‘Americanisation’ of the avant-garde and its relationship to a neo avant-garde situated predominantly within the United States academic framework has not succeeded in de-stratifying the political or cultural power hierarchies in which it is embedded, despite its claims that such were its intentions. Indeed the rigorous textual, conceptual and site-specific practices of many artists of the 1980’s are far removed from today’s dominant commodified and spectacularised varieties of contemporary art.

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Of course under globalisation it has been claimed that theoretically there can no longer be any dominant cultural modes, that globalisation is an essentially democratising process. Nevertheless the infiltration of contemporary art by globalised Western commercial codes is an increasingly common phenomenon. Some argue that such a phenomenon is beneficial because it both democratises the arts industry by further levelling distinctions between high and low culture and finally rids contemporary art of its historically encoded elitist reputation. Others bemoan this situation, as it fundamentally commodifies contemporary art to such an extent that its critical function becomes simply irrelevant. This is regardless of the fact that it was precisely such functions that marked the art of the early 20th century as historically distinct. Still others, while recognising contemporary art’s critical traditions, claim that globalisation’s decentralisation of societies, and of the privileged place of critique within Western intellectual tradition (in particular), is inevitable and should not be lamented — because it potentially opens unpredictable spaces of critical diversity and difference.

Interestingly, many recent high-profile international exhibitions, including the European Biennale, Manifesta 5 (2004), which was concerned specifically with global geographies, the Kassell Documenta XI (2002), whose platform was globalisation and transnationality, and Documenta X: Politics–Poetics (1997), have sought to problematise the supposed dominance of neo-conservative global-commercial hierarchies from within contemporary culture. They have done this by choosing to emphasise temporal and experimental networked forms, video, interactive and multimedia-based projects. Such exhibitions are cast in a broad socio-political framework that deliberately attempts to undermine, through processes of dematerialisation, the appearance of art as global commodity.

Questions arise about the ideological and ‘critical’ nature of these exhibitions, though, because large multinational corporations, such as IBM, sponsor them. It is exactly global corporations like these who have been cited by critics of globalisation as implicitly connected to the social imbalances endemic to the rise of its neo-liberalist agenda. Such exhibitions thereby manifest the contemporary paradox of art produced within a global-institutional context. In them social critique, even of the most rigorous nature, may still be covertly framed by the

268 John Tomlinson, Globalization and Culture.
269 See, for instance, Jean Baudrillard’s proclamation of the ‘total worthlessness of contemporary art’ in ‘A conjuration of imbeciles’.
270 Okwui Enwezor, Documenta XI: Platform 5.
objects of its own criticism. This is especially the case as contemporary art institutions themselves become globally decentralised and increasingly dependent on corporate investment and support.

In partial opposition and more aligned in spirit to the protests of the anti-globalisation movement, are the self-regulated activities of certain globally distributed artist run initiatives (ARIs), small organisations sceptical of the global influence of multinational corporations and large quasi-commercial cultural institutions, as well as of the increasing role they play in the production of art and the modes of its display. However, such independent sites are also increasingly co-opted, often as a result of the unspoken pressures of global economic discourse, by the visibility and increasing popularity of the types of contemporary art endorsed by global corporate institutions. Meanwhile, government funding bodies, which embrace corporate models more and more completely, may further pressure independent cultural initiatives via the implied threat of refusing funding to activities they consider to hold no possible future commercial worth. Such a threat may be carried out if the nature of the culture produced by independent initiatives, or by individual artists, is too socially ‘negative’, or if it is too openly critical of prevailing government policies. And while this is not as simple as saying ‘criticise the government and you’ll lose your funding’, the emphasis in Western governments under globalisation on catering to corporate interests comes at the expense of a more inclusive and critically aware vision of contemporary culture.

It has to be noted also, however, that the critical dimension of recent types of contemporary art is derived from positions significantly less polarised and didactic and more ‘open’ than those evident in much of the socially orientated art of the 1980’s and early 1990’s. Such contemporary approaches, textual, institutionally strategic and multilayered, are already couched in terms of the openness of a critical project no longer anchored by the oppositional tenets of a reconceptualised ‘progressive’ modernism. In fact it is in this openness and its containment within the growing globalised context of contemporary art that such art locates its greatest challenge. This is because critical openness remains equally open to appropriation by the neo-conservatives. And in an era increasingly marked in the West, and around the world, by the spectres of neo-liberalist economic and religious fundamentalism and a dangerously ‘enlightened’ militarisation, the cynical acceptance of the global market popularisation of contemporary art also conceals a parallel acceptance of the correctness of such a model.
Therefore globalisation, as a form of ‘pseudo-democracy without a subject’,\textsuperscript{272} succeeds in finally formalising art, just as it succeeds in formalising politics and economics while disregarding the critical social effects such rationalist systems exercise over populations globally. A return to rationalist critique based on transparent opposition, whether military or theoretical, therefore does not necessarily result in an enlightened ethos. If many post-structuralist theories offer little to the artist,\textsuperscript{273} neither is the related decentralisation of critique under globalisation, as much as it attempts to annihilate difference through accepting it, lacking in oppositional potential. As growing support for the diverse web that is the conveniently labelled ‘anti-globalisation movement’ has shown, globalisation also generates possible points of resistance to its dominant Western economistic ideology. These are to be found within the realm of contemporary art as much as within alternative social movements and elsewhere.


\textsuperscript{273} See, once again, Jean Baudrillard’s ‘A conjuration of imbeciles’, but also his scathing criticism of contemporary artists’ attempts to use his theories of ‘simulation’ creatively, in Chris Horrocks, \textit{Introducing Baudrillard}. See also Jacques Derrida’s serious reservations about the creative deployment of ‘deconstruction’, which he argues is not a method, appears only in practice and is eminently indisposed to systematic repetition. However, this has not dissuaded many contemporary cultural practitioners from using it as a conceptual platform for the presentation of physical projects. See David Wood and Robert Bernasconi, eds, \textit{Derrida and Différance}, p. 1.
Chapter 2

The empire and its allies: 'Enlightened' populism and globalisation's new Western consensus

Globalisation as we understand it today is foremost an economic paradigm. As such it inflates the global value of neo-liberal 'self-regulating' markets. The worldwide imposition of these is crucially orientated towards Western and especially U.S. financial and territorial interests. Indeed such territorialism, accelerated at present, is also distinctly imperial, as the United States attempts to install itself as a global empire overseeing and policing the widest possible geopolitical territory.\(^1\) To achieve this, it relies on, among other means, military occupation, excusing such behaviour via the terrorist affront to its territorial sanctity enacted in the September 11 attacks on New York's World Trade Center towers.\(^2\)

Even more effective, though, in relation to its territorial ambitions, is the United States' repeated triumphal invocation of the freedoms offered by neo-liberal free trade that propels globalisation's ever-expanding 'naturalised' markets. In fact, globalisation's market freedoms, at the same time, effectively usurp traditional oppositional politics of Left and Right, replacing them with a very particular, ideologically conservative 'brand' of Western liberal democracy.\(^3\) This Western liberal democracy, particularly since the highly visible collapse of Communism and international socialism, is predicated on the populist politics of a consensual centre. This means that in the supposed absence of continued ideological opposition and sustained critical attacks from the Left, contemporary politics is replaced by the global territorial interventions of Western controlled multinational corporations. These now assume the positions of power once contested by 'true' politics. With such political barriers removed, and relying on the apparent rationalism of the Western system of neo-liberal economics, globalisation is able to represent itself as a positive form of contemporary universalism purveying a quasi-Enlightenment agenda of accelerated 'progress'.

In the field of contemporary 'global culture' such changes are particularly marked. This is

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\(^1\) See Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder.

\(^2\) On September 11, 2001 two hijacked airliners piloted by terrorist supporters of the Islamic fundamentalist organisation Al-Qaeda flew into New York's World Trade Center towers, causing them to collapse. The unpredictability and destructiveness of this attack on United States territory created a new era of global politics dominated by U.S. 'anti-terrorist' measures.

because globalisation’s most powerful economic institutions are still predominantly located in the U.S., in cities such as New York and Los Angeles. So even if cultural globalisation argues in favour of a politics of difference and inclusion, its markets remain centralised in the West. As a further result of the United States’ current imperial leanings, some of its foremost artists implicitly mirror its prevailing aura of opulent self-aggrandisement, privileged excess, individualist self-interest and self-mythologising. At the same time, artists such as Mathew Barney push contemporary global art production into the highly commercialised realms of the media-entertainment culture of its most internationally vaunted global manifestations — Music Television (MTV), for example.

Of course the ‘empire of globalisation’, as primarily a Western econometric manifestation led by U.S. example, then exerts particularly noticeable influence over other Western, English-speaking countries. In Britain, for example, the economic emphases of contemporary ‘global culture’ lionise the corporate ‘branded’ commodity of the Young British Artists ‘movement’ (yBa) and its aftermath. In turn, Britain’s equation of the contemporary artist with the pop star and media idol filters through, alongside market-coveted examples of contemporary U.S. entertainment-art, to effect the work of a generation of Australian artists. In each of these English-speaking nations, which also eagerly participated in the ‘coalition of the willing’ that invaded Iraq in 2001, the production of contemporary ‘global art’ regularly becomes a specialised adjunct to the voracious functioning of neo-liberal markets. Similarly, the freedoms expressed through such art do not seriously affront, other than occasionally through deliberately sensational ‘shock tactics’, the presumptions of a particular form of Western liberal democracy that discredits genuine opposition.

2: 1 Centralised but disguised: North America’s new Enlightenment

For its supporters, globalisation promises a radical freeing-up of the world so that nations, no longer separated into individual states or territories, may share in a multiple enlightening process while participating in the historical imminence of a promising economic moment. Likewise, those enamoured of the economic promises of globalisation believe that its processes will finally prove the overall ethical and political correctness of Western neo-liberalism as a system eminently applicable on a global scale. For those more critical of globalisation rhetoric, however, globalisation is but a generalised term disguising the reconceptualisation of a historical Enlightenment program for strategic Western political and territorial ends.

This contemporary ‘neo-Enlightenment’ from above, enacted by governments and today even more by corporations and global cultural institutions, relies on the generalised re-
invocation of classic Enlightenment rhetoric of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. Thus echoes of such sentiments heavily imbue the jargon shrouding the ongoing conflict in Iraq, whose invasion was named by its U.S. occupiers, ‘operation infinite justice’. The infinity to which this term refers is, of course, related to globalisation’s supposed infinite stretching of nationally defined boundaries. At the same time, such spatial re-conceptualisation is also linked to the legal concepts of international or ‘global’ law. Thus, under globalising circumstances, the concept of justice in developed democracies is increasingly less specific to particular, ‘site-specific’ legal contexts, and more universalist in its application. As a result, international ‘justice’ is offered instead as a type of divine and universal promise and this is despite the seemingly contradictory fact that the United States is very much against the practical implementation of international law.

The nature of this promise of a universally enlightened global justice is therefore primarily rhetorical and ultimately simulated. Such simulated justice is doubly paradoxical. This is because first, recent theories discredit the Western ideal of an ‘authentically’ enlightened individual — such a construct’s core identity has been shown to be fundamentally a social expression of external power relations. And second, the central place of ‘individualism’ in Western capitalist culture is representationally central to globalisation processes, which exaggerate the social, material and cultural benefits it claims to offer. Not surprisingly, the final attainment of such benefits is simultaneously predicated more than ever on the stringent and regularly brutal suppression of Others. Likewise, it is accompanied by an overall ethos of

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4 Following the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Department of Defense named its proposed military response, ‘Operation Infinite Reach’. This name can be traced to ‘Operation Infinite Reach’ which was used for the 1998 bombing of Osama bin Laden’s facilities in Afghanistan and Sudan. These air strikes were a response to the bombings of the United States embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. However, it has been pointed out that after the public disclosure of ‘Operation Infinite Justice’, ‘Muslim groups protested the name on the basis that their faith teaches that Allah is the only one that could provide “infinite justice”.’ Operation Infinite Justice was changed to ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’ on September 25, 2001’: John Pike, ‘Operation Infinite Justice’.

5 This is fully testified by the United States repeated and categorical refusal to ratify as one of the 120 participating states of the international criminal court based in the Hague, the Netherlands established in 1998, whose task it is to try perpetrators of crimes against humanity under both wartime and civilian circumstances.

6 See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation. 1: 3 (iv) Art and the critique of power.

7 As far as the contemporary discourse of globalisation is concerned, its Enlightenment-inflected jargon — of ‘infinite justice’, for example — is in fact employed to economically subjugate ‘peripheral’ nations under the weight of its promises. For circumstantial and statistical evidence of this, see statements from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2000) which admit that, ‘truly world wide development ... is not progressing evenly’ and the World Bank Briefing Papers (2000), which identify the increasing economic inequality of nations under globalisation, stating that, ‘in 1960 the average per capita GDP [Gross
renewed and paternalistic colonialism of the sort historically linked to the rampant colonialism of the Enlightenment era, and to modernism, both of which ultimately failed to deliver practically, despite the frequently utopian social rhetoric in which their agendas were clothed, the types of progress they preached.

Of course the type of military and economic suppression witnessed globally today may take the form of transparent opportunistic aggression, as was and is the case in the U.S. led war on Iraq. Alternatively, it frequently operates in a covert fashion, by enticing so-called developing and Third World nations — through such things as ‘tailor-made’ advertising for consumer goods and the lifestyles they conjure — to participate in an essentially Western economic and cultural milieu that cannot be reciprocated because of the absence of local equivalents. In fact, this absence of equivalents is necessary to further the desire-inducing mechanisms driving globalisation as an essentially neo-liberal economic phenomenon. The ‘freedom’ and ‘openness’ of globalisation processes, particularly as they are enthusiastically pushed by the neo-liberals and neo-conservatives (neo-cons) of the contemporary United States, increasingly draws nations into the expanding techno-cultural networks it is central in generating. Yet, in the end, there is often a vast discrepancy between the profits gleaned by Western and North American markets and any social or economic benefits gained by other nations, especially if they are already economically troubled. In fact, the benefits for nations newly subscribing to the ‘enlightened’ neo-liberal economometric rhetoric of globalisation are often severely limited.

For both advocates and critics, globalisation refigures the world in very particular ways. If there are no longer any ‘nations’, as is suggested by pro-globalists, then what we are left with is a vast, expansive, intercontinental terrain marked by limitless difference. Likewise, the breadth of this expanse can, theoretically, no longer be critically described in terms of opposing nation-states beholding to nationalist ideologies. For pro-globalists, this is added ‘proof’ of the global

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9 Such a system is obviously crucial in indebting poorer nations to richer ones, as the universal freedom of exchangeable goods produced in the West deliberately induces debts in countries where such goods are introduced and purchased on a credit basis.

9 ‘Neo-liberal’ and ‘neo-conservative’ are recent words, both coined as far as I know in the United States about twenty years ago. It doesn’t help that they mean almost the same thing’: Susan George, Another World is Possible ‘IF’..., pp. 8–9.

10 Indeed, under globalisation the disparity between rich and poor nations is exacerbated. See, for example, Manfred B. Steger, ‘The global south, a fate worse than debt’ in Manfred B. Steger, Globalization, p. 43.
‘correctness’ of Western liberal democracy with its idealised and convenient principles of ‘free speech’ and ‘free trade’.¹¹

What does this conjunction of Western liberal democracy with neo-liberal economics mean for contemporary art networks? What is promised is access to a greatly expanded global territory facilitating accelerated cultural exchange among globally diverse cultural communities. Yet acceptance of the notion of ‘global culture’ as the free exchange of concepts and the fostering of expanded social possibilities in contemporary art is, again, shadowed by globalisation’s emphasis on the economic value of transnational exchange. More than ever, this emphasis encourages the accelerated trade of contemporary artworks.

Even more problematic, though, is the constant reiteration, in art, of the symbolic global ‘correctness’ of the system of neo-liberal economics. Thus contemporary art’s very ‘contemporaneity’ comes to be unconsciously understood as a ‘natural’ by-product of its uncritical embrace of a generalised — and impending — highly commercialised ‘global culture’:

Just as global capitalism stepped out from behind the cloak of its defeated opponent after 1989 and,¹² in its rapid transformation, was revealed as the rapacious, inexorable system that it is, so it may be with the art world … [that today] its core function [is] as a propagandist of neo-liberal values.¹³

In this way, too, the pursuit of the financial legitimacy of the role of the ‘contemporary’ artist finally extends to cultural products themselves, so that economic value ‘in itself’ now accounts for the socio-critical value of the contemporary artwork. That is to say, the earlier hopes of radical cultures to dematerialise art, thereby emphasising the artworks’ political and social functions and defying their restrictive bourgeois economic reification, has been thoroughly superseded. Without any notion of a ‘higher’ socially transformative purpose, the value left to art is wholly economic. Art which fails to achieve visible economic value, a value which today is symbolic in the extreme,¹⁴ is likely to be rendered by the global art system, which is dominated by markets and a globally dispersed infrastructure of ‘official’ cultural institutions,

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¹¹ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.
¹² Global capitalism’s defeated opponent is, of course, international Communism. Its demise was marked by the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall separating Communist East Berlin from capitalist West Berlin.
commercial galleries and their attendant publications, peripheral and amateurish.

Refusing or opposing the economic promises of a hegemonic system of world economics irrevocably linked currently to the global imperial power of the U.S. and its fêted dollar, whether as nations or as artists, is therefore to risk being ‘de-legitimised’. Such de-legitimisation operates strategically in a similar manner to the treatment meted out to all those other supposedly ‘failed’ Leftist historical ideologies, such as Marxism, whose actual aim was to socialise the means of production of culture, making culture a product of ‘the people’ and of society collectively. Worse still, refusing globalisation’s reiterated promises, negatively complemented by the supposedly constant threat of ‘global terrorism’, potentially identifies anyone suspicious or critical of globalisation as an ‘enemy’.  

In fact, contemporary political and economic rationalism, though superficially gleaning from post-structuralism a radically decentralised subject, refuses to relinquish the possibility of total control. Global power, whilst ideally expressed as multiculturally diverse and increasingly non-hierarchically concentrated around the world, desperately relies on creating a centre worthy of defending from the Others it also creates. Contemporaneity in the global political arena is therefore dependent on what is in fact an archaic conceptualisation of the nature of power; this has ramifications for international contemporary culture.

Indeed, what does it mean to be ‘contemporary’ in this brave new globally dispersed world ‘contemporary to what’? In other words, if the contemporary global world is marked by blatant transgressions of the classical imperatives of democracy whilst it maintains a wholly symbolic allegiance to them, then in order for global contemporary culture to appear relevant, it must reflect the significant ethical compromises of the ideologically promoted ‘new world order’. Therefore contemporary art is expected to participate consensually in the enlightened global present, or else be denounced as ‘anti-democratic’. To be ‘anti-democratic’ in such a scenario is often implicitly to be considered ‘anti-American’, yet criticising the ‘empire of globalisation’ led by the United States is also inevitable:

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15 Of course, to seriously propose a ‘war on terrorism’ is inherently paradoxical, as it allows the definition of ‘war’ to stray into impossibly ambiguous territory. Similarly, the West’s civilised anti-terrorist rhetoric, supported by pro-globalists, is underscored by a climate of fear knowingly assisted by Western governments. This helps allow governments like that of the U.S. to construct individual nations, such as Iran, Iraq and North Korea, the infamously described ‘Axis of Evil’, as enemies of the West and its values. See Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*.

because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree.¹⁷

2: 1 (i) The Empire’s new clothes

Crucial to the formation of empires is their reliance on the notion of knowledge as force, a force for ‘enlightening’. Knowledge becomes a form of power inscribed by particular states and the networks and colonies they control. According to Enlightenment rhetoric, it is only through force, disguised as benevolence, that empires are able to exert their economic and cultural influence over the widest geo-political domain.

Similarly, globalisation, issuing from an Anglo-American centre, relies on the forceful propagation of particular representations of knowledge. Today, such representations figure ‘popular’ knowledge primarily as entertainment, especially as knowledge is conceived via the contemporary media and the technologies that support it. In fact, the contemporary re-emergence and instilling of the global value of imperial interests is dependent on new technologies to an unprecedented degree.¹⁸ Such technology functions in two ways: first, it facilitates the capacity of wealthy Western nations, especially the United States, to extend, almost instantaneously, the products of its culture far afield. It is also central in establishing global virtual markets that allow traders to exert broad financial control without having to actually travel to the regions they seek to influence. Second, and more forcefully, technology aids attempts at global domination through symbolic means, by making contemporary politics a form of spectacle, dominated by images and disarticulated ‘sound bites’.¹⁹

Contemporary technological spectacle is reliant on the significant gap between what appears to audiences on screen (for instance) and any actual knowledge of how such spectacles are technically realised. The globalisation of such virtuality is inherently mystifying because it represents the ‘affective’ radical transformation of labour into an ‘informatization of production’²⁰ based on ‘capitalist informationalism’²¹ and producing ‘immaterial goods’.²² More than ever, technology is configured as an ethereal presence appearing simultaneously in hugely dissimilar transnational contexts.

In this sense, virtualised technologies, such as the internet, are the foremost

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¹⁷ Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 5.
¹⁸ See Paul Virilio, Politics of the Very Worst.
¹⁹ See Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulations.
²⁰ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire, p. 297.
²² Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire, p. 290.
representational dimension of empire under globalisation. Additionally, such technological ‘dressing’ is extremely successful in camouflaging its imperialistic purposes. In the same way, the dramatic economic and territorial influence of globalisation’s favoured multinational and transnational corporations remains invisible, other than as data in the form of rising and falling stock market share figures in the global media for example, to those external to their immediate operations. In such instances, technology is easily portrayed as universally positive, simply because it appears clean, rationalist and scientific.

At the same time, such techno-economic representations are conveniently, and highly effectively, structurally voided of demands for self-knowledge or self-criticism. Thus, as a global technological system representing itself as innately ‘rationalist’, virtual capitalism is emptied of its ethical accountability. Even the first U.S. led Gulf War, known as Desert Storm, was portrayed in the media as a ‘clean’ war utilising ‘smart’ bombs, and warheads whose devastating physical effects were disguised by their on-screen transformation into technologically ‘inert’ video imagery. Furthermore, the poetic language of ‘Desert Storm’ radically transforms the idea of contemporary warfare through reversing traditional language of military aggression, making such warfare sound instead as though it were the result of geographic and climactic phenomena, a simple sand or dust storm for example.

In the virtualisation of international warfare under globalisation, as in the globalisation of international markets, aggression is naturalised. As a result, the justification for global military and economic infiltration is universalised, making their seemingly infinite conjoined reach ‘only

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23 ‘It should come as no surprise then that the United States government poses the establishment and regulation of a global information infrastructure as one of its highest priorities, and that communication networks have become the most active terrain of mergers and competition for the most powerful transnational corporations ... The construction of the new information infrastructure ... provides the conditions and terms of global production and government just as road construction did for the Roman Empire’: Ibid., p. 298.

24 For example, in 2002 Argentina’s government de-pegged the peso from the U.S. dollar, against which it could not hope to fairly compete, after a decade of depending on the IMF to determine the exchange rate between the two currencies. This decision of the Argentinean government was made as a reaction to the culmination of an era of concerted privatisation that had simultaneously resulted in large numbers of worker redundancies. Argentina’s debt to the IMF, valued in 2001 at approximately US$170 billion, was defaulted, and the peso was consequently devalued, resulting in widespread demonstrations and looting. This situation clearly revealed the dependency of poorer nations, even those relatively strong regionally, on the globalised economy of the IMF and driven by the value of the U.S. dollar. Furthermore, the neoliberalist values spread, via globalisation, as a Westernising force were also proven, despite suggestions of their universality, to fail under specific local conditions, thereby effectively destabilising regions at the same time. For differing perspectives, see ‘Timeline: Argentina’s economic crisis’ in The Guardian, 20 December 2001, Steve H. Hanke, ‘Argentina: Caveat lector’, The CATO Institute and The NY Economist, and ‘Economic meltdown in Argentina’, at www.worldsocialism.com.

States, the world’s foremost economic and military power. The U.S. publicly lauds the productions of such individuals, conspicuously celebrating them as the global ‘cultural capital’ of a much greater territorialising ideological system.

A prime contemporary example of such a representative, as far as the empire of the U.S. is concerned, is video and ‘multimedia’ artist Matthew Barney. Indeed, Barney is currently lionised as the United States’ greatest living and most ‘important artist of his generation’.28 Fittingly, the trajectory of Barney’s œuvre is a fascinating instance of the contemporary empire’s desire to promote a new ‘Renaissance man’ of multiple — and seemingly inexhaustible — talents.

In lieu of globalisation’s fundamental neo-liberal economic outlook, Barney’s career has straddled several fields central to contemporary capitalist mythology: sport, fashion and art.29 More recently, Barney has made himself the model and central locus of his elaborate and self-mythologising art practice. Not surprisingly, within that practice, the aesthetic and ideological realms of sport, fashion and art are inseparable.

Stemming from his mastery of this capitalistically inflated intersections of sport, fashion and contemporary art, media representations of Barney the artist tend to portray him in near super-human terms.30 In accord with his ‘super-human’ personification, signs of poverty or material lack are practically absent in Barney’s œuvre. Like the otherwise dissimilar work of North America’s previously championed harbinger of a deliberately ‘superficial’ transnational commodity-identifying post-Pop art, Jeff Koons,31 Barney’s is a rich art, thoroughly befitting an

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27 Ibid. See also Chapter 4 — The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled? 4: 1 (i)
Contemporary art education: The business of dissent or business as usual
29 Barney initially rose to prominence for his sporting prowess, as quarterback for Yale University, the state champion football team. Following this, Barney then worked for a time as a fashion model for a series of globally renowned fashion houses, modelling for Ralph Lauren and J. Crew while still a student. See John Habich, ‘Matthew Barney’s whole, sensational Cremaster film series comes to town’.
30 In this way Barney functions somewhat as an exemplar of the Neitzschean übermensch. The German term übermensch, literally translating as ‘overman’ but essentially meaning ‘superman’, ideally captures the spirit of both Barney’s reputation and his working process. And like the American cartoon hero, the artist Barney frequently depicts himself in acts of overcoming and of conquering the physical environments in which he has cast himself as hero. For the philosophical genesis of the term übermensch, see Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, pp. 1–13. Such a reputation is further supported by critics such as Katy Siegel, who writes, quite seriously, that, ‘Matthew Barney is better than you … he is much better looking than you, much more successful, a much better artist with a much more interesting life (inner as well as outer …)’ and goes on to describe the Cremaster series as ‘works of genius’: Katy Siegel, ‘Nurture boy—film director Matthew Barney’.
31 American artist and former Wall Street commodities broker Jeff Koons pursued a highly visible contemporary art career, especially during the 1980’s and 1990’s. His work is heavily inflected by commercial and deliberately kitsch iconography and frequently unites entertainment imagery with
artist 'chosen' to represent the new empire. To realise his sculptural installations and films, the artist routinely utilises a range of reified, exquisite and highly expensive materials, including microcrystalline wax, crystal glass, stainless steel and chrome, polished parquetry and satin — all of which are smooth, precious and inscrutable substances. Missing from this material world are signs of genuine decay, decrepitude or physical destitution, unless they are obviously theatricalised or formally sculptural. Of course Barney's work does regularly focus on grotesque imagery, and the artist often places himself at the centre of scenes of physical abjection. Yet from a background of inflated opulence, such emphases only intensify the self-perpetuating fantasies of victimhood that are central to the empire of the U.S. in its current role as wounded 'anti-terrorist' avenger.

Indeed, Matthew Barney's use of his own physicality in his work is also a means of reinscribing the traditional role of the artist as individualist hero. In this capacity, Barney is constantly assailed by, — but, more importantly, continually surmounts — attacks launched against him by various opponents. In order to defeat his aggressors, Barney frequently enacts 'freakish' self-transformations. By becoming 'alien' in this way, Barney becomes ever more able to powerfully live on as an exotic, a Shaman of contemporary pop culture and a figure of exaggerated individuality. Further, in relation to his embrace of representations of a heightened and exaggerated individualism, it is interesting to note that the individuals making up group sequences in Barney's much-celebrated Cremaster cycle remain resolutely apart and isolated from one another. Even when performing glittering choreographed tableaux, such groups at no point demonstrate a collective identity. Instead, they appear as a simple mass conforming to a spectacular image that is highly reminiscent of the nostalgic and fetishised aspects of contemporary advertising, or the popular culture of Music Television (MTV) (see Figure # 1).

pornography, for example. Like Warhol, Koons celebrated the endemic commodification of American life and culture, often producing large and highly expensive works, such as his monumental, self-irritating, flower-encrusted sculpture 'Puppy' (1995). See Robert Rosenblum, Jeff Koons: Celebration. Barney's Cremaster 3 (2002) features footage of a number of rotting horses. While such an image suggests physical, even psychic, degeneration, it appears instead as pure artifice. The painstakingly reproduced sculptural qualities of these apparently decaying animals is emphasised. The effect is 'cool', and does not elicit the visceral reaction that would otherwise be expected. Also central to the 'gangsterish' Cremaster 3 is the figure of a female corpse in the rear seat of a pulverised Cadillac; it too appears as a finely crafted art object rather than as an actual cadaver. Evidence of real physical putrefaction is replaced by evidence of the skill and vision of the artist as creator/director.

32 For instance, in Cremaster 3 the artist portrays himself having his teeth knocked out. They are later graphically extruded from his anus as the artist's mouth is simultaneously transformed into a bloodied conduit.
Of course much advertising and popular culture already draws heavily from contemporary art. Alongside global capitalism’s extreme emphasis on the world superiority of neo-liberal economics, art, advertising and entertainment are held in ever more symbiotic suspension.35 Therefore, spectacular imagery in Matthew Barney’s Crema* cycle, as in advertising, often functions purely as visual effect, deferring potential enticements to engage with its socio-economic meanings.36 Indeed, in Barney’s elaborate fantasy world, suggestions of the affective relationship between artwork and locally, or globally, prevailing socio-economic conditions, are minimised or absent altogether. Barney’s is an art continually withdrawing from the ‘real’, as its hermetic symbolism becomes ever more elaborate. In the true spirit of capitalist individualism, Matthew Barney’s self-contained world is presented as entirely his own creation. Furthermore, the imperial dimensions of Barney’s Crema* cycle are highly apparent in its reliance, as a work of art rather than as a conventional ‘film’, on considerable technological resources as well as its harnessing of large numbers of assistants and ‘extras’, many of whom work unpaid.37 Actually, the sheer technical scale of Barney’s Crema* project is as metaphorically expansive as globalisation’s radical exponential spread.38

36 Ibid., p. 48.
37 See Alex Lee, who writes, ‘Wanna work for 20 hours a week — for no payment whatsoever — for Matthew Barney, one of the top-grossing artists in the world?’ He then goes on to detail the Matthew Barney Internship, which reads ‘We ask our interns to work a minimum of 20 hours a week. We are unable to offer a salary/ stipend or housing. We will accommodate academic credit requirements’: Alex Lee, ‘Matthew Barney needs slaves’.
38 Accordingly, the artist’s Crema* cycle has been filmed in a diversity of geographic locations. These range from the urban panorama of contemporary Budapest (Crema* 3 [1997]) and the isolated
Similarly, as part of his generalised invocation of issues of global cultural difference, Barney obliquely references his own Anglo-Celtic heritage. Myths pertaining to such genealogy arise in Barney’s *Cremaster* cycle via overt signifiers of particularly Scottish Celtic forms, including comically exaggerated red hair, tartan kilts and the phallic caber. However, his references to ‘other’ cultures and to the ‘multicultural’ composition of the contemporary United States are atavistic and colonising. For example, the ‘Celtic-ness’ Barney evokes has already been internally appropriated by the U.S.’ self-mythologisation as exemplary of a liberally ‘tolerant’ nation. Therefore the artist’s corresponding self-mythology presents him as an individual capable of exteriorising concepts that successfully encapsulate the multiplicity of the world’s different cultures. Nevertheless, despite such multicultural appropriations in Barney’s art, it is difficult to ignore its quintessential ‘American-ness’.

Although subtly interwoven, there are in Barney’s *Cremaster* cycle many examples of fairly blatant nationalistic imagery. Such imagery is most apparent in *Cremaster 2* (1999), an episode from which expressly invokes the American flag, the ‘star-spangled banner’, that most loaded of all U.S. nationalist symbols. Here, the flag provides a backdrop for a Mormon Tabernacle Choir who serenade the execution of the infamous North American serial killer Gary Gilmour, played by Barney himself. This particular scene, while uncanny and ‘surreal’, appears neither ironic nor critical of the ‘Americana’ it references. Elsewhere, other overt signifiers of ‘Americana’ emerge in Barney’s work in the guise of cowboys (see Figure # 2) and rodeos, Cadillac cars and Manhattan’s unmistakable Chrysler and Guggenheim buildings. In fact the Guggenheim Museum not only housed Barney’s 2003 solo exhibition, an exhibition of distinctly imperial ambition and appearance, (see Figure # 3) but had previously been transformed by him in *Cremaster 5* (1997) as a symbolic site singly possessed by the artist. Barney’s scaling of the famous multitiered interior of the museum in this particular work may additionally be read metaphorically as a realisation of the artist’s grandiose ambitions to attain a dominant place atop the hierarchy of contemporary ‘global culture’ At the same time, here the Guggenheim Museum reads literally as a ‘white house’, making Barney theoretical ‘president’ of a now global ‘United States of Contemporary Culture’.

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Columbia icefields of northern Canada (*Cremaster 2* [1999]) to the harsh and dramatic coastal setting of Ireland’s Devil’s Causeway (*Cremaster 3* [2002]).

39 The traditional ritual tossing of the Scottish ‘caber’ is said to ‘complete’ the artist’s *Cremaster* works.

Nonetheless, the U.S.' current aggressive pursuit of empire, based primarily on its sheer economic weight, simultaneously exposes its potential undermining by the growing power of the truly transnational corporations it shields. In this way, the empire of the United States is also crucially bound by anxiety. In tune with this, Mathew Barney's *Cremaster* cycle also evinces an underlying and pervasive anxiety, coupled with an underlying sense of impotence. Thus the artist’s individualist masculine vision, beholden to the iconography of power — skyscrapers, boardroom tables, expensive cars (see Figure # 4), tailored business suits, machines, surgical equipment (implying the phallocentric penetration of the body), and acts of physical exertion — is at the same time thoroughly destabilised by suggestions of castration\footnote{Images relating to castration include the psychoanalytically loaded imagery of the artist losing his teeth in violent circumstances in *Cremaster 3* (2002), as well as numerous incidental depictions of the artist's orifices being invaded by various objects and devices, and his regular attendant self-portrayal as hermaphroditic.} and vulnerability.\footnote{The term 'Cremaster', around which Barney's entire oeuvre ultimately hinges, refers to the muscle that raises and lowers the testis. Thus whilst undeniably masculine, Barney identifies himself with the most vulnerable part of the male anatomy. 'Barney makes no secret that the series' raw subject matter is the ascending and descending of the testicles, a process controlled by the Cremaster muscle': Katy Siegel, 'Nurture boy—film director Matthew Barney'.}
To compensate for this vulnerability, Barney substitutes a wholly mystifying symbology that sees the role of the contemporary artist revert to that of organic creator and secretive genius, and he is pseudo god-like in this guise. This vision of a seemingly omnipotent individual creative entity perfectly reiterates the mythological structures of capital currently driving the United States’ self-image as a global empire. This transformation of the world’s most powerful nation at the same time includes its regression to the diplomatic primordialism of the ‘with us or against us’\(^{43}\) mindset of the presidency of George W. Bush and his neo-conservative supporters. This in turn activates a global might-is-right ideology that requires the subjugation of economically weak nations. Subjugation of this sort is enacted on the grounds that such nations oppose the inherently ‘fair’ (neo) ‘liberal’ values of the U.S., the globalised world’s exemplary democracy.\(^{44}\) The impact of a democracy, propelled essentially by economic interests, is further crucially disseminated via populist and sensationalist media-entertainment imagery. Today, contemporary art of the sort produced by Mathew Barney significantly partakes of such representational practices. More broadly, these practices have helped cement the cultural and political consensus of the United States’ English-speaking cousins, Britain and Australia.

2: 2 Cementing cultural alliances in the English-speaking world

The United States’ considerable economic prowess, alongside its success in technologically popularising representations of itself worldwide, grants it considerable global influence today.

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\(^{43}\) See George W. Bush, quoted at the anti-terrorism summit in Warsaw, ‘You are either with or against us’.

\(^{44}\) Such action is carried out on the positive and imperially arrogant assumption that ‘liberal democracy remains the only coherent political aspiration that spans different regions and cultures around the globe’: Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man, p. 13.
Not surprisingly, many new technologies developed and marketed by multinational communication and media conglomerates are also centralised in the U.S., Microsoft, Disney and the Disney subsidiary Dreamworks, for example. As a result, their productions also symbolically enhance the notion of the United States as the foremost global entity. In this way, the U.S. emerges not simply as a powerful and technologically advanced nation, but also as an ideologically constructed global empire.\(^{45}\)

The apparent fluidity of new digital technologies, and their oft-promoted accessibility to potentially ‘anyone’,\(^{46}\) aids the perception of the global media as a ‘soft’ spectral phenomenon arising non-hierarchically from multiple technologically inscribed sites at once. Yet the image culture that results from the deployment of such technology conceals the fact that it specifically popularises representations of U.S. culture around the world, especially in other English-speaking countries. The worldwide propagation of the democratic and economic superiority of the ‘American way of life’\(^{47}\) as a global ideal at the same time strategically aids in staging international offensives such as those waged in Afghanistan and Iraq. In the English-speaking West, the United States, by way of its shared language and popular culture, is more likely, despite vocal internal opponents, to be uncritically received as a benevolent guardian generous in its support of willing allies.

Most recently, the concept of a global alliance of English-speaking nations arose in the form of the ‘coalition of the willing’,\(^{48}\) united in its fight against the threat of Islamic terrorism

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\(^{45}\) This is despite protests to the contrary by populist ‘Right-Hegelian’ intellectuals such as Francis Fukuyama. See, for example, Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*.

\(^{46}\) This is a core ideology underlining the contemporary celebration of new digital technologies. It is assumed because such technologies are compact, easy to operate, have multiple uses and are able to plug into a range of communication infrastructures, particularly the internet, allowing owners of such technology to freely manipulate their functions across geographic distances. This perception of new technologies is ideological, of course: it fails to admit their expense and therefore the essential privileging of Western and northern urban consumers.

\(^{47}\) The notion of an ‘American way of life’ is intimately tied to that nation’s rise as a dominant world power. It also conjures the joint extolling of wholly capitalist means of production favouring the constant manufacture of ‘time-saving’ and ‘leisure-providing’ commodities, and a Western liberal democratic system that promotes an ideology of universal freedom. In the 1950’s — incidentally, also the era of U.S. accelerated commodity production and socio-political conservatism — the Hungarian-born ‘post’ Marxist philosopher Alexandre Kojève wrote, ‘I was led to conclude that the *American Way of Life* was the kind of life proper to the post-historical period and that the presence today of the United States in the world prefigures the “eternal present” of all humanity.’ Under globalisation, such an outlook is not only reinvigorated, but exacerbated. See Alexander Kojève, quoted in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debi, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, p 72.

\(^{48}\) The ‘coalition of the willing’ is the U.S.-led conglomerate of international military forces that invaded Iraq on 20 March 2003.
in Afghanistan and Iraq.\textsuperscript{49} This ‘coalition of the willing’, while by no means purely Anglo-centric,\textsuperscript{50} nevertheless symbolically united, in an explicitly global context, the cultural and territorial interests of the U.S., Britain and Australia. These nations, opposing a proposed ‘Axis of Evil’,\textsuperscript{51} are further united in pitting a contemporary model of Western hegemony against anything that resists the global ‘new world order’ such a model envisages. Consequently, enemies seem to proliferate everywhere, within the West as well as outside it. Meanwhile, the routing of enemies, conveniently, requires contemporary theorisation of what makes contemporary Western values, and most visibly those of the U.S., globally superior.\textsuperscript{52}

Such Western theorisation has resulted in the global drive towards populism in both politics and culture. Such a drive is encapsulated, both in its forms and in its ideological inclinations, in the populism that informs much mainstream North American culture. In certain European quarters, recently derided by the Administration of U.S. President George W. Bush as representing ‘old Europe’,\textsuperscript{53} North American culture has long been attacked for its overwhelming adherence to a spirit of entrepreneurial capitalist positivism. Under globalising conditions, however, the reach of U.S. popular culture and the worldwide influence of its image-making and televisual industries provide additional means for legitimising, in economic and ideological terms, the ‘innate’ superiority of its ‘new world order’ outlook. Meanwhile, the very idea of global ‘contemporary’ culture is transformed to imply the ‘right to belong’, or rather to

\textsuperscript{49} The United States government administration linked both the oppressive rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Iraqi dictatorship of Saddam Hussein with the terrorist activities of Al-Qaeda, the organisation responsible for the destruction of New York’s World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001. This is despite the fact, as reported by the United Nations, there remains no credible evidence suggesting any link between Al-Qaeda and Iraq — nor, ultimately, of a united Middle Eastern terrorist front, it further implies. See Evelyn Leopold, ‘Iraq and al-Qaeda: UN finds no links’.

\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, the full ‘coalition of the willing’ involves the participation of 30 countries. They are: Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, The Netherlands, Nicaragua, The Philippines, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.

\textsuperscript{51} The term ‘Axis of Evil’ was coined by U.S. President George W. Bush in his anti-global terrorism, pro-Iraq War ‘State of the Union’ address on 29 January 2002. The phrase was actually penned by David Frum a Canadian speechwriter working on behalf of the Bush Administration. The ‘Axis of Evil’ included: Iraq, Iran and North Korea (and later Syria). The rhetorical conceptualisation of such an ‘axis’ is extremely ambiguous, insofar as there are distinct differences between these countries — and, in fact, no apparent political connection between them at all.

\textsuperscript{52} This is ultimately the argument of neo-liberal supporters such as Francis Fukuyama. See Francis Fukuyama, \textit{The End of History and the Last Man}.

\textsuperscript{53} In his speech at a news conference to the Foreign Press Center of the National Press Club in Washington, U.S. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said, with regard to France and Germany’s opposition to the war in Iraq, that these nations represented ‘old Europe’, and that in the lead-up to war both had been a ‘problem’. See Donald Rumsfeld, quoted at www.CNN.com/WORLD.
conform to, cultural norms established by the United States as the globalised world’s sole empire.\textsuperscript{54}

In contemporary Britain and Australia, the cultural alliance that results from an unspoken adherence to such norms is similarly committed to the spirit of populism. At the same time, such contemporary cultural production is deliberately packaged self-consciously as global spectacle, often evoking a generalised Western culture of narcissistic youthfulness befitting the apparently imminent global ‘new world order’. Similarly, such representations tend to encourage contemporary art’s divorce from its role as social criticism by favouring a popular entertainment ethos founded in sensationalism and visual effect. Many examples of British and Australian contemporary art are therefore indelibly linked to the broader econometric neo-liberal ideology as well. This ideology buoyed a particular vision of ‘global culture’, a vision which acts as a covert adjunct to the United States’ current imperial interests.

2:2 (i) Recent British and Australian art: Sharing the value of contemporary ‘global culture’

Britain and Australia have been keen to form part of an alliance with the U.S. for economic and political reasons, principal of which is the desire to side with the globalised world’s dominant nation. This means that contemporary culture in both those countries has reflected this identification enthusiastically. Whilst such identification is by no means complete, the apparent absence of criticism regarding it in the recent work of many artists within these English-speaking nations is significant.\textsuperscript{55} In fact, in the absence of such criticism, what arises instead is the consensual internalisation of commercial codes that have their ideological and representational origins in the populist culture of the U.S. Resulting contemporary work, produced and popularised in Britain and Australia, shares with its United States counterparts an increasingly un-ironic iteration of a commercial visual language. This desire for identification with the seemingly omnipotent contemporary ‘global culture’ of North America represents an attempt not so much to challenge the universal acceptance of art as primarily a high-end commodity, but to deliberately force art-as-commodity into direct competition with globally endemic Western populist mainstream commercial culture.

In the economic relationship between contemporary art and overtly populist, commercial varieties of ‘global culture’, advertising and entertainment, the former is now considered —

\textsuperscript{54} Alain Joxe, \textit{The Empire of Disorder}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{55} Such an absence of criticism in culture could also be seen to coincide with the British and Australian governments’ globally strategic military and economic alliance with the United States.
almost gleefully, and by contemporary artists themselves — supplementary to the latter. In this climate, many contemporary artists in both Britain and Australia appear to be following an unspoken dictum that is unproblematically enamoured of the universal validity of global cultural populism. Unlike particular strains of U.S. Pop Art that sought to satirise through exaggeration, the international rise and dominance of Western commodity culture, and much contemporary art in Britain and Australia, evinces a typically Warholian coolness and obsession with ‘pure’ visual effect that is frequently also deeply narcissistic. The insularity and regular failure of such art to consider its role critically in terms of an exteriorised engagement with the world, or to consider such an engagement in broader political terms, again testifies to the paradoxes of globalisation, a system that is claimed to be essentially an open network.

Globalisation’s rhetorical celebration of openness and transnational community is replaced by a contemporary ‘global culture’ of self-referential interiority that, paradoxically, often employs self-conscious representations of nationalist stereotypes. Allied with the spread of such tendencies in contemporary culture is a concomitant emphasis on a universalised concept of youthfulness and a regressive celebration of contemporary art as essentially a glamorous classless ‘thing’, whose primary global importance lies in its accelerated transnational circulation. The more popular and successful varieties of recent British and Australian contemporary art accordingly transform the voiding of critical intention into a ‘critical’ celebration of vacuity. The assumed impossibility of agency or of socio-cultural opposition in such art is, in turn, celebrated as ultimately signifying contemporary Western art’s successful globalisation, its ‘enlightened’ neo-liberal economic naturalisation. The ‘dumbing-down’ of

56 Julian Stallabrass considers this point by comparing (unsuccessful) attempts in the work of yBa to achieve pop culture status through utilising fairly crude appropriations of Britain’s sensationalist popular press with the huge global critical and popular success of the American animated TV series The Simpsons. In Stallabrass’ estimation, contemporary art, although it has recently tried, simply cannot compete with such a level of popularity. See Julian Stallabrass, High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990’s, p. 168.

57 Andy Warhol succeeded in devouring the avant-garde’s pretensions to autonomy by making explicit its openness to marketability. The ‘coolness’ of his stance, whether ironic or not, left subsequent critical culture with ‘two alternatives: either they openly acknowledge their economic role — or they actively work to dislodge an entrenched, institutionalised avant-garde production model’. Theoretically discounting Warhol’s stance as primarily ironic, while emphasising the wholehearted contemporary dominance of the first alternative over the second, opens the possibility for an art conceived principally in economic terms, with the artist as celebrity at its centre. See Craig Owens, ‘The problem with puerilism’, in Craig Owens, Beyond Recognition, Representation, Power and Culture, p. 265.

58 Nikos Papastergiadis, with reference to recent British art, claims that such art ‘accentuates a primordial identity; and it suggests that the notion of the aesthetic as a pure and transcendent category has returned with a “visceral” but “dumb” vengeance’. Nikos Papastergiadis, ‘Back to basics: British art and the problems of a global frame’, Pictura Britannica/Art from Britain catalogue, p. 137.
contemporary ‘global culture’ that results also verifies, overall, globalisation’s emphasis on populism in the political sphere, where it is most blatantly evident in the neo-conservative values of the contemporary United States (but also mirrored in the contemporary cultures of Britain and Australia).

2.2 (ii) Britain’s lost empire: The invention and contemporary popularisation of ‘global’ British culture

The significance of British exhibitions such as New York Now, held at London’s Saatchi Gallery in 1987–88 and American Art in the Twentieth Century: Painting and Sculpture 1913–1993, staged at the Royal Academy in London in 1993, testify to the strong interrelationship between contemporary art from Britain and that from the United States. Such influence was further reflected in the subsequent British survey exhibition, Brilliant! New Art from London, shown at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston in 1995–96.

Following the success of such exhibitions, much recent British art has been globally promoted via the phenomenon of the yBa ‘movement’. Work by artists listed as associated with this phenomenon — including Matt Collishaw, Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Chris Ofili and Sam Taylor Wood — is heavily dependent on its populist, tabloid-style ‘shock’ value. Rather than being genuinely oppositional or politicised, such work almost uniformly refuses to draw conclusions that negatively engage political or cultural specificities — by questioning the actions of particular individuals or governments, for example.59 The superficial ‘negativity’ portrayed in much of this art likewise does not expect to elicit a response beyond the short-lived temporality of phenomenological experience, of sensation.60 As a result, the conceptual parameters of this art are often extremely generalised and vague. Moreover, just as the global media, especially in its populist guise, demands instant attention, so too the yBa’s particularly ‘British’ blending of art and ‘news’ serves principally to promote the aura and personalities of

59 A good example of this fact was the use, by London-based artist Matt Collishaw, of an aerial photograph of buildings wrecked by an IRA bomb blast that also killed two people in Bishopsgate, London on 10 April 1992 for the cover of the catalogue for the exhibition Brilliant! New Art from London (Walker Art Center, Minneapolis and Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, 1995–96). See John A. Walker, Cultural, Offensive: America’s Impact on British Art Since 1945, p. 245. The political specificities and local implications of this event, used in this promotional manner, were left deliberately unmentioned and unquestioned. In this way, and like much art of the globally touted yBa phenomenon, social consciousness and political awareness are useful only insofar as they can successfully promulgate lifestyle attitudes or aesthetic posturing.
its individual artists and of itself as a global phenomenon. The ‘avant-garde’ dimension of such art, as it is perceived by the general public and promoted by sympathetic supporters, reinscripts the contemporary artist in the conventional role of *enfant terrible*.

Such gestures reveal a politics-of-the-self that is perfectly in accordance with the pervasiveness of neo-liberalist individualism endemic to the global-capitalist ideology. In fact, in the United States and abroad, ‘Brit-Art’ has been ‘trumpeted ... in the brash way previously associated with American salesmanship ... via the use of bragging and the hard sell’, and has thereby revealed ‘the extent to which it has absorbed the crudest American values, without, apparently, realising that it has done so’. Curiously, this lack of self-awareness among the yBa movement occurs because of its reinvigorated obsession with its own ‘Britishness’, a distinction that is, ironically, occasioned through its thorough absorption of North American cultural values.

In this case, globalisation as an ideological force driven predominantly by U.S. economic and territorial interests formulates a distinctive ‘national’ contemporary culture by substituting for Britain’s lapsed empire its own recently invented one. The ‘local’ and ‘national’ are therefore replaced by the ‘global’, in the guise of the reflected shadow of the United States’ economic-imperialist ‘new world order’. This order’s resistance to criticism in general is also reflected in Britain’s contemporary art: it explains both much of contemporary British art’s lack of interest in expressions of genuine or specific critical dissent and British art’s resistance to theory in general. Similarly, such resistance is underlined by the fundamental commercial and entrepreneurial focus underpinning globalisation:

The ‘FUCK THEORY’ approach that is evident in the so-called ‘young British artists’ (yBa) phenomenon ... is not simply a rejection of sophistry; it is a licence for a more narcissistic and uncritical expression of ‘Englishness’ ... It is a rearguard offensive which has as much credibility as the isolationist and anti-Europe movement in the Tory party. However, the chauvinism is more duplicitous and unspoken in the art world, and as a consequence [is] commercially far more successful.

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60 Revealingly, *Sensation* was the title of a highly influential exhibition of contemporary British art held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London between September and December 1997 and then touring worldwide, involving the participation of most of the artists of the yBa phenomenon.


62 Ibid., pp. 245-46.


The dual emphasis in contemporary British art on commercialism and antagonism to theory results in its explicitly Western neo-liberal global-commercial outlook favouring a reduced tabloid-style view of the world. Such art has imitated and appropriated the language of sensationalist and populist journalism. Further, it has also harnessed the electronic media to such an extent that a symbiotic co-dependency has been established between artists and the highly corporatised popular press. The resulting relationship is echoed in the regular and relatively permanent appearance of British artists in ‘lifestyle supplements alongside celebrities drawn from the more traditionally fame-fixated worlds of pop, fashion and sport’.65

Parallel to this ‘radical’ popularisation of contemporary British art as media spectacle is the related emergence of the equally populist ‘criticism’ of British television art commentators such as Matthew Collings. Collings’ show, *This Is Modern Art*,66 proved highly successful partly as the result of his witty and articulate — but also, crucially, anti-intellectual — perspective on contemporary art. Displacing complex analysis, Collings’ approach is alternatively joke-ridden and self-consciously ‘unpretentious’, combining English eccentricity with repeated recourse to the nation’s beloved ‘common sense’.67 In his role as presenter, Collings also cunningly recasts the role of contemporary art critic as cultural tastemaker for mass, and especially younger, TV audiences. Similarly, he perpetually strives to demonstrate why contemporary art, in a globally mediatised context, is, and needs to be, ‘cool’; that is, he aims to present contemporary art alongside and in equal competition with, other expressions of

66 Curiously, the title of this British Broadcasting Commission (BBC) funded television show employs the term ‘modern’, not ‘contemporary’, art. This is most likely the result of marketing reasons, given a show with ‘contemporary’ in its title is less likely to rate well, particularly in terms of the very general audience this show aims to appeal to. This may in part explain why Pablo Picasso and Jackson Pollock are cited as the indisputable godfathers of contemporary, particularly contemporary British, art: expressly because their historical standing is based as much on their personal, entertainment-worthy reputations as on the art they produced. Not surprisingly, Andy Warhol, explicitly iterating an obsession with fame, completes this populist triumvirate. See the related publication, Matthew Collings, *This Is Modern Art*.
67 The notion of ‘common sense’, is central to the philosophical underpinning of much British and Anglo-American thinking in general. In Britain, such thinking is rooted in the nation’s Protestant heritage, which traditionally values practical knowledge over ‘convoluted’ theoretical ruminations. It is a tradition also heavily indebted to the 1776 publication of the philosophical pamphlet *Common Sense* by the radical republican theorist Thomas Paine. Importantly, this treatise both influenced nascent American republican ideology and profoundly affected the perception of government in England. More recently, this would also extend, from a cultural point of view, the general and sometimes excessive resistance in British (and to a lesser extent, Australian) academic circles to the ‘pretentious’ complexities of French ‘continental’ post-structuralist philosophy.
global popular and entertainment culture, such as television and films.\textsuperscript{68}

In line with his media-savvy popularisation of contemporary British art, Collings' latest writing also specifically dismisses any attempts to deploy Marxist-derived socio-economic criticism within the field of contemporary art.\textsuperscript{69} Collings instead suggests that 'fame', or at least its emulation, is far more useful to contemporary artists than an adherence to socio-critical imperatives would be. Not surprisingly, in Collings' vision, much as in that of Matthew Barney, the acritical fame-fixated worlds of popular music, fashion and sport are now positively interdependent with a critically stripped variety of 'global' contemporary art. However, not only are these worlds acritical and entertainment orientate; under global neo-liberal conditions in particular, they are also thoroughly and fundamentally commercialised — much recent art in Britain has been shaped by the strategic economic interventions of highly visible individual cultural entrepreneurs such as Charles Saatchi.

The commercial support of Charles Saatchi has been central to the formation, both locally and globally, of the perception of the 'Britishness' of contemporary British art. This is true to such a degree that it has been suggested that a recent generation of British artists has actually been living in 'the Saatchi decade'.\textsuperscript{70} Furthermore, rather than attempting to encourage socio-critical analysis in either artists or buyers, Saatchi's intention has been to popularise the work of the yBa; this intention, not surprisingly, coincides neatly with the deliberate packaging of a national cultural identity for global exportation.

Interestingly, the transnational success of the yBa package, despite the fact that it by no means represents a uniform group, has been the closest thing in recent times to a coherent modernist 'movement'. Such movements were 'modernist' precisely in their general disregard for an awareness of the power relationships between the West and the rest of the world, regardless of the internal disparities that inevitably existed within 'movements' of the historical avant-garde. The yBa 'movement' is, as 'movements' of the historical avant-garde were, rife with internal disparities, but remains cohesive in its total lack of collective critical intention. In line with the spirit of neo-liberal individualism this evinces, Saatchi's global promotion of a distinctly 'British' contemporary art has also been reflected in the more-or-less populist governmental policies and inclinations of the British Council for the Arts.

\textsuperscript{68} See Mathew Collings, \textit{This Is Modern Art}.
\textsuperscript{69} For evidence of Collings' anti-Marxist stance in his critique of the cultural analysis of the contemporary British art critics and theorists, Julian Stallabrass, J.J. Charlesworth and John Roberts in 'Rocking Marxists', in Matthew Collings \textit{Art crazy nation: The post-blimey art world}, pp. 123–30.
\textsuperscript{70} See Cork R., Kent S. and Price D. et al., \textit{Young British Art: The Saatchi Decade}.  

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Once governments themselves have been in effect corporatised, the nature of the culture they globally promote likewise reflects the contemporary erosion of the distinction between business and the state. The supposedly stateless nature of nations under globalisation results, then, from the colonisation of the political by the commercial. Additionally, such a process also imbues corporate activity with political agency.\textsuperscript{71} This has been crucial in pursuing the colonising image of contemporary ‘British’ art globally. It has also been noted that during the 1990s, ‘the marketing of contemporary art abroad by the British Council was pursued quite aggressively’, and furthermore that the resulting ‘export effort has been extraordinary — the list of group shows of British Artists placed in cities all over the world from Brussels to New York and Tokyo would fill a telephone directory’.\textsuperscript{72}

While contemporary British art does its best to advertise its uniqueness and difference, it does so at the same time as Britain’s generally resists its incorporation into Europe, on the grounds that Britain ‘is an island’\textsuperscript{73} — this is a highly insular, protectionist, and overtly anti-global stance. Such insularity mirrors, as well, from afar, the paradoxical imperial insularity of the U.S. as a self-styled ‘exporter’ rather than ‘importer’ of contemporary culture. Indeed, contemporary British culture’s deferral to the global empire of the United States is likewise mirrored in its heavy dependence on the ubiquitous might of the U.S. dollar. Britain’s recent massive cultural projects, including the 2001 construction in Greenwich, London of the multimillion pound Millennium Dome, the world’s biggest dome\textsuperscript{74} — and an occasional site for the exhibition of contemporary art — would have been inconceivable without U.S. financial backing. The Millennium Dome’s construction was made possible not only because of the contributions of British corporations such as Tesco’s, Marks & Spencer and British Telecom, but also by the quintessentially American global mega-corporations Ford and McDonalds, and its very name suggests the pretensions of hand-me-down imperial grandeur. Indeed eventually the British Chief Executive of the Millennium Dome project was replaced by former Euro-Disney manager, Pierre-Yves Gerbeau, in the specific hope that in the spirit of commercial entertainment, he ‘might inject some fun into the experience’.\textsuperscript{75} It has further been pointed out

\textsuperscript{71} See Alain Joxe, \textit{The Empire of Disorder}, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{72} Patricia Bickers, quoted in Julian Stallabrassi, \textit{High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990’s}, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{73} Robin Cohen, \textit{Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others}, p.30.
\textsuperscript{75} Dave Beech, ‘On the Dome front’, p. 3.
that 'Disney haunted this project right from the start'.\textsuperscript{76} And that 'Disney is everywhere in the Dome because of its overweening moral propriety.'\textsuperscript{77}

In instances such as this, the welcomed infiltration of contemporary British culture by United States corporate interests serves not only to continue to promulgate the globalised Western notion of art as entertainment, but also to protect contemporary art from its potential lack of 'moral propriety'. While such 'impropriety' is acceptable if it exists in quasi-entertainment form in the guise of the grotesque or sensational, as we have witnessed in the yBa 'movement', it is utterly out of the question if it exposes the strategic corporate machinations or dominance of the global 'culture industry'. This is because difference, like the highly generalist neo-liberal doctrine of global 'free speech', must be demonstrated to function democratically, especially within the traditionally individualistic and 'subjective' realm of art. Of course the definition of 'difference' is least contentious in the West, where artistic 'protests' of the sort staged by the yBas are more likely to offend people's manners and lifestyle expectations than confront their political or ethical allegiances or compliances.

In this sense, the freedoms allowed global artists, indeed expected of them, whilst occasionally pulled back by disgruntled attempts at censorship,\textsuperscript{78} are tokenistic rather than strategic or politically explicit. Indeed, the social politics of the globalised art world are rarely, if ever, considered part of a broader political and cultural climate. Thus the seeming coherence of contemporary British art is attenuated because of its interiorised and adolescent obsession with its own image and inward operations. This might explain an array of contemporary British art practices, from Damien Hirst's fixation with embalming (see Figure # 5), to Tracey Emin's repeated confessions of narcissistic suffering,\textsuperscript{79} Matt Collishaw's tabloid-style, context-less and sensationalist treatment of images of incest, rape and murder, and Sam Taylor Wood's ambivalent investment in producing glossy photographs of bourgeois isolation (see Figure # 6). Regardless of the international success of such art, its global visibility, encouraged by both

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78} The most famous and notorious example of such censorial action aimed at yBAs occurred during the New York showing of Sensation, when Chris Ofili's painting, The Holy Virgin Mary, which incorporates elephant dung, was described by New York mayor Rudolph Giuliani as 'sick', 'disgusting' and 'offensive to Catholics'. Giuliani sought not only to close the exhibition, but to have the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, where Sensation was showing, evicted. The motion was thrown out of court. Needless to say, it attracted much attention from the popular press. See The Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences v. The City of New York and Rudolph W. Giuliani, individually and in his official capacity as Mayor of the City, 99 CV 6071, the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, November 1, 1999.
\textsuperscript{79} See Alex Gawronski, 'The confessional culture of Tracey Emin', pp. 41-43.
private British commercial interests and the government, in the form of the British Council for the Arts, is dependent on a U.S. model. In Britain:

The strategy is to pursue the area, culture, where the UK has an advantageous position, largely because it shares its language with the culturally dominant world power, and is thus in a position to make a distinct, if minor, complementary addition to the output of the United States.\(^\text{80}\)

This position of supplementarity is further emphasised if we regard it as resulting from the total collapse of the British Empire and its subsequent irrelevance within a contemporary global framework. Significantly, it took U.S. diplomat and ex-Secretary of State Dean Acheson, in a prophetic speech — delivered at a prominent United States military establishment, the West Point Academy, of all places — to describe Britain’s situation: he said, ‘Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role’.\(^\text{81}\) Today that role has been secured for it through Britain’s alliance with the global empire of the United States. Still, other British influences maintain their currency, particularly in the present global spread and popularisation of ‘Thatcherism’,\(^\text{82}\) which has found what appears to be permanent footing within the new empire, via the language and operations of global ‘economic liberalisation’.\(^\text{83}\)

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\(^{81}\) Dean Acheson’s speech (December 1962) is quoted in Patrick J. Boylan, ‘British art in the 1990’s: The social and political background’, Pippa Coles, Jacqui Poncelet and Matthew Higgs M. eds, *Pictura Britannica/Art from Britain* catalogue, p. 147.

\(^{82}\) ‘Thatcherism’ refers to the policies of the British ultra-conservative prime ministership of Margaret Thatcher (1979–97). These included wide-scale ‘reforms’ — private ownership of state institutions, corporate-style management of government, and major military offensives, most famously the Falklands War of 1982–83.
2.2 (iii) Free-trade Australia: Contemporary Australia as global economic colony

Britain's economic and cultural dependence on the United States is similarly strongly felt in Australia. It appeared overtly in a political context, when, in an unparalleled example of the penetration of Australian domestic politics by external influence, U.S. President George W. Bush, speaking at an international press conference in 2004, openly criticised policies of the Australian Labor opposition before an international audience. See Michael Gordon, 'Bush blasting Latham's troop withdrawal plan'.

As well as local political expressions aimed ultimately at appeasing and appealing to U.S. influence, there are now arrangements that render Australia and the United States economically inseparable: the Australia–US Free Trade Agreement (2004). This move was particularly controversial in the cultural sphere because it threatens to force Australia's artists and cultural producers into direct economic competition with their North American counterparts. At the same time, the agreement 'encourages', via the threat of economic penalties, a reduction in local content in film and television — and, by implication in contemporary art is effected as well. This is because from the point of view of the agreement, explicitly localised cultural references are economically 'uncompetitive' essentially because they do not automatically translate to the market for the other party to the agreement — the United States.

Of course, the underlying assumption behind such legislation is that 'global culture', — that is culture that can be freely traded between nations on 'equal' terms (between Australia and the U.S. for example), — ultimately has as its ideal, the contemporary culture of the United States. Thus, the contemporary culture of the U.S., particularly in terms of mainstream film and television, is assumed to have universal global appeal. This implied universalism further emphasises the neo-Enlightenment dimensions of the United States as a contemporary global empire. Similarly, the term 'free trade' enfolds within it the Enlightenment ideal of universal 'freedom', originally intended to mean the universal emancipation of individuals, but now instead suggesting the pursuit of trade as the indicator of personal liberty. Liberty, once

83 Under globalisation, these are now most virulently pursued by the U.S. based financial institutions, the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank.
84 It appeared overtly in a political context, when, in an unparalleled example of the penetration of Australian domestic politics by external influence, U.S. President George W. Bush, speaking at an international press conference in 2004, openly criticised policies of the Australian Labor opposition before an international audience. See Michael Gordon, 'Bush blasts Latham's troop withdrawal plan'.
85 For example, in response to pressure from the White House, and particularly after having previously criticised current U.S. economic policies, ex-Labor leader Mark Latham in 2004 brought previous opposition leader Kim Beazley, well known publicly for being pro-United States, back to the front bench. See John Kerin and Megan Saunders, 'Beazley's promotion pleases US'. More than this, however, Latham also promised that if won the 2004 Federal election, the Labor Party would endeavour to create what has been explicitly described as a 'United States of Australia' linking all state leaderships. See Mark Metherell and Linda Doherty, 'United States of Australia: Latham's plan'.
86 Such an invocation of universality is also explicitly reminiscent of the Enlightenment project, which employed it as a means of justifying notions of the 'universal' superiority of 'civilised' over so-called primitive cultures.
promoted as an innate social right is now primarily considered an economic one. Australia, like Britain, despite the Australian government’s repeated insistence on its privileged alliance with the United States,87 will assume a symbolically subordinate role, regardless of simple statistical differences between it and the U.S.,88 within the new global, ‘universalised’ economy.

Importantly, the refracted insularity of contemporary Australian politics, embodied in the highly conservative social policies of the Liberal Party government of John Howard, has also been distinguished by both its enthusiastic policing of national borders and its remapping of those borders.89 Both exercises have attempted to prevent the rupture of a mythically ‘unspoilt’ Australian nationhood by the penetration of unwelcome ‘un-Australian’90 outsiders. Currently, such ‘outsiders’, to suit the government’s political agenda, are the refugees fleeing countries and regimes such as Afghanistan and Iraq, countries from which they have in fact been displaced by the Australian government’s participation in the new global ‘anti-terrorist’ conflict. In such instances, globalisation, rather than encouraging an altruistic embrace of cultural difference, actually serves as an excuse to physically enforce national geographic boundaries as well as symbolic and legal definitions of Australia as a nation. This reshaping is enacted according to principles of exclusion, not inclusion.91

At the same time, the isolationism underlying such politics is reflected in contemporary Australian culture, as it is in the culture of Britain. In fact both nations use their physical and

87 The Australian conservative Liberal Party Prime Minister, John Howard, has repeatedly stressed Australia’s close and mutually dependent relationship with the United States. For example, Prime Minister Howard has said that the United States is responsible for giving Australia ‘privileged access to technology and joint training’, and that this, as well as helping Australia, helps the United States’ ‘defence capability and enhances [its] ability to defend [itself]’. See United States Republican, Doug Bereuter, ‘Speak up, Mr Howard’.
88 Technically Australia is approximately 1/20th the size, in population, of the U.S., and even for this one fact thus is not ever likely to be of equal weight, economically or politically.
89 On Tuesday, 4 November 2003, the Australian government rushed through retroactive legislation to excise Melville and several thousand other islands traditionally lying within northern Australia’s national boundary. The legislation was expressly passed to prevent 14 Kurdish asylum seekers entering Australian territory. See Jane Murphy’s interview with John-Pierre Fonteyne, professor of international law at the Australian National University, ‘Borders of convenience’.
90 Certainly this would describe the harshness of the Australian Liberal/National government’s widely criticised ‘border protection’ measures and its establishment, often in abandoned and desert locations, of highly patrolled ‘detention centres’ for the detainment of refugees and asylum seekers, including children and families.
91 From such examples we may deduce that globalisation, essentially a Western ‘enlightening’ program, does not tolerate its actual penetration by ‘others’. Instead it subscribes wholly to fixing populates in their ‘natural’ places. This is in order that globalisation’s core ‘free trade’ market ideology may be most successfully disseminated well beyond its Western power centres. In this way, globalisation, as a Western ideology, can be offered as a generous ‘gift’ to other nations, while the Western nations driving its rhetorical claims police their internal territories ever more vigilantly.
symbolic identity as islands to excuse themselves from a more open engagement with the rest of the world. Yet, paradoxically, much contemporary Australian culture is also marked by its self-conscious obsession with its own internationalism — note its constant references to Western populist commercial and entertainment forms. This overt pursuit of populism in contemporary Australian culture also echoes the enclosed model of Western neo-liberal globalisation, which is founded on the ‘freedom’ to trade over and above any social definition of that term.

This would also partly account for the current collapse in Australian politics - and, it can be argued, in Western politics generally — of opposing Left and Right ideologies. Thus the Australian Labor Party, in its 2004 federal election campaign, defined the terms of its opposition as economically based, and focused on the ‘aspirational voter’. Such a voter’s political allegiance, it was claimed, is ultimately formulated around the supposedly ubiquitous desire to accumulate goods, as signifiers of contemporary social status, rather than around alternative social values or structures. While its political life has been collapsing in the absence of viable democratic oppositionality, contemporary Australian culture has been effectively colonised by the virulent neo-liberalism of the pro-globalisation discourse.

2: 2 (iv) Shaping Australia’s ‘global’ culture: Contemporary Australian art — between masters in the middle of the road

Much contemporary art produced in Australia consciously or unconsciously celebrates the imperatives of the neo-liberals’ focus on self-interest. It is ironic, then, given such art’s covert reflection of a prevailing Australian conservatism, founded in economic self-interest, that particular senators of the Howard government have criticised this art as ‘avant-garde crap’ and

92 A good example is the art of Australian contemporary photo-media artist Tracey Moffatt. Moffatt, who is of ‘Aboriginal heritage’, is also Australia’s most internationally successful contemporary ‘global’ artist. The artist herself, though, attributes the extent of her transnational success to the ‘universalism’ of her themes and her works’ general ‘international look’. See Chapter 5 — The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation’s reinstated centre, 5: 4 (i) Case study: Tracey Moffatt: Black-and-white between worlds — the current global visibility of Australian contemporary art’s foremost (indigenous) artist.

93 Certainly, Tony Blair’s Labour Party, superficially regarded as leftist, particularly in relation to Britain’s conservative Tony Party, is ultimately little differentiated from the conservatism of the U. S.’ presidency of George W. Bush or the Australian prime ministership of John Howard, in terms of its wholehearted embrace of neo-liberal economics and total support for the U.S.-led war in Iraq.

94 Mark Latham, in his inaugural speech to the Evatt Foundation and further to his proposed vision of an Australian ‘aspirational voter’, stated that, ‘The party that backs economic aspirations ahead of economic envy will most likely win’: Fred Benchley, ‘War on the home front’.

95 Tony Abbott, Liberal Party Minister for Health and Aged Care, The Sunday Age, 7 December 2003.
the 'product of sick minds'. However, despite the reactionary attitudes towards contemporary culture expressed by various members of the Australian Liberal Party, the general climate described by the narrowing of differentiation between opposing political parties, alongside the 'utter failure of traditional party politics' experienced globally, results, in Australia as elsewhere, in an economically fixated and consensual mainstream culture. As a result, Australian contemporary artists are more than ever ready to extol the similarities of their productions to those of the commercial media, or to embrace again more or less traditional art forms, producing discretely mobile aesthetically pleasing and politically 'neutral' objects.

In a globalised context, the production of discrete hand-crafted objects are valued for their ease of global transportation, which makes them readily available to transnational markets. Their apparently unproblematic positivism is equally valued. Of course such positivism strongly contrasts with the negativity normally associated with critical or oppositional cultural and political practices. More than this, however, and discounting the notion that art needs to be overtly 'political', much contemporary Australian art, like its U.S. and British relations, actually succeeds in transforming its relationship to difficult questions concerning prevailing socio-political contexts in a rapidly globalising scenario, into the uncritical pursuit of the commodified exchange of Western lifestyle values and 'looks'. In this environment, art is just a thing amongst things, an object whose symbolic value is unquestionably as a reified 'universalised' commodity rather than as a strategic instrument of contemporary social dissent or criticism.

Concretely, such a worldview is reflected in contemporary Australian art in the restrained, over-determined objects of fêted Melbourne practitioner Ricky Swallow, to take one example.

96 This sentiment in particular cerily recalls those underlying Adolf Hitler's infamously staged 1937 Entartete Kunst (Degenerate Art) exhibition. See Ross Cameron, Liberal Party federal member for Parramatta, quoted in The Australian, 2 December 2003.
98 The object-based sculptural practice of contemporary Australian artist Ricky Swallow is a good case in point. Swallow's work is often intricately and obsessively hand-carved wood. His work presents contemporary subject matter, often drawing from generalised and populist contemporary commercial 'youth culture', but does so in a style reminiscent of the 'great masters' of realist European sculpture, such as the Italian Baroque artist Gianllorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), famed for his sheer technical bravura. Swallow's deployment of highly traditional manual art skills to realistically reproduce contemporary imagery displayed as discrete and portable objects has proven extremely attractive to local and global collectors, and has greatly enhanced the artist's international reputation. See Chapter 5 — The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation's reinstated centre. 5:2 (i) In-built obsolescence: Australian art's institutional valorisation of 'global' youth culture.
99 Such 'positivism' is attested to by such works' overall avoidance of controversial contemporary socio-political themes, and is reflected as well in a contemporary return of geometric abstractionism, for instance. Such work is creatively 'productive', even decorative, rather than 'negatively' critical.
Swallow's highly successful career is dependent on an extreme hobbyist's obsession for reproducing generalised Western icons of adolescent popular culture while parading the contemporary signifiers of globally marketed youth lifestyles.\textsuperscript{100} A related worldview is reflected in the equally obsessively finished products of Australian photo-media and object artist Patricia Piccinini; her works fuse media and entertainment forms with imagery of biological and genetic mutation.\textsuperscript{101} In fact, Piccinini's imagery is almost wholly concerned with a superficial 'analysis' of contemporary genetic technology, in line with the positivist, pseudo-modernist notion that such technology is synonymous with absolute contemporaneity.\textsuperscript{102} The visual currency of the artist's imagery is automatically assured because of its continuing emphasis on new globally developed biotechnologies --- which are, at the same time, expressly the subject of excited neo-liberal commercial speculation.\textsuperscript{103} Piccinini's art ultimately relies on visual affect. Its populist and sensationalist overtones also, fittingly, incorporate images of fashion models and readily identifiable television personalities\textsuperscript{104} (see Figure # 7).

\textsuperscript{100} See Chapter 5 --- \textit{The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation's reinstated centre}, 5:2 (i) In-built obsolescence: Australian art's institutional valorisation of 'global' youth culture.

\textsuperscript{101} See Chapter 5 --- \textit{The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation's reinstated centre}, 5:3 (ii) The microscope reversed: Selling the global artist as popular-scientist.

\textsuperscript{102} Piccinini's professional strategy is to invoke a discourse that is quintessentially of the 'now': 'genetic engineering'. The development of the means to genetically clone living organisms and to artificially reproduce living cells is extremely recent, and its material and ethical implications are also extremely significant. By modelling her art around such technology, although by no means understanding it scientifically, Piccinini is able to present her work as having an indisputable contemporary relevance. In fact, the given-ness of such works' innate contemporaneity lends them a false significance, especially as Piccinini's work is frequently traditionally illustrational.

\textsuperscript{103} Such technologies, including cloning, raise serious questions about neo-liberal market access to human genetic material and the future possibility of producing 'designer children' whose genetic faults have all been removed --- for a price.

\textsuperscript{104} In particular, see Piccinini's use of the actress and children's show host Sophie Lee in the works, \textit{Psychotourism} and \textit{Psychogeography} from the 1996 series \textit{Your Time Starts Now}. Piccinini has said of these, 'Within the borders of the media culture where they dwell, a strange flat familiarity replaces real intimacy, and even if you don't recognise the figures you feel like you should, because they look famous.' This concern to emphasise popular culture's obsession with fame is likewise evident in her explanation of her admiration for the work of Melbourne artist Chris Langton: 'he is trying to come to terms with consumerism and the love we hold for it': Kathy Cleland and David Cranswick, 'Patricia Piccinini --- Interview/Questionnaire'.

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The regressive essentialism of current Australian politics and its struggle to define a contemporary ‘global’ identity can also be witnessed in contemporary Australian art: in its ‘slacker’ or ‘grunge’ posturing. Such a trend was first theorised during the 1990s, but persists today in the work of particular high-profile local practitioners such as Adam Cullen. Cullen’s paintings, whilst conceived as aggressively critical of Australian political issues, including the nation’s traditional colonial deferral to British culture and resultant sense of national inferiority, nonetheless mirror in their contrived artless grotesquerie recent British art’s self-conscious ‘shock’ tactics (see Figure # 8). Likewise, the feigned sociopathic and politically ‘retarded’ vision Cullen’s paintings convey functions simply to promote an equally regressive and essentialist view of contemporary Australia. This vision is based on the alternatively predictable national stereotypes, already firmly marketed abroad, of coarse pub humour allied with a pseudo-Irish larrikin’s disdain for British imperialism, which is, of course, by this stage already defunct.

Perhaps even more indicative of Australian culture’s current embrace of the empty ‘internationalism’ of the pro-globalisation discourses heavily endorsed by U.S. economic and territorial interests is a large-scale exhibition such as 2004: Australian Culture Now. The exhibition was staged at the National Gallery of Victoria and the Ian Potter Centre for

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105 See Charles Green’s assessment of the recent cultural climate of Australia politics, which was marked ‘from 1996 by the arrival of the Howard government, by globalisation’s deep discontents and then by the broad Australian public’s delighted reversion to social intolerance’: Ibid., p. 11.

106 ‘Slacker’ and ‘grunge’ are terms used to describe a particular strain of contemporary Australian art that achieved prominence during the 1990’s. This art combined a Duchampian interest in the found object with the ‘garage’ culture of LA artists such as Mike Kelley. However, despite its familiarity with minimalist and conceptualist tropes, such art also tended to de-emphasise intellectual rigour and replace it with a provocative emphasis on base materials. Other artists in this category include Hany Armanious, Mikala Dwyer and ADS Donaldson. See reviews of the exhibitions Monster Field, at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney, 6–29 May 1993 by Graham Forsyth, and Shirthead, in the Mori Gallery Annex, Sydney, 7–21 May 1993 by Jane Rankin-Reid, in Art + Text, no. 46, 1993, p. 74 and p. 78 respectively.
Contemporary Australian Art in Melbourne. This particular show was illuminating because of its blanket claims to capably represent contemporary Australian culture as a totality, a claim which was fully endorsed by the corporate sponsors of the exhibition, Ernst & Young.\textsuperscript{107} Such a claim is particularly ironic given concerns about the irreversibly globalised condition of contemporary Australian culture expressed in the accompanying catalogue.\textsuperscript{108}

Within this exhibition of contemporary Australian art, the work of particular artists relays an image of a blandly globalised contemporary Australian culture. For instance, contemporary Australian painter and sculptor Jan Nelson's tableau of a lone female figure, constructed in fibreglass, seated passively before a large, generically striped 'abstract' painting, wryly celebrates a politically indifferent and aspirationally consumerist national psyche. In this work, both figure and painting, subject and object, are literally cast of the same substance. Rather than this being a criticism, Nelson's 'installation' appears to extort support for contemporary arts' 'necessarily' consensual commodity self-identification.

Overall, the extremely depoliticised view of culture portrayed by this large survey show defers indirectly to the Howard government's conservative, insular vision of a contemporary Australia defined foremost by global economic prerogatives. Such deference is already conditioned by Australia's hierarchically determined past and present complementarity to British and U.S. 'global' imperial cultures. The present — and indisputable — hierarchical centrality of the United States' global economic and cultural empire is confirmed in Australia not only by the Howard government's repeated emphasis on the synonymity of the cultures of both nations, but by its very eagerness to participate in a 'global war' led by the U.S. and its eagerness to enter into a free trade agreement (AUSFTA).\textsuperscript{109} In the same way, contemporary Australian art's

\textsuperscript{107} In the sponsor's notes of Garry Hounsell, a managing partner of Ernst & Young, Hounsell proclaims in a spirit of neo-liberal positivism: '2004 .... will change art. From the moment the exhibition opens, long-held perceptions will change, the rules of the game will alter, and everyone near the cutting edge will be affected. Australian art will shift gear'. Garry Hounsell, in editor, 2004: Australian Culture Now catalogue, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{108} The accompanying catalogue for this exhibition includes several essays dealing with the globalised condition of contemporary Australian culture. See, in particular, Rex Butler's 'Against pluralism', in which he counterposes the provincialist paradigm endemic to recent historical perceptions of art in Australia with an emerging 'true' internationalism. See Rex Butler, in editor, 2004: Australian Culture Now, pp. 67–69. Curiously, my own experience of the overall effect of 2004: Australian Culture Now was of its thorough fragmented and pluralistic and disparity. .

\textsuperscript{109} Regarding the latter, this is despite the fact that many commentators, including some within the Howard government itself, indicated the negative costs likely to be incurred by such a decision. Senators of National Party, Ron Boswell and Larry Anthony, and backbencher Luke Hartsuyker, all expressed criticism of the Australia–US Free Trade Agreement. See transcript of Chris Bath's interview with the Australian government's then Trade Minister, Mark Vaile, on the Sunday Sunrise program, at www.seven.com.au/sundaysunrise/politics.
adherence to a generic and emerging ‘global culture’ is simultaneously underscored by its refusal to address the negative aspects of the ideological shaping of such a culture. This is especially the case because that art is informed by a fundamentalist econometric ideology. This too would explain much of contemporary Australian art’s current lack of engagement with critical issues of site-specificity, localised opposition or an awareness of the strategic cultural and political alliances that now cast it as a product of a fully ‘globalised’ ‘national’ culture.

2: 3 ‘The West is the best’: The Western bias of globalisation’s proposed economic empire

Globalisation, as an essentially Western economic enterprise, shapes the contemporary world in very specific ways. On the one hand, by purporting to offer dramatic material benefits to those uncritically subscribing to its neo-liberal ideals, it draws nations once considered ‘peripheral’ into firm and binding economic agreements with it. On the other hand, it deliberately obscures, while by no means completely succeeding in achieving this, the ideological dimensions that drive such territorial ambitions. Because neo-liberalism relies on the concept of naturalised self-regulating markets, globalisation is able to present itself as a contemporary manifestation of a naturally enlightening process, opposition to the progress of which could be viewed as not only unnecessary, but also ‘irrational’. Such rhetoric, fundamentally embedded in economic discourse, also enables the current positioning of the United States as a global empire, due to its sheer global economic power. And while this empire regularly claims to be acting on behalf of the democratic good of the world ‘as a whole’, in its various global military and economic interventions it continues to radically destabilise the national sovereignty of nations that resist it. This makes the ‘empire of globalisation’ a new hegemonic colonising force through which Western, and particularly North American, cultural values are disseminated the world over, as representative of the highest order of contemporary democracy.

Such a worldview is reflected by ‘global culture’s’ ‘prize artists’, people like Matthew Barney, whose sheer success is built as much on worldwide media fame as on artistic merit. Similarly, because artists like Barney already heavily incorporate methods and aesthetic styles reminiscent of commercial entertainment, his identity as a quintessentially ‘global’ cultural figure is more easily defensible. Of course the neo-liberal econometrics of globalisation, predicated on material self-interest, also aid in reinventing the contemporary Western artist as an individualist hero straddling multiple creative disciplines. Furthermore, by being seen as simply acting out ‘surreal’ and subjective psychological fantasies in his work, a ‘global’ artist such as Barney actually disengages from considerations of the relationship between his work and
prevailing contemporary socio-political realities. Meanwhile, the extent of his media fame as a contemporary 'global' artist is upheld as a model for other contemporary artists, and spawns many transnational emulators.\footnote{Here the work of contemporary Australian artists Patricia Piccinini, who was once described as 'Australia’s Matthew Barney', and Monica Tichacek, who, as the winner of the 2001 Helen Lempriere Australian Travelling Art Scholarship, worked as an assistant to Matthew Barney in the U.S., ought be mentioned. Many of Tichacek’s subsequent video installations, although perhaps ‘feminist’ in inclination, nevertheless mirror the neo-baroque style and detailed narrative 'look' of the work of Barney.} This occurs particularly in other English-speaking nations, such as Britain and Australia. And even when the cultural productions of these countries may not necessarily be directly attributable to U.S. influence, their often generic commonality may be considered a result of their dependence on a Western cultural scene dominated by the economic imperatives of neo-liberalism. That means that the inflated economic resources available to a U.S. based artist such as Matthew Barney, a British artist of the yBa generation such as Damien Hirst, or a quasi-industrial contemporary producer such as Australian Patricia Piccinini, are relative to the 'globality' of their international reputations. Under globalised conditions, inherently reliant on neo-liberal economics, contemporary art becomes a natural domain for the self-conscious display of money. This is particularly true in Western contemporary art.

Just as globalisation, in its neo-colonial guise, disguised by 'neutral' economic rhetoric, continues to pursue its commercial territorial interests, the United States likewise continues its contemporary imperial agenda, based on its self-assumed roles as global protector and enlightened 'educator'. In fact, the extreme Western bias of globalisation as an Anglo-centric economic paradigm also enables the very definition of the term ‘globalisation’ as essentially a Western ‘invention of corporations’.\footnote{See Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder, p. 155.} Yet the ‘empire of globalisation’, pursued most wholeheartedly by the U.S., is partial. And though it is difficult to realistically contest evidence of the increasing confluence and hegemony of contemporary 'global culture', influenced by Western example, there are also networks, both within and outside the West, that refuse and contest globalisation’s hegemonic impact. Such resistance arises precisely because globalisation’s core basis in Anglo-centrism cannot control the proliferation of alternative, vastly dispersed, antagonistic positions. Also undermining the imperial dimensions of globalisation, and also deeply paradoxical, is the fact that the multinational corporations central to the enacting of globalisation’s processes threaten to ultimately displace a self-made empire like that of the contemporary United States, once they usurp the agency of state politics
altogether. As a result, as globalisation attempts to forge a 'new world order' and a contemporary 'global culture' to match, its highly successful appropriation of difference and of multiple points of opposition is simultaneously faced with equally numerous obstacles to its economically territorialising intent.
Chapter 3

Contested global contexts: Critical regionalisms contesting globalisation’s ‘new world order’

The predominantly hegemonic Western economic and representational paradigms underlying globalisation and the globalisation of the contemporary art world provoke the internalisation and subversion of these same paradigms within a diversity of geo-political cultures. This is especially the case in nations whose histories have traditionally opposed economic and cultural domination by Western — and particularly U.S. — influence. The discourse of globalisation, eagerly pursued by United States imperial example, therefore simultaneously fosters specific manifestations within contemporary ‘global culture’ that are both aware and sceptical of its colonising effects. Furthermore, globalisation’s Western hegemonic tendencies, although generally welcoming cultural difference, particularly in a market sense, fail to curb explicitly critical reactions to the significant limitations of their ‘benevolently’ promised economic rewards.

As a result, the ‘global culture’ produced in particular geo-political regions today — including Eastern Europe, the former Eastern bloc (now described by the current government administration of the United States as the ‘new Europe’),¹ Latin America, the Middle East and China — is not peripheral as their cultures have often been portrayed by the supposedly technologically superior West. The local culture produced within these regions is simultaneously globally aware, and technologically and iconographically sophisticated. Furthermore, much of the culture produced in these regions today is critical of the Western neo-liberal economic agendas underlying globalisation. Revealingly, such forms of cultural production often parasitically adapt evidence of neo-liberalism’s self-styled and essentially Western-biased ‘global art’ to strategically enact their critiques.

Overall, contemporary global art production continues to prove its ability to generate significant capital, and the promise of increased capital is an effective means of producing sympathetic representations of the ideological investments of the West — more explicitly, of the global empire of the United States — in the current affairs of other nations. Needless to say, however, the U.S. pursuit of aggressive unilateral foreign policies, as we have seen, also

¹ Of course such a term immediately conjures the increased global markets and opportunities for Western corporate intervention opened up in this region since the demise of Communism.
generates transnational opponents. In the same way, globalisation’s critics in the field of contemporary art have not abandoned oppositional gestures for the wholesale embrace of Western neo-liberal ideology, with its central focus on entertainment, luxury and youth. This means that the appropriation of Western cultural and representational forms by local opponents of neo-liberal globalisation can be seen as also critical of their own culture’s continual appropriation by the West for essentially Western cultural consumption.

The particular regional art cultures that result — in Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and China, for example — while of course provoked by the effects of globalisation’s implementation of neo-liberal economics, are by no means beholden to them. Certainly they overtly contest globalisation’s proposition that it is as a quasi-mythical ‘solution’ to the problem of human existence.2 At their most effective, instances of site-specific cultural resistance demonstrate the many flaws of globalisation as a viable means of harmonious transnational unification. And if the world cannot be effectively and harmoniously united on the basis of Western liberal democracy’s neo-liberal capitalism, globalisation forfeits its identity as a positive global totality. There are numerous specific global geopolitical areas which provide examples of the threat posed to globalisation by active contemporary critical cultures. These are a threat in as far as they are able to variously expose and challenge the positivist capitalist rhetoric driving globalisation processes.

3: 1 Renegade others: 4 case studies

With the concept of locality disparaged by pro-globalisation discourses, local protests against its political and cultural manifestations tend to be viewed by pro-globalisationists as indicative of nostalgia for a lost revolutionary moment, a moment symbolised by the promise of international socialism. This is especially the case in parts of the world that historically have negative political relations with the United States. These include ex-Eastern bloc cultures, especially the ex-Soviet Union, many parts of Latin America, particularly Cuba, more than ever Islamic nations, grouped together under the ambiguous geographical denomination of the ‘Middle East’, and Communist China, currently in a state of radical social and economic transformation.

Whilst globalisation promises to unite, economically and ideologically, even those nations opposed to the principles of Western capitalist neo-liberalism, it uses ever greater resources of coercion, most extremely via direct military aggression, to try to convince determined opponents of its ultimate benefits. Many of those nations mentioned continue to contest the global

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2 See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. 

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hegemony of Western and Anglo-American interests, and the forms of critical culture arising in symbolic resistance to the dominance of overtly Western capitalistic idioms often assume surprising and unexpected dimensions.

In fact, much contemporary art from contested global contexts superficially appropriates the visual rhetoric of contemporary Western visual and media forms. However, this invocation of Western contemporary cultural modes is frequently employed in site-specific and critical ways. Together, such localised countercultural strategies aim to expose and undermine the excessive and absolute optimism with which the West announces globalisation’s coming ‘new world order’.

3: 2 Eastern Europe

In the West, many viewed with great hope and expectation the emergence of Eastern Europe as the ‘new East’, after the 1989 collapse of Communism. What Western — and particularly United States — corporate and commercial interests hoped for was a wholesale victory that would provide a greatly expanded global economic and ideological base. In addition, such a ‘victory’ was also relished as a conquest: the final conquest of international socialism by global capitalism. Yet while certain recently ex-Communist governments embraced, and indeed believed in, the ideological package served up to them, many other groups remained sceptical. Amongst these were numerous contemporary artists, intellectuals, writers and cultural theorists.

What many contemporary artists from the former Eastern bloc discovered was that cultural idioms, especially advertising and other commercial media forms, imported from North America and Western Europe could be used critically in a local context, to point out the global Anglo-imperialist pretensions underlying them. Western commentators were also surprised by the apparent cultural resistance in the former Eastern bloc to the globalisation of U.S. models of consumerist individualism. Art-critical practices within the ‘new East’ have deliberately and ironically invoked the propaganda art of the region’s previous Communist incarnation in order to oppose the similarly propagandistic rhetoric underpinning globalisation.

3: 2 (i) Contemporary artists’ contrasting responses to globalisation’s opening of the East: Slovenia and Russia

The effects of neo-liberal globalisation processes in the former Eastern bloc remain particular to different regions. Therefore, a small and relatively prosperous nation such as Slovenia, a nation within what was Yugoslavia, has succeeded in many ways in avoiding the catastrophic effects of the transition from state Communism to contemporary global market capitalism. Historically as
well, the particularities of the Slovenian national situation made it possible for Slovenians, both during and after Communist rule, to pass freely from East to West, allowing artists to maintain an awareness of Western and international art developments. Nevertheless, the singularities of the post-Communist, proto-capitalist ‘globalised’ Slovenian situation have produced artist collectives that are highly critical of the consumerist individualism of Western commercial cultures that are promoted universally as liberationary.

The vanguard of a contemporary, acutely critical conceptual culture in Eastern Europe is the collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (New Slovenian Art, or NSK). Indeed, NSK has provided a highly influential model in the region of a collective and politicised culture that ideologically confounds and contests the application of a global capitalist culture.

Countering the individualistic emphases provoked by globalisation processes, NSK’s creative output is anonymous and collective. Moreover, its collectivised stance has led NSK to form its own conceptual state, the State of NSK — it produces its own passports and issues its own decrees and rules of belonging. At the same time, awareness and anticipation of today’s increasingly globalised conditions appear frequently in NSK’s work through its deliberate opposing of multiple transnational trans-historical cultural references and working methods. For example, the 1996 Transnacionala ‘performance’ of the NSK-affiliated group Irwin consisted of the five artists from this collective plus other invited practitioners travelling across the United States in two recreational vehicles over a one-month period. Their aim was to confront U.S. regional and urban art and non-art communities with an alternative, ‘Eastern European’ vision of their country. At the same time they facilitated open discussions, about ‘art, theory, politics, and existence itself’ with members of the U.S. general public as well as with local art communities.

Elsewhere, the montage of multiple and often conflicting artistic genres in the collective output of NSK conflates Western deification of modernist ‘high art’ with the regressive ‘taboo’

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4 In his own footnote, relating to the specific issue of NSK passports, Ales Erjavec comments that the release of such passports was especially resonant politically during the collapse of the Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, he states that people actually used them to successfully travel through Europe at the time. See ibid., p. 173.

5 The other artists involved in this enterprise included Alexander Brener, Vadim Fishkin, Yuri Liederman, Goran Dordevic, Michael Benson and Eda Cufer.

cultures of Stalinist and Nazi totalitarianisms. At the same time, NSK’s critique is frequently aimed specifically at the growing global influence of Western and United States ideological and economic interests. This is most blatantly apparent in the various press statements co-authored by Laibach, the originating branch of NSK, such as:

First of all we know America likes us and we shall therefore come back; nonetheless ... [i]f America is the foremost nation of today, then history has come to a full stop. If this is the future, then it does not work.  

Furthermore, rather than producing post-Communist contemporary art indicating ‘post-political’ material self-satisfaction, NSK aligns its projects with an explicitly political purpose, stating that, ‘Politics is the highest and all-embracing art, and we, who create contemporary popular art, consider ourselves politicians.’ While such a statement may be read ironically, the form of irony NSK employs allows its work to function as an open question and ongoing provocation. The collective openness of NSK’s position acts at the same time as a critical challenge to a contemporary global economic, political and cultural system which, under the supposed continual threat of ‘terrorism’, increasingly demands simplified statements and absolutely transparent positions.

Another Slovenian/ex-Yugoslavian collective, the Salon de Fleurus, continues the regional tradition of collectivism practised critically by NSK. In general, the Salon de Fleurus is concerned with critiquing the inflated social and economic status of the highly prized collections of Western modernist art that appear with increasing regularity in the ‘new East’ under globalisation. Such collections often function symbolically as trophies of individualism and imperially as models of unfettered creative freedom; this is especially the case in those nations once barred from access to them.

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7 Laibach co-authored statement, in an interview with Andy Dunkley from Rockpool, an American music magazine, reproduced in the monograph, Neue Slowenische Kunst, p. 57.

8 Ibid., p. 48.
Against this essentially patronising neo-colonialist attitude, the Salon de Fleurus copy famous Western collections in a slavish and depersonalised manner, in works such as *Fiction Reconstructed Collection II/The Last Futurist Exhibition* (see Figure # 9). Such fictionalised 'private' collections manufactured by the Salon de Fleurus also speak mockingly of the general Western assumptions about the absolute spiritual and economic privation of Communist socialism. Their re-creation of prized cultural artefacts from secondary sources cannily dilutes the value of the Western fetish for artistic originals conceived primarily as private property. Of course under globalisation the privatised value of such collections can now be disseminated on the broadest possible scale. The Salon de Fleurus collective ironically questions what the global value of famous Western modernist art 'scientifically' simulated in the East might be.

In addition, the collective and ironically 'reverential' productions of the Salon de Fleurus attest to the prodigiously mutable capacity for accelerated commodification of all culture under the 'benign' hegemony of global neo-liberal capitalism. According to the same logic, this simultaneously makes 'Second' and 'Third' world nations reinvigorated sites for the market-oriented de-territorialisation of local cultures. In the same way, the savage civil war in Yugoslavia that occurred during the 1980's could also be regarded as a convenient means of multiplying new markets through their apparently 'necessary' political annexation.9

By contrast, in the former Soviet Union, which was the largest and most powerful 'single' entity and driving identity behind the historical ideal of international socialism, the collapse of

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9 This argument is central to Alain Joxe's claim that the United States as an empire is unwilling to accept its global responsibilities on that level by refusing to peacefully resolve international conflicts, although it unquestionably has the resources to do so. Joxe further claims that in such instances, the empire of the United States does not play the protective role it seeks to advertise, but through its promotion of economic globalisation, functions instead as a global destabilising force, making itself more powerful through exacerbating disorder on a wide scale internationally. See Alain Joxe, 'Introduction: Chaos today', in *The Empire of Disorder*, pp. 77–98.
the Communist Party system has seen the most dramatically negative effects. The demise of the USSR, while celebrated by its former ‘allies’, was perhaps most gloatingly celebrated in the West. Yet revealingly, present social conditions in the former Soviet Union, born out of the effects of the attempted implementation of Western ‘global’ economic systems, frequently evidence a state of constant privation.

Russia’s contemporary artists, consequently, have repeatedly critiqued the negative ‘Westernising’ influences of globalisation processes. Overall, the attempted ‘instantaneous’ Westernisation of Russia and its rapidly enforced economic ‘globalisation’ have resulted in living standards regularly considerably lower for most than those experienced under Communism. The nature of globalisation’s transformation of the former USSR into a contemporary capitalist nation is glaringly evident in the following statement:

The long-awaited but nonetheless sudden abdication of the Soviet powers in 1991 ... transformed the gigantic territory of the Soviet Union politically and legally into a property-less, empty space. The result ... should not be understood as the road that leads from a property-less country to a country of private property but instead as the ... violent picking apart and private appropriation of the dead body of the Soviet state.

Critiques of the glaring absence of the material benefits of globalisation have emerged in a variety of forms in the work of numerous contemporary Russian artists. Partaking in a critique of the inflated individualism inherent to the privatising ideology of globalisation, the artistic partnership of Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid critically intermix ‘Western’ and Soviet stereotypes. Their ongoing project, *The World’s Most Wanted*, parodies the individual ‘originality’ still generally demanded by Western art markets by producing works based on anonymously compiled global statistical information (see Figure # 10). For *The World’s Most Wanted*, random individuals from various countries around the world were asked to fill in a questionnaire in which they had to list all the elements they desired in an ideal picture.

The results of this procedure were then averaged by Komar and Melamid, and corresponding paintings were produced. These supposedly rationally and democratically reflected the aesthetic and ideological desires of each nation surveyed. But more importantly, such work questioned deeply the underlying universalism suggested by globalisation advocates.

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10 There are many contemporary accounts of this fact. As an example, see Angus Macqueen and Liana Pomerantseva, ‘Survivors’, in Ian Jack ed, *Russia: The Wild East*.
This is because each national poll relied on in *The World’s Most Wanted*, whilst displaying certain similarities, reflected widely divergent expectations. The strange unsatisfactory results of such a paradoxically depersonalised ‘democratic’ creative process could also be said to mirror the failure of a genuinely participatory global democracy.

Such a lack is especially evident when former Soviet artists who want to become successful globally must, in a sense, become tourists within their own, once Communist, culture. This is the case as visible ‘global’ success is negotiated largely according to Western standards that are connected to its dominant sites of economic privilege.

Other trends in recent Russian art unrelentingly depict the degradation and vastly accelerated discrepancy between the rich and poor in Russia’s urban population that is appearing as a result of globalisation. Counteracting the utopian promise of better, more glamorous lifestyles for average Russians, courtesy of sudden access to global markets, are the images of photographer Boris Mikhailov. Mikhailov’s photographs brutally exaggerate the ever-expanding rift between rich and poor — this, rather than the promised material benefits, is the true visible result of global neo-liberal economics.

While such structural bias has been a feature of capitalism for some time, the irony of the effects of globalisation in the work of Mikhailov is that his contemporary urban subjects live with a degree of squalor and degradation more typical of representations of pre-industrial life before the 1917 Russian Revolution: the frequently emphasised clean, mediated high-tech dimensions of globalisation in fact lead to local living standards of the basest most desperate kind.

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12 Ibid., pp. 79–80.
13 Ibid.
14 Boris Groys once again identifies the problem of cultural alienation that arises from the economic pressures of globalisation when he states, ‘Only the Soviet artist who could see his or her own land and its history with the eyes of an international tourist would be able to make something that could, potentially, be exported.’ Additionally, he suggests that such alienation is further exacerbated by the false freedoms promoted by stereotypes of contemporary Western creativity. In this way, ‘Artist-émigrés who took the ideal of autonomy of art too seriously would be immediately confronted in Western art systems with a fixed catalogue of demands and expectations that forced them to present themselves as innovative, original and critical in accordance with a relatively narrow criteria for what it means to be innovative, original and critical. In essence, the idea here was simply to discover and fill empty spaces in the art market. Thus the artist-émigré experiences all Western institutionalised art prohibitions as irritating censorship, a censorship worse than in the totalitarian home country’: Boris Groys, ‘The other gaze: Russian unofficial art’s view of the Soviet world’, in Ales Erjavec and Boris Groys eds, *Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicised Art Under Late Socialism*, pp. 60, 65–66.
Also telling in Mikhailov’s work are signs of the extent of contemporary Western consumer influence, particularly as they appear in the guise of sports and leisure wear, ritually fetishised in Western markets. In Mikhailov’s photographs, however, coveted clothing brands seem more symptomatic of the poverty of globally institutionalised injustice\textsuperscript{15} (see Figures # 11 and # 12). Furthermore, the artist’s subjects dwell in the empty, transitory zone between the urban and rural that has appeared since the collapse of Soviet heavy industry. The transitoriness of this exposed zone of enforced quasi-public habitation not only mocks the freedom of mobility said to result from globalisation; it also suggests that this new ‘open’ space is equally a space of perpetual fear and ever-present personal danger.\textsuperscript{16}

The Russian Sergei Bugaev Afrika imbues the pervasiveness of this sense of fear, which has arisen as a result of globalisation’s radically polarising economic effects, with a distinctly political edge in his 2002 video installation Stalker 3. In Stalker 3, Bugaev Afrika, collaborating with sound and installation artist Dimitry Gelfand, reiterates the critical impersonality of other contemporary Russian conceptual art by utilising as his primary source a found videotape. The video presented depicts, from the viewpoint of the enemy, the annihilation, in Chechnya, of the

\textsuperscript{15} See particularly, Mikhailov’s photographic series, Case history (1999).
\textsuperscript{16} See Gilda Williams’ review of Boris Mikhailov’s exhibition at The Photographer’s Gallery in London, 7 April to 21 May 2000, in which she writes, ‘in Russia, the occupation of social space is inverted. There is an overall, constant state of panic interrupted by occasional safety zones. The sense of danger and imminent death, of flesh rotting whilst still alive on human bones, runs throughout Mikhailov’s portraits’: Gilda Williams, ‘Boris Mikhailov, p. 30.
Russian 245th Motorized Infantry Regiment by pro-Al Qaeda fighters lead by a Saudi Arabian national.17

Implicit in this work is criticism of Russia’s post-Soviet political and economic dependence on the U.S. and the West: such an attachment recasts the Russian war in Chechnya, previously understood through national and nationalist agendas, as part of the so-called ‘global war on terrorism’. On the other hand, Russia’s enthusiastic identification with such an ‘altruistic’, ‘universal’ cause may also be regarded as politically opportunistic, as it allows the Russian state greater liberty in its aggressive quelling of Chechnya’s longstanding struggle for independence.

Consequently, the ‘enemy’ is globalised, as now a once localised conflict attracts both anti-Russian and generally anti-Western combatants from a diversity of geo-political locations.18 The danger posed by the expansion of such a conflict to a global level is likewise specifically linked, in Bugaev Afrika’s work, to the Russian government’s increasing willingness to court Western ideals and corporate investment, while at the same time legitimising its suppression of internal political dissent.

Furthermore, Bugaev Afrika’s decision to exhibit Stalker 3 in New York, in the immediate aftermath of September 11, exposes further paradoxes of globalisation. In particular, Stalker 3’s bland, artless, Al Qaeda-eye vision of terrorism challenges the spontaneous demand in a post-September 11 United States for a traditional humanist mythological structure capable of redeeming that event.19 In critical denial of the possibility for contemporary reliance on such traditionalist models, Stalker 3 proposes that contemporary threats arising out of the intermingling of global heterogenous opponents to Western systems remain, ultimately, ambiguous. The very real difference of such threats makes them incapable of redemption in traditionalist terms, and certainly not in the positivist terms of neo-liberal pro-globalisation rhetoric.

18 Such a scenario attests to the genuinely global nature of contemporary anti-Western sentiment. The global threat of fundamentalist ‘Islamic’ terrorism, therefore, while often suggested by Western commentators to be ‘backward’, ‘tribal’, ‘primitive’ and anti-modern, actually relies on sophisticated contemporary technological communication channels to rally supporters from a diversity of locations, including from within the West. The latter occurrence was well proven by the capture in Iraq of pro-terrorist ‘enemy combatants’ from the United States, Britain and Australia.
19 See Christopher Moylan’s review of Stalker 3, ‘Those that sleep in the dust’.

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3: 3 Latin America

The eminent Pakistani-born social and political analyst, Tariq Ali, recently described the region of Latin America, including Mexico, as representing the biggest challenge to the global empire of the United States. The reason for this, he explained, was the increasing success of Latin American countries in defying neo-liberal attempts to dominate them via economic means, especially through actions of U.S. corporations aimed at privatising the region’s resources.

For example, in Bolivia in 2003 the local indigenous community successfully opposed the proposal of the U.S. corporation, Bechtel\(^2\) to privatise the country’s water. In Cochabamba, in central Peru, the Cuzco peasants revolted against corporate efforts to privatise electricity in the area, knowing that if this happened, local populations would no longer be able to afford it.

Meanwhile, in Argentina, the country’s financial crisis of 2001–02\(^2\) was celebrated by many as ultimate proof of the bankruptcy of Western neo-liberal economics, after Argentina’s politicians admitted that ‘for ten years they had done everything that the U.S. Treasury, the IMF and the WTO had told them to do’\(^3\) — in the end, to no avail. In the streets of Buenos Aires, as a consequence of this financial crisis, there was a popular uprising, Argentina’s government was ousted and a countrywide rebellion that ‘became a crucible for popular politics’\(^4\) was sparked.

In Mexico too, popular resistance arose when the indigenous Zapatista movement successfully opposed the attempted implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) — it threatened traditional land rights, because it would remove article 127 of the Mexican constitution, which specifically protected such rights.\(^5\) The Zapatistas ‘declared war on the Mexican government and the policies they called neoliberalismo’.\(^6\) They ultimately forced not only the Mexican government, but the U.S. administration also, back to the negotiating table — on Zapatista terms.

The background to these events has also had a significant impact on the productions of artists from Latin America. Such practitioners remain acutely aware of the effects of the attempted whole-scale implementation of neo-liberal economics and Western liberal democracy; these are offered as a means of quelling local resistance — through the promise of increased

\(^{20}\) Tariq Ali, ‘Cracks in the empire’.
\(^{21}\) The Bechtel Corporation is currently a major contractor in post-occupation Iraq.
\(^{22}\) See Chapter 2 — 2: 1 Centralised but disguised: North America’s new Enlightenment.
\(^{23}\) Tariq Ali, ‘Cracks in the empire’.
\(^{24}\) Notes from nowhere (anonymous), eds, We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism, p. 387.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 22.
material benefits for local populations. This drive to enforce such ideologically loaded ‘democratic’ forms on nations with longstanding territorial and political disputes with the United States has provoked examples of art that are equally critical of local art’s integration into a comparably ideological global art scene.

3: 3 (i) Neo-liberal globalisation and Latin American resistance: A political background

The numerous recently successful oppositions, cultural and political, to foreign control of Latin American territories have been conditioned, of course, by a long history of U.S. imperialist intervention in the region. Perhaps most notorious of these was the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and United States government’s central role in forcefully removing the democratically elected socialist Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende in Chile on 11 September 1973. Allende was replaced, via U.S. directed actions, by the dictator Augusto Pinochet. Pinochet, revealingly, banned contemporary art forms from Chile and had progressive people, many of whom were artists, murdered.27

Furthermore, during the 1980’s, the United States was involved in El Salvador, in its largest counterinsurgency war since Vietnam. Summarising the historical background to this conflict, former U.S. Marine Corps Major General Smedley Butler said the main reason for the presence of U.S. Marines in El Salvador and other Latin American countries at this time was a Mafia-style enforcement of Western corporate interests.28

Today, the rising threat to the now global imperial ambitions of the United States posed by such localised dissent is clearly reflected in its more recent political forays into Latin America. These include the backing of the neo-conservative alternative to Venezuela’s popularly elected socialist government, led by Hugo Chavez. Evidence also strongly implicates the U.S. financed National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the failed coup of 11 April 2002 that briefly ousted Chavez.

Importantly, Venezuela is also the world’s fourth largest oil exporter, and was the United States’ principal foreign source of oil during the oil embargo enforced by the Middle East in the 1970’s. In the likelihood that there would be another embargo, as a result of U.S. actions in Iraq,

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26 ibid.
it was made clear that the Bush Administration ‘would not tolerate [the socialist] Chavez in control of Venezuela’s oil production’.

The effects of such interventions are experienced directly in other ways, too. For example, the dehumanising potential of neo-liberal economic policies in so-called Third World Latin American countries was evident when a ubiquitous North American-style shopping mall caught fire in Paraguay on 4 August 2004. Fearing that fleeing customers would leave without paying for items, supermarket owners had security guards seal all exits; this resulted in the deaths of 399 shoppers. Such action recalls the worst excesses of 19th century industrialisation.

3: 3 (ii) Contemporary Latin American art: Localised reactions to globalisation’s proposed economic empire — Cuba, Brazil, Mexico

Of all Latin American countries, three come to the fore today for particular reasons: first, Cuba, because of its longstanding resistance to the economic and cultural values of the United States. Second, Brazil, notable for its annual hosting of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, a meeting of communities of global activists and an alternative response to the annual G8 meetings of the world’s richest nations. Third, Mexico, which is significant not only because of the recent popular oppositional successes of the Zapatista movement, but because it is the United States’ closest geographic neighbour and its economic situation remains vastly weaker. In fact, the massive economic and social discrepancies between these bordering nations have only accelerated under globalisation. Mexico’s general standard of living, rather than having improved because of global free-trade conditions, remains way below that of the U.S., placing it in as a Third World country.

In Cuba, the socialist leadership of Fidel Castro has largely maintained its independence from U.S. influence since the revolution of 1959. The nation’s resistance, which is has been

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29 Greg Palast, ‘Warning to Venezuelan leader’.
30 The World Social Forum is an annual event held at Porto Allegre that brings together culturally, ethnically and politically diverse communities of activists opposed to the economic and ideological principles and effects of globalisation. In January 2002, 60,000 people attended this event. See Notes from nowhere (anonymous) eds, We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anticapitalism, p. 502.
31 According to studies, Mexican immigrants in particular have very high poverty rates. Poverty among Mexican immigrants is significantly higher than that of Americans. Furthermore it has been suggested that, ‘If Mexican immigrants are finding it difficult to obtain a middle-class income, it implies that a significant proportion of immigrants are unable to succeed in the modern American economy’: ‘Poverty and income’, Centre for Immigration Studies, at http://www.cis.org/articles/2001/mexico/poverty.html.
32 Fidel Castro led the Cuban Revolution, which on 1 January 1959, overthrew the U.S. supported dictator Fulgencio Batista; Castro made a commitment to feed, clothe, house, educate, employ and
provoked as much in response to the trade embargo imposed on it by the United States since 1960, has been particularly sustained but has also come at a price that includes widespread poverty. It has also produced art that is highly critical of both U.S. global economic and territorial interests and the perpetually self-mythologising nature of the Cuban leadership. In fact, through their work, contemporary Cuban artists indicate specifically how the political deadlock between Cuba and the United States enforces, especially under globalisation, a low standard of living for most Cubans.

The work of contemporary Cuban artist José Toirac deliberately appropriates distinctly Western visual models, particularly advertising, to indicate the ongoing negatively symbiotic relationship between Cuba and North America. A work such as the artist’s 1994 painting, *United Colours of Benetton*, sardonically comments on this relationship through, more or less faithfully, reproducing an advertisement for the multinational Benetton clothing company (see Figure # 13). Benetton is especially well known globally for its repeated use of controversial, socially orientated imagery, including photographs of AIDS sufferers and war victims. Benetton is also very aware of its explicitly global image as it markets itself to ‘developing’ Third World nations via its self-conscious multiculturalism and use of models with a range of ethnicities.

This particular painting of Toirac’s indicates the prevailing poverty of the Cuban nation — from which such advertising has, up until recently, been banned. More vitriolic, however, is Toirac’s exposure of the intrinsic irony in the arrival of such advertising in Cuba, as it already accurately mirrors the actually prevailing living standards of that country. There is further and deeply critical irony in Toirac’s recognition of the way that successful global corporations such as Benetton sell back to countries like Cuba images of their own privation, supposedly as a gesture of corporate empathy. And this is done in order to market items that continue to remain unattainable luxuries locally.

provide health care for the country’s entire population (see www.globalexchange.org/countries/cuba/background/factsheet.html).

33 ‘US companies may not trade with Cuba. US citizens are prohibited from travelling to Cuba (except under special circumstances). The United States Congress has passed a bill.... that imposes sanctions against any country that trades with Cuba.’ Wm Leler, ‘End the Embargo of Cuba’ at www.leler.com/cuba/embargo.html, 2001.
The endemic social problems arising as direct and indirect effects of neo-liberal
globalisation have also been criticised by other contemporary Cuban artists. At the second
Johannesburg Biennale, the artist known as ‘Los Carpinteros’, for instance, presented an
installation called Cuban Soil for Sale, which reflected the radical shifts in recent Cuban
economic policy as the country is increasingly pressured to participate in the global ‘free
market’. Even more acerbically, in 1997, Cuban artist Tania Bruguera performed a work in
which she stood facing the crowded local street in the neighbourhood of Havana where she
lives, and proceeded to eat Cuban soil for 45 minutes.\textsuperscript{34} Once again, this work vehemently slates
the source of Cuban poverty home to the ideological poverty of globalisation’s neo-liberal
system of economics, which repeatedly fails to deliver the actual material benefits it glowingly
promises.

Such indictments of global economic policies and their effects in Latin America are not
restricted to the ‘traditionalist’ socialist context of Cuba, however. In Brazil, artists such as
Rubens Mano and Amanda Rodrigues Alves have criticised globalisation’s reliance on
colonialist models to exercise economic control over local populations, as well as its willingness
to override the local needs of people.

Rubens Mano, in contrast to the dominant imperialist and decentralising tendencies of
globalisation, focuses on the minutiae of the Brazilian urban environment. Furthermore, the
deliberate immateriality of Mano’s work favours concern for local social and political issues
above the creation of saleable art objects for the global art market.

\textsuperscript{34} Gerardo Mosquera, ‘The new Cuban art’, in Ales Erjavec A. and Boris Groys B. eds, Postmodernism
\textit{and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicised Art Under Late Socialism,} p. 241.
In 1999, in an action called Sidewalk, Mano secured the use of a public building for ‘cultural’ purposes in the newly developed commercial district of Bom Retiro, in Brazil’s São Paulo. The artist proceeded to make the building’s electricity freely available to the street. This had two results. First, the local site was enlivened as a space for public inhabitation and spontaneous informal occupation. Second, the availability of free electricity encouraged street vendors, who arrived to sell everyday wares outside the official economic parameters imposed by the rigidity of global business etiquette. Overall, Mano’s action intensified in the public an awareness of their local agency. Such agency contrasts radically with the abstract and invisible global operations of surrounding multinational businesses, whose activities are invariably directed outside the country.

Another Brazilian artist critical of the contemporary effects of globalisation is Amanda Rodrigues Alves. While assisting in the Brazil + 500: Exhibition of Rediscovery, which later travelled to the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao, Spain, Alves realised that the show perpetuated hierarchical relations imitative of those of Brazil’s previous status as a Portuguese colony. Consequently, she and a group of sympathetic artists staged a protest at the show’s opening, creating placards that were pasted over — and thus effaced — the exhibition’s official advertising billboards.

At the same time, Alves’ work pointedly suggested the nature of Brazil’s contemporary colonisation by multinational and U.S. corporations. She did so by indicating the specific nature of the events staged parallel to the exhibition. This included the opening of Brazil’s 500th McDonalds fast food restaurant. The opening of this particular U.S. chain store even shared the theme of the exhibition, ‘Descombrido do Brasil’ (Rediscovering Brazil). The celebration of this opening was even more ironic given McDonalds’ exploitative and locally insensitive use of the Brazilian rainforest, which has recently been extensively documented.

In Mexico, the United States’ closest bordering Other, U.S. representations of itself as a foremost global power and land of infinite material resources have attracted Mexicans who die in their hundreds in attempts to illegally cross the border. This kind of transnational dissemination of desire-inducing commercial imagery by multinational franchises and

36 César Braga Pinto, ‘Brasil 500 años: An incredible miscegenation in the park’.
37 See Eric Schlosser, Fastfood Nation.
38 Since 1998, over 2000 people have died attempting to enter the U.S. from Mexico undetected. See the ‘Border working group’, at www.rfteam.org/border/prespkt.pdf.
corporations promising ‘better’ lifestyles for poor and disaffected communities is a product of contemporary global neo-liberalism and U.S. propagated Western liberal democracy. In Mexico, the ever-multiplying presence of such contemporary global manifestations is met with varying levels of support and resistance.

Specifically critiquing these conditions, Mexican artist Minerva Cuevas founded The Mejor Vida Corp (Better Life Corporation) (MVC) in 1998. The MVC is a fictional corporation, with its own website,\(^3^9\) which has deliberately imitated the actions of global corporations through site-specific interventions, sabotages and gift distributions. As the artist writes herself in ‘The sell-out of freedom and its opposition’, such actions critically parody those ‘features commonly found on commercial websites: “products”, “services”, and “campaigns”’\(^4^0\) (see Figure # 14). Not surprisingly, these are precisely the ‘immaterial goods’ identified by contemporary critics of globalisation, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.\(^4^1\)

![Figure 14](image)

What Cuevas testifies to is that what is on offer in such instances is not goods, but ideologically encoded values. Thus ‘immaterial goods’ have become, under globalisation and through its intimate reliance on virtually networked technologies, suddenly infinitely more visible and manipulative in economically depressed nations. In nations such as Mexico, the

\(^3^9\) See The Mejor Vida Corp, at www.irational.org/mvc/english.html.


\(^4^1\) See Chapter 1 — 1:4 The global scenario: Criticism without opposition? 1:4 (ii) Globalisation and the post-modern impasse.
general inability to accumulate actually advertised commodities is replaced by virtualised desire. Maintaining desire at this level of impossibility perpetuates the system of neo-liberal capitalism as a system of stasis and control. In opposition to these operations, Mexican artists such as Minerva Cuevas and her MVC return the hollow immaterial gift of Western neo-liberal capitalism while critically magnifying an awareness of the true, site-less nature of that global gift.

3: 4 The Arab world

Many commentators on the phenomenon of contemporary globalisation claim that a North/South opposition has now replaced the traditional East/West polarity central to Cold War politics, but there are significant problems underlying this assertion. The first of these is the current negative media emphasis on the conglomerate of disparate nations known conveniently as the ‘Middle East’. Of course this geographical labelling implies a sense of political and cultural coherence that is actually far from evident. In fact, the ‘Arab’ ‘worldview’ is, to a far greater extent, the product of a (post-)colonial Western mindset. This gives further credence to the notion that globalisation shapes the image of the world in relation to essentially Western precepts.

The Middle East is thus not the united entity, nor united enemy, that it is most frequently portrayed as by Western — and especially North American— media. Such media focus effectively establishes the Middle East as a true counter-empire, pitted against that of the rightly conjoined global empire of the United States and its allies, who are united in their belief in the universal value and global applicability of contemporary Western liberal democracy. Yet if we remove this politically strategic and opportunistic conceptualisation of the Middle East, it is obvious that its various nations represent a complex diversity of voices that cannot be simply and conveniently generalised as enemy Arab other.

Certainly the U.S., as a self-promoted empire, recognises certain of these nations as friends — Israel and Saudi Arabia, say — while it brands others — Iraq, Iran and Jordan, say — as opponents, either openly or by insinuation. The United States’ longstanding support of

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42 Many contemporary theorists of globalisation, such as Australian Nikos Papastergiadis, have cited globalisation’s specific contemporary displacement of an East/West paradigm with a North/South one. See Nikos Papastergiadis, ed., Complex entanglements: Art, globalisation and cultural difference.

43 See Edward W. Said, Orientalism.

44 Consider, for instance, U.S. President George W. Bush’s post-September 11, pre-Iraqi war speech, in which he openly identified Iran, alongside Iraq (and North Korea) as the contemporary world’s ‘axis of evil’. See George W. Bush, ‘State of the Union Address’.
Israel discourages in the world as a whole, open criticisms of the Israeli government’s repeated military forays into Palestinian territory, its assassination of Palestinian spiritual and political leaders and its current erection of an Israeli version of the Berlin Wall in its attempt to separate once and for all Israeli and Palestinian cultures.45

3: 4 (i) Globalisation’s ideological division of contemporary Arab territories

The promotion of globalisation as the positive dismantling of transnational borders cannot possibly be true if other borders arise out of the many crises of international relations it sets up. The brutalism of Israel’s annexation wall questions, in particular, the supposed ‘openness’ of cross-cultural exchanges between nations supposedly united by globalisation processes.46 Similarly, the East/West relationship between Israel and the U.S. relies on the regressive suppression of Israel’s geographical neighbour, Palestine. Furthermore, such suppression is dependent on U.S. exports to Israel in the form of military hardware, which is then utilised in offensives against Palestinian refugee camps such as Hebron, Jenin and Ramallah.47

Such examples again illustrate how the ‘enlightened’ flows of Western-liberal globalisation stretch only so far. And in the relationship between Israel and the United States, they also promote a brutalist closing-down of possible positive interchanges between physically adjoining ‘nations’. In the same way, the effects of the propagation of the foundational ideals of Western neo-liberal capitalism in the contemporary Middle East are far from even. In fact, they are crucially selective, as nations considered ‘unfriendly’ or antagonistic towards Western ‘liberal’ values, or broadly labeled as terrorists or as terrorist sympathisers, have sanctions enforced on them to the detriment of their civilians.48

45 The Israeli government of Ariel Sharon, to finally separate Israelis from Palestinians, initiated this concrete wall, which is still in the process of construction. It has been erected directly through the middle of the West Bank and was deemed by the United Nations in September 2003 an illegal annexation of Palestinian territory, and therefore to be condemned by the international community. See ‘UN report slams Israeli wall as illegal annexation of Palestinian land’.
46 See Paul Virilio, who writes, ‘When a border is eliminated, it reappears somewhere else. When one says: “There are no more borders,” this means that the new one has been masked’: Paul Virilio, Politics of the Very Worst, p. 74.
47 In these raids, aimed supposedly at militant Palestinians and terrorists, the Israeli Army, under direction from the government, has employed bulldozers to demolish individual houses and entire neighbourhoods, which has resulted in the injury or death of many Palestinian civilians.
48 Iraq is a good example of such a situation, as it has been subjected to United States and United Nations sanctions since its 1990 invasion of Kuwait. Such sanctions persisted alongside regular bombing of Iraq by the U.S. Air Force long after the 1990 Gulf War was said to have ended. In Iraq, UNICEF reported that some 5000 children under 5 years of age were dying each month as a direct result of the United Nations sanctions, and that excludes teenagers, adults and the elderly. See Denis J. Halliday, ‘UN sanctions against Iraq only serve US ambition’. 
As civilians, contemporary artists from the region known as the Middle East are faced with a particularly harsh situation: first, because the infrastructure of their country has often been seriously destabilised through invasion or economic isolation, and second, because the global success of contemporary art is usually predicated on access to Western markets. Not surprisingly, contemporary Arab art produced under these circumstances is often significantly critical of the polarised relationship between East and West (even though that relationship is, ironically, covertly encouraged by neo-liberal globalisation processes). It is critical in particular of the strategic favouring of those who are unquestioningly eager to embrace the material and political benefits of neo-liberal economics and Western liberal democratic ideology. At the same time, and in stark contrast to the typical neo-colonial orientalisation of the Middle East and its generic perception of the region as under-developed, such work regularly evidences a thorough understanding of contemporary visual and technological languages.

3: 4 (ii) Contemporary Arab art: Diversities of opposition to globalisation’s regional hegemonic influence

A good example of localised contemporary Arab artists responding to the divisive global effects of U.S. foreign policy in that region is the anonymous collective, Artists Without Walls. This collective was founded around an event of the same name staged in April 2004, that specifically opposed the construction of the Israeli annexation wall. Artists Without Walls activated real-time video links from cameras mounted on either side of this recently constructed barrier. As a result, the wall was transformed virtually and metaphorically into an opening, a doorway or window, as communities physically separated were able to witness the projected daily activities of those on the other side.

The site-specificity of this work was far from merely poetic, though, especially under the highly charged circumstances of the rigidly enforced separation of these two communities. The installed cameras, through revealing hidden ‘information’ about events concealed by the wall itself, conceptually challenge the inflated and strategic security concerns of the Israeli government. Additionally, the installation of closed-circuit cameras emphasised the pervasive fear and distrust actually embodied by the physical architecture of the wall. Overall, Artists Without Walls has been described not as an isolated ‘happening’ but as a critically pertinent

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49 See Edward W. Said, Orientalism.
50 See Catherine David, who says, ‘News on its [the Arab world’s] cultural proposals and practices is still very diffuse or too selective and very often undervalued or treated by the media with condescension’: Catherine David, ‘Seminar 1: The Middle East’.
mobile and ‘permanent forum for dialogue between individuals engaged in all fields of art and culture’.  

Figure 15

This idea of counter-interventions and counter-histories — counter to those officially supplied by governments and the military — is also central to other Arab initiatives. Foremost of these is the Atlas Group, founded by Walid Raad in 1999 in Beirut, Lebanon (see Figure # 15). One of the specific aims of the Atlas Group is to compile and produce stories as collective evidence of the way in which the globalising systems of Western liberal democracy and neoliberal economics continue to marginalise representations of Arab communities and individuals. For instance, part of the Atlas Group’s countercultural process entails publicly presenting ‘found’ archival footage regarding recent Arab political experience. The highly politicised impact of this documentary material lies in the viewer’s awareness of the fact that it has been deliberately excluded from the Western ‘global’ media.

This sense of the exclusionary othering of Arab representations in today’s media world has also been addressed in international exhibitions such as Contemporary Arab Representations. The first part of this exhibition, Beirut/Lebanon, was presented at the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam, between September and November 2002. A critical component of this exhibition was its direct satellite transmission of live news coverage from the popular Arab television network, Al Jazeera.

51 Gianluca Costantini, ‘Artists Without Walls will render the annexation wall transparent’.
Such a gesture was distinctly critical, as Western and particularly North American media have repeatedly demonised Al Jazeera as being the voice of fundamentalist and undemocratic Arab anti-Western sentiments.\textsuperscript{52} At the same time, such virulently directed criticism against it grants Al Jazeera a superficial reputation for extreme radicalism in the West. Its uncensored availability in the context of a Western European exhibition such as \textit{Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut/Lebanon} therefore succeeds in critiquing, by implication, the supposedly ‘democratic’ nature of globally dominant Western corporate media networks such as Fox and CNN.

This emphasis on ‘news’ and ‘newsworthiness’, from a contemporary Arab perspective, provides additional examples of the Arab media and a network like Al Jazeera, providing a globally dissenting voice that questions journalistically Western and U.S. imperial values. Also issuing primarily from a news-media context, the Paris born Egyptian contemporary artist and political cartoonist Golo, whose work was recently included in the second instalment of the above mentioned international exhibition series: \textit{Contemporary Arab Representations: Cairo}.\textsuperscript{53}

The style of Golo’s cartoons is indebted to the ‘funnies’ traditionally inserted in Western newspapers as comic light relief from ‘real’ news. Golo’s cartoons, however, are parody — they imitate recognisably Western cartoon styles and are explicitly critical of Western perceptions of the so-called Middle East. For example, in one of Golo’s works, a group of Western tourists with cameras file past an Egyptian dressed as a Western sales representative, who greets them with a florid, ‘Welcome to Egypt’. On the left stands a group of locals, some wearing Western attire: an adolescent with a baseball cap and ghetto-blaster, a man in a tracksuit whose son wears a McDonalds cap and jumper. The locals portrayed, overtly eager to parade their Western ‘global’ credentials, are nevertheless prevented from entering the same tourist site as the Westerners. A local baton-wielding policeman in military dress forcibly detains the Egyptians. Outwardly imitating the gestures and dress codes of privileged Westerners is therefore no guarantee of universal ‘global’ acceptance.

Extending this critical comment on economic globalisation’s Western bias is another of Golo’s cartoons. This one overlays multiple meanings in an image that is both highly

\textsuperscript{52} In 2001, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell travelled to Qatar in the Middle East with the express purpose of curbing the editorially independent activities of the Al Jazeera television station, which he claimed was giving airtime to ‘anti-American opinions’. The station has also been disparagingly described, inaccurately, as ‘Taliban TV’. See \textit{BBC World News}, Thursday, 4 October 2001, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1578619.stm.

sophisticated and starkly humorous. In it, a dinosaur rampages through New York, tearing apart the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The creature wears a Taliban-style turban and beard and a T-shirt emblazoned with ‘GodSilla’. On the one hand, the prehistoric creature could be seen to represent what the West currently perceives as the reawakening of a dangerously ‘primitive’ Islamic fundamentalism. On the other, the dinosaur parodies Hollywood and the popular media’s obsession with disastrous external threats to the ‘holy’ sanctity of Western liberal democracy, specifically citing U.S. director Steven Spielberg’s 1993 film, Jurassic Park. By replacing the ‘z’ in ‘Godzilla’ with a dollar sign, Golo emphasises what he believes lies at the heart not only of the North America’s new identity as the victim of global ‘Arab’ aggression, but of neo-liberal globalisation processes generally.

Victimisation is also obviously central to recent events emerging from the U.S. led war on Iraq. Most notorious of these is the now infamous treatment of captives at the U.S. controlled Abu Ghraib prison complex. In flagrant contradiction of the oft-reiterated principles of Western liberal democracy, prisoners there were humiliated and tortured, their abuse captured secretly (or boastfully) on digital cameras and covertly distributed globally. The negative press generated by evidence of human rights violations at the hands of the world’s foremost democratic and military power raised further questions about the United States’ actual role in Iraq.

While the ‘battle for Iraq’ has long been said to have been won, the country’s infrastructure and all its major institutions are presently in ruins, as are its cultural institutions. The chaotic void thus created in the push to globalise Western liberal democratic and neo-liberal economic values in the region has left little for contemporary Iraqi artists to work with. A group of 20 Iraqi artists recently staged an exhibition at Baghdad’s sardonically renamed ‘Abu Gulag Freedom Park’, in protest at the treatment of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. Their works, however, are thoroughly grounded in conservative Western traditions of figuration. And in this guise, they inadvertently conform to regressive neo-conservative cultural expectations, through presenting, for isolated aesthetic consumption, series of discreetly mobile, if somewhat disturbing and accusatory, sculptures on white plinths.

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54 On Friday, 2 May 2003, U.S. President George W. Bush, delivered by plane to an aircraft carrier laden with troops, declared that, ‘the United States had prevailed in the Battle of Iraq’, suggesting that the war had been won. Continuing escalation of United States coalition casualties in Iraq has since proven such a statement premature. See BBC World News, Friday, 2 May 2003, at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/2989459.stm.
In Iraq under global occupation, local artists are challenged by the lack of a meaningful national context in which to work. In addition, with the rapid influx of U.S. corporate investment into the newly conquered nation, the chances for effective cultural dissent diminish. Workshops previously organised and controlled by the repressive ‘socialist-realist’ cultural program of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein are being replaced by an equally narrow, econometric and market-orientated vision of contemporary art, courtesy of Western and U.S. neo-liberal market values. This fact is clearly testified to by the following internet posting in poignantly incorrect English by the contemporary Baghdad gallerist M. Zaki Al-Obaidi:

After freedom Iraqi artists welcome all kind of cooperations related to art events in any part of Europe. Under the normal term and conditions. Right now for year 2004 2005 there are a touring exhibition going throughout Europe. Please call us if you thing there is a chance to arrange an exhibition or any art fairs in you city. All artwork in three dimensions, very special style and techniques from the land of mosopatamia.

Ultimately, and under conditions of bitter irony, the mediated and digitised depictions of Iraq’s tortured Abu Ghraib prisoners superficially resemble, more closely, recent examples of contemporary ‘global’ art, with their inadvertently transgressive, artless and documentary appearance, than do the more-or-less traditionalist works executed by local Iraqi artists in direct political protest. This is particularly since many successful global artists have deliberately adopted and appropriated the representational language of oppression, even though as privileged producers often living in the West such oppression is clearly not their own, but is used instead as a selling point on which to transnationally trade their works.

Hypothetically, this discrepancy may prove highly convenient in the cultural restructure of the Iraqi nation. The production of aesthetically ‘safe’, market-friendly contemporary cultural forms in the ‘new’ liberated Iraq may indirectly suggest ‘proof’ of the international validity of the Western coalition’s desire to ‘secure’ the country under the ideological mantle of U.S. style democracy and economics. However, the immensely destabilised conditions currently evident in Iraq may prove equally capable of producing resistant contemporary forms out of the ‘ground zero’ the country has symbolically become.

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55 Under Saddam Hussein’s regime, artistic activity was state controlled and dedicated solely to monumentalising the dictator’s leadership.
3: 5 The China syndrome

China is a good example of the crisis currently facing contemporary art under globalisation. During the last 20 years, China’s avant-garde was brutally suppressed under the region’s authoritarian Communist administration. Today that leadership has undergone a dramatic transformation, and exists somewhere between traditionally opposing ideologies: state Communism and the operations of the global free market. China is a highly particular example of the schizoid and mutational capacity of contemporary neo-liberal global capitalism to penetrate even the most insular and oppositional national models.

At the same time, since China has relaxed its economic policies, previously suppressed examples of Chinese avant-garde art have become increasingly popularised throughout Western Europe and North America. Many examples of this work have lately been exhibited throughout this region. Such art functions in a paradoxical fashion in a globalised context. Its utilisation of more or less traditional Western painterly traditions, previously considered unacceptable in China, is conservative and ‘academic’ by Western ‘avant-garde’ standards — as a result examples of contemporary Chinese ‘avant-garde’ art employing traditional Western pictorial conventions of realist figuration are simultaneously able to excite a global reputation for being cutting-edge and subversive due to their having been deemed ‘dangerous’ in their country of origin.

The current popularity of such work in the West reflects a reverse system of Western neo-colonial orientalising. According to the unspoken principles of this system, contemporary Chinese art is valued both for its superficially Western appearance and for the degree to which signs of this Westernisation are automatically read as criticism of the Chinese Communist system. The Western popularity of Chinese contemporary and ‘avant-garde’ art can also be read as covertly supportive of today’s global model of Western liberal democracy. The Taiwan-based critic Chin-tao Wu supports this revelation as she writes, ‘The coming of age of Chinese artists


58 Since the 1989 China/Avant-garde exhibition at Beijing’s National Gallery, major surveys of Chinese contemporary art have appeared in Europe, Australia and the United States. The most recent of these highly visible exhibitions was Alors, la Chine? (Well then, China?), held at the Centre George Pompidou, Paris, 24 June – 13 October 2003, and featuring work from about 50 contemporary practitioners.
has less to do with the intrinsic value of their work than with the special economic position that
their country enjoys with the West.\textsuperscript{59}

3: 5 (i) Contemporary Chinese art: Between ‘old’ East and ‘new’ West

Recently, Western audiences have expected a certain level of anti-establishment attitude from
contemporary Chinese art. This would explain the popularity in the West of what has been
called ‘Political Pop Art’.\textsuperscript{60} In fact, such work still reflects the most commonly held image of
Chinese contemporary art — as wholeheartedly discrediting the revolutionary program of state
Communism by deliberately subsuming Chinese Communist symbology into Western
advertising and pictorial references.

In such circumstances, it is assumed that this work deliberately chooses Western visual
models over state Communist-imposed ones, ultimately expressing its ideological preference for
Western traditions based on artistic freedom and individualism. Yet there is much irony in the
fact that the extreme repressiveness of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was also responsible for
modernising China. In so doing, it displaced traditionalist forms of Chinese culture — replacing
brush and ink techniques with oil painting, for instance — without necessarily relying on the
aesthetic ‘direction’ of dominant Western models.\textsuperscript{61} ‘Political Pop Art’ in China could therefore
also be considered an indictment of the present encroaching global impact of Western
commercialism on Chinese art and society.

Even more than that, work of the Chinese ‘Political Pop Art’ movement frequently
directly compares the ideological imperatives of state socialism and Western free-market
capitalism, seeing them as more or less synonymous in their intertwining. This is because each
system relies on mobilising the mass desires of populations while demanding their maximum
complicity. Consequently, the dualism of ‘Political Pop Art’ has also been referred to as
‘double-kitsch’,\textsuperscript{62} invoking the kitsch-ness of Chinese socialist imagery alongside the kitsch-
ness of Western global advertising.

Indeed, the huge commercial success of Chinese ‘Political Pop Art’ in the West was
underpinned by a state of extreme cynicism towards the coercively utopian proclamations of
both Communism and Western neo-liberal capitalism — \textit{not}, as has been regularly assumed by

\textsuperscript{59} Chin Tao Wu, \textit{Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980’s}, p. 177.
\textsuperscript{60} Gao Minglu, ‘Post-utopian avant-garde art in China’, in Ales Erjavec and Boris Groys B. eds,
\textsuperscript{61} See ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., pp. 253–55.
Western art collectors, by its open embrace of the possibilities of the latter. Such a fact is clearly evident in a statement by foremost ‘Political Pop’ artist Wang Guangyi, as he rejected the idealism of his earlier work, ironically proclaiming, ‘we must liquidate the enthusiasm for humanism’, because now, ‘art is created only to achieve stardom in media society and the market’. 63

Wang Guangyi’s Great Castigation Series of the 1990’s, as its title suggests, presents a highly cynical overview of the effects of Chinese Communist Party leader Deng Xiaoping’s ‘reformist’ embrace of the Western market economy. In this series Guangyi produces hybridised images in which state political propaganda is layered with Western and multinational commodity brands; Coca-Cola, Kodak, Nikon, Canon, Tang, Montana and so on (see Figure #16). At the same time, such work blends English and Chinese characters in an effect that is highly fragmentary, a fact further exacerbated by the overall application to them of random serialised numbers.

![Figure 16](image)

The level of authorial self-effacement apparent in Guangyi’s Great Castigation Series critiques the notion that Western liberal democratic values, founded as they are in individualist consumption, are universally valid under globalisation. Meanwhile, the artist draws visual analogies between these myths of Western individualism and state Communism’s absorption of individual rights. Guangyi’s works also critically evidence the West’s relatively recent exoticisation of the symbols of totalitarian oppression and its narcissistic fascination with the

63 Ibid., p. 253, p. 255.
detritus of Communist imagery, over which it believes itself to be, in a global context, finally victorious.

Other artists loosely associated with the ‘Political Pop Art’ movement include Wu Shanzhuan and Xu Bing, both of whose productions revolve around the use of Chinese characters and texts. The critical and conceptual basis of their work also demonstrate defiance of the assumption of universality that is central to globalisation processes. That is because Chinese is not a language commonly taught or generally understood in the West, though Chinese speakers are globally perhaps the largest single linguistic group. As a result, the Western neo-colonial fetishism for Chinese communist symbols and imagery is paralleled by an equally exoticised consumption of more traditional signifiers of supposedly intrinsic ‘Chineseness’.

Shanzhuan’s work, such as the Red Humour series, combines Maoist political slogans with references to Chinese and Western literature, alongside the banalities of contemporary Western advertising, weather forecasts and miscellaneous ‘news’ items. However, the artist refuses to force such information into an overall meaningful relationship. Thus the characters, ‘garbage, garbage, garbage’, are surmounted by the character for ‘nirvana’, while on the floor is written wurenshuodo (nobody can interpret them). The separation of meaning in the context of this work forces the Chinese characters of which it is composed to assume an identity as pure graphic signs. And as signs, they are rendered available for universal global consumption precisely through their emptiness of the specifics of communicable meaning.

The artist Xu Bing, in his 1988 installation Book From the Sky, shares critical concerns with Wu Shanzhuan. Bing’s installation consisted of large suspended scrolls and numerous folded books of what appeared to be thousands of Chinese characters. The artist, to simulate the superficial appearance of Chinese calligraphy, however, painstakingly invented the Chinese characters in this work. Thus the renewed concern under globalisation to consume signs of contemporary regional authenticity and difference is here subverted by the use of ‘unreadable’ texts that function solely, and unbeknownst to non-Chinese speaking audiences, at the level of fabricated appearances.

More savagely critical is Bing’s 1994 installation/performance, A Case Study of Transference, featuring two pigs in a pig sty, the male stamped with English letters, the female with pseudo-Chinese script. During this work, the animals trampled and defecated on the Western and Chinese philosophical texts that lined their enclosure, eventually copulating in front of the assembled art audience. As the male (English ‘speaking’) pig mounts the female.
(Chinese ‘speaking’) pig, the piece is transformed into a visceral vilification of globalisation’s ‘pornographic’: the attempted global universalisation of Western cultural and ideological aspirations.

3:5 (ii) The currency of contemporary Chinese art: The strategic global marketing of a ‘national’ culture and its critics

The contemporary Chinese cultural climate has led some external commentators to regard its radical transformation under globalisation as representing the arrival in China of The American Dream. Such commentators see China positively today as a country in which ‘entrepreneurs are no longer “capitalists” and “exploiters”’. And as these new entrepreneurs and ‘brand-new millionaires are discovering the joys of unbridled capitalism’, the fact that in Beijing ‘there is a McDonalds on practically every street corner’ is regarded as something to be celebrated.

The vastness of China as a global market at the same time renders contemporary Chinese art the height of international fashion, a highly strategic means of promoting the country’s rekindled vigour, its apparent openness, dynamism and innovation. This is regardless of the fact that the Chinese Communist Party still rigidly regulates this very system of apparent openness. Additionally, the benefits of the rapid globalisation of the Chinese cultural and political spectrum are not without their price:

It is now out of the question for China, caught up in a web of international economic relationships ... to start objecting to alliances on moral, idealistic, ideological or any other grounds. Despite this, there remains within the work of many contemporary artists living and working in China a vein of trenchant criticism. In fact the overt politicisation of this work is very different from that of the earlier ‘Political Pop Art’ movement, as it deliberately abandons references to the Communist revolutionary imagery that was so rapidly popularised in Western commercial markets. Instead, these artists focus on contemporary international political events, including the politics of the globalised system of international contemporary art.

The contemporary Chinese artist Yan Lei, for example, in a work from 1997, May I See Your Work?, harshly criticises the effects of the type of openness occasioned by the impact of globalisation on the local Chinese art scene. The title of his work is a sardonic comment on the

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64 Ibid., p. 259.
65 Michel Nuridsany, in Michel Nuridsany, China Art Now, p. 7.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., p. 8.
68 Ibid., p. 12.
recent influx of significant numbers of Western and European curators and collectors into China and the frequency with which they have patronisingly asked local Chinese artists to ‘present’ to them — in return for the possibility of global exposure. The work itself, a photographically based painting in six panels, accusingly represents an imperious guild of judges or merchants.

Another artist, Chen Shaohong, produced a work in 2002 called Anti-Terrorist Variety, an irreverent take on the U.S. national tragedy, the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. In this video work, an anonymous aeroplane flies towards a skyscraper in a Chinese business district. As the craft is about to impact, the building separates, and the aeroplane appears to fly straight through, leaving it and the skyscraper unscathed. In another frame the same building bends anthropomorphically to avoid the same collision (see Figure # 17).

![Image of a skyscraper with an aeroplane flying through it.](image)

*Figure 17*

Shown in an international context — the 2002 Venice Biennale — the work was inflammatory precisely because of its recognition of the highly manipulative nature of the Western media’s spectacularisation of tragedy for political ends. Also, the attacks on the World Trade Center have since been inextricably linked to the U.S. government’s global territorial interventions — what it calls ‘anti-terrorism’ measures. The absurdity of Shaohong’s depiction, its ironic humanisation of metropolitan business architecture over an obvious humanitarian focus on the tragic loss of actual lives, critically questions the ‘global’ nature of such tragedy. The artist seems to ask, provocatively, whether or not the events of September 11 would have been deemed so ‘globally’ significant if they had occurred in the central business district of Guangzhou, the city in which the artist lives.
There is a parallel critique operating within this work, and it centres on the nature of the global economy and its current importation to China. In Shaoxiong’s work, the threatened skyscraper, although Chinese-built, is suggestive of the ubiquitous contemporary global corporate activity that remains resolutely anonymous and secluded. The fact that the building in Shaoxiong’s video avoids its final destruction, in fact seems indestructible, translates further as a comment on the skill of multinational global corporations in eluding attacks on them. This is because the physical structures housing corporations are ultimately deemed replaceable. On the other hand, the corporate economic system, based now in a transnational global context of endless circulation of ‘immaterial’ and abstract information, poses a threat less easily locatable and unable to be destroyed by physical means.

In contradiction to claims recently made that today’s Chinese artists, living under global capitalist conditions, ‘are no longer bothered with politics, and don’t want to become involved’, much of the work produced by such artists suggests otherwise. While sceptical of the contemporary effects or ongoing relevance of official left-wing Chinese Communist Party politics, many of these artists remain equally aware and equally critical of the avaricious demands of globally ever-expanding Western markets, including the international contemporary art market.

3: 6 Resistant remainders of the nation-state: Global culture as partial totality

The idea that neo-liberal globalisation is a totalising system capable of rendering invalid any critical opposition within contemporary culture, is only partially true — perhaps even entirely false. There are numerous sites whose specific national histories and intellectual traditions remain resistant to their complete absorption into an overall political and cultural system founded on Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal economics. The expected uncritical and opportunistic embrace of the Western neo-liberal system as the dominant ‘ideology’ of the contemporary world, especially after the collapse of international Communism, has not occurred.

Meanwhile, the neo-liberal economic values inherent to globalisation are replicated in the global proliferation of art markets. At the same time, this commercial proliferation is similarly evident in the increasing frequency of culturally specific ‘theme shows, organised

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69 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire.
70 Michel Nuridsany, in Michel Nuridsany, China Art Now, p. 232.
predominantly by North American and Western European curators, gallery owners and museum directors. Much of the critical work cited in this chapter has appeared in global exhibitions of this nature. Importantly, however, these contemporary critical practices, rooted in the specificities of national geo-political histories, are equally significant in their capacity to resist, at least partially, their appropriation by this global profit-oriented network.

This potentially totalising global network, with its massive ability to appropriate worldwide cultural difference, would explain, too, the recent faddish tendencies towards exhibitions of contemporary art focused explicitly on work from regions once considered marginal to mainstream Western galleries and markets. For example, not long after the collapse of the Communist Eastern bloc, contemporary art from this area became increasingly popular in Western Europe.71

Most recently, and with the conceptual positing of an alternative global North/South axis to replace the East/West one typical of the Cold War, exhibitions of contemporary Latin American art have achieved a far greater level of international recognition than ever before. However, the U.S. history of political intervention in this particular region has left those societies and cultures polarised between supporters of Western neo-liberalism and fervent opponents of it (who are perhaps in the majority).

The longtime socialist nation of Cuba, although struggling under economic pressure from the United States especially, continues to demonstrate contemporary neo-liberalism’s failure to effectively absorb counter-ideologies or to convince local audiences that opposition today is simply irrelevant. And it is punished for this.

Contemporary art from the so-called Middle East also seriously challenges the ‘enlightened’ Western-democratic ideals promoted in defence of globalisation as a positive universalising political, economic and cultural system. Reception of such work is somewhat different in Western Europe, particularly in relatively small, tolerant societies like those of The Netherlands and Scandinavia, where shows like Contemporary Arab Representations have been specifically dedicated to contemporary critical and politicised art from diverse Arab nations. In North America, however, the United States’ continuing occupation of Iraq, and growing public awareness of the U.S. government of George W. Bush’s opportunistic oil and business deals

71 See Boris Groys, ‘The other gaze: Russian unofficial art’s view of the Soviet world’ in Ales Erjavec and Boris Groys B. eds, Postmodernism and the Postsocialist Condition: Politicised Art Under Late Socialism.
with Saudi Arabia,\textsuperscript{72} means that contemporary art from the Middle East cannot be effectively popularised there. This is, of course, unless the mechanism of globalisation can locate ways of promoting new art from the Middle East that is sympathetic to the Western neo-liberal cause as proof of its ultimate global correctness.

Contemporary China is an especially pertinent example of the effects of the current globalisation of Western political, economic and cultural systems in a vast region previously considered thoroughly ideologically insulated. Generally considered a growing economic success, the impact of global markets on contemporary China has also proven their effectiveness in accelerating the division between the wealthy and poor. Similarly, the international popularisation of contemporary Chinese art has located increasing numbers of practitioners whose work is based largely on criticising and exposing, in a site-specific manner, the liberalist presumptions of neo-liberal globalisation rhetoric.

Finally, in each of these areas — the former Eastern bloc, Latin America, the Middle East and China — techniques and iconographies traditionally associated with Western art and technological media forms have been successfully reappropriated as vehicles for critiquing globalisation as predominantly motivated by Western hegemonic ideology. Far from proving the universal contemporary relevance of such a system, critical art from these regions reveals the ideological bias and fallibility of wholly positivist Western liberal democratic and neo-liberal self-representations, as well as their openness to strategic atavism.

\textsuperscript{72} The interconnectedness of the United States presidencies of both George Bush Senior and the current president, George W. Bush, and the Saudi Arabian royal family have been well documented. It has been said that public records show that ‘Many of the same American corporate executives who have reaped millions of dollars from arms and oil deals with the Saudi monarchy have served or currently serve at the highest levels of U.S. government.’ And further, that ‘the former president, George H.W. Bush, remains a senior adviser to the Washington D.C.-based “Carlyle Group”, an influential investment bank with deep connections to the Saudi royal family as well as financial interests in U.S. defence firms hired by the kingdom to equip and train the Saudi military’. See Jonathan Wells, Jack Meyers and Maggie Mulvihill, ‘Bush advisers cashed in on Saudi gravy train’.
Chapter 4

The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled?

Globalisation's current 'streamlining' of contemporary art's various increasingly interdependent institutions is directly affected by the attempted wide-scale implementation of its core neoliber al economic paradigms. Consequently, contemporary art education, art production and the staging of international contemporary art exhibitions are increasingly forged into a symbiotic relationship determined by global economic rationalism. Meanwhile globalisation's 'streamlining' of art and its various institutions emphasises a 'user-pays' attitude to culture that is aligned to its ideology of an equally rationalist, 'streamlined' 'new world order'. Such an order seeks to present its institutionalised vision of 'global culture' as efficient, varied and entertaining. However, the degree of critical autonomy or of cultural dissent such a globally networked outlook allows is often severely restricted — and seemingly covertly enforced.

The related corporatisation of contemporary culture also impacts on the curricula of universities and art schools, the spectacle-oriented culture of contemporary art museums and the curatorial direction of many contemporary, especially commercial, art galleries, as contemporary art education — and in countries like the United States and Australia, education generally — is edged towards privatisation. In tandem with such changes, large-scale transnational exhibitions, such as the vastly expanding global network of biennales, become the means for falsely propagating an essentially Western, economically driven vision of globalisation as an altruistic and broadly inclusive 'multicultural' process. At the same time, the corporate infiltration of previously state-funded galleries and other cultural institutions is echoed in the disciplinary blurring between populist and commercial industry-based practices such as design, fashion and advertising and the recent socially critical histories of contemporary art.

This levelling of distinction and critical autonomy also produces global institutional 'hybrids'. These result in semi-autonomous quasi-institutions, many of which opportunistically glean, as the contemporary commercial realms of design and fashion do, 'alternative', 'independent' identities whilst fully subscribing to the hierarchical machinations of globalisation's dominant paradigms. Under such conditions, fostered specifically by neo-liberal globalisation, the challenge to contemporary art as an effective form of social critique or cultural resistance is acute. This is particularly so as more and more, critical practices are thoroughly de-territorialised to become yet other branded commodities on what is by now a thoroughly globalised art market.
4: 1 Instituting ‘global’ culture

The increasing global interdependence of dominant art institutional forms — education, museums and international biennales — presents an image of contemporary ‘global culture’ inhabited, to a high degree, by the spectre of corporate commercialism and its attempted transnational universalisation of ‘cultural difference’. Control and influence over interrelated art institutions by corporate boards of trustees, government funding bodies and multinational conglomerates further impinges on the possibility of a designated ‘global culture’ that is capable of autonomous critique. Indeed, globalisation’s neo-liberal economic and institutional framing increasingly compromises claims for the independent critical functioning of contemporary art. Accordingly, institutions of contemporary art, including educational ones, are increasingly called upon to legitimise their activities in terms of encroaching populist and economically rationalist imperatives.

4: 1 (i) Contemporary art education: The business of dissent or business as usual?

Today, the centralising economic pressures of neo-liberal globalisation increasingly transform higher education facilities, including art schools, into marketplaces. As a result, institutions are forced to sell an image of their ‘intellectual acumen’ in the broader global ‘market’ of tertiary education. In this way, under globalisation, tertiary education institutions rapidly become quasi-corporations. Such education corporations trade the immaterial goods produced by ‘knowledge workers’.¹

‘Knowledge workers’ and the education ‘companies’ that produce them, once simply known as universities, are at the same time bound by globalisation’s guiding rhetoric of ‘free trade’. As a result, the value of higher education is increasingly assessed along narrowly vocational lines, in terms of ‘market accessibility’,² a condition expressly produced through global ‘trade liberalisation’.³ These processes have particular consequences in the education of artists, who are multi-skilled in an area that traditionally has little obvious or direct ‘vocational’ value — especially as it proposes itself as a discourse of constant critical questioning — except perhaps from a teaching perspective. Indeed, under such conditions, arts, design and visual art departments have also increasingly been combined into a single unit, mostly known as faculties of ‘creative arts’.

¹ Carolyn Allport, ‘The trade agenda and international education’.
² Ibid.
Under the economic pressures of neo-liberal globalisation, the role of artists as teachers is also growingly threatened. Recently in Britain, for example, it has been noted that:

[the country’s] once rich network of specialist art colleges (an average of at least two per county) has almost vanished in successive waves of educational amalgamations and take-overs. Such colleges have ‘merged into the far larger and more bureaucratic structures of ex-polytechnics, now the new universities’. Consequently ‘today there are far fewer opportunities on offer for part-time teaching sessions by practicing artists (This was) until recently ... a source of income for British contemporary artists.\(^4\)

Not only has the fundamental nature of art education institutions changed since the spread of neo-liberal globalisation; the nature of what is taught in them has changed as well. In the past, the education of contemporary artists, particularly according to the Left-leaning so-called New Art History,\(^5\) emphasised lateral and critical thinking about contemporary art’s specific histories, its critical methods, the particular sites of its production, and how together these establish a relationship between art and society based on questioning and social analysis.

Today, however, via Western neo-liberal economics, the ‘intellectual surplus’\(^6\) of such a fundamentally anti-instrumentalist approach to the education of artists is being questioned, primarily on economic grounds. This is because globalisation’s economic regulators require ‘objective proof’ of both the ‘culture industry’s’ and the higher education institutions’ ability to create financial gain within the general economy.

It is implied, by supporters of globalisation, that today’s commercially orientated ‘collaborations’ between artists and engineers or artists and industrial designers, for example, actually maximise the potential of practising artists. This is because such cross-overs are seen to provide additional opportunities for artists to employ their creative training while engaged in industry sectors from which they might also rationally expect increased financial rewards. These changes in the climate of education promote a dramatic parallel shift ‘from basic or curiosity-driven research, generally referred to as “pure research” to targeted or commercial or strategic research’.\(^7\)

Further reiterating globalisation’s massive de-territorialising capacities, the preference in

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\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Patrick J. Boylan, ‘British art in the 1990’s: The social and political background’ in Bernice Murphy ed, Pictura Britannica/Art from Britain catalogue, p. 158.

\(^5\) See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 2 (iii) ‘New Left’ criticism for a social theory of art.

today's arts faculties for the often generalist, eclectic and 'imagist' discipline of 'cultural studies' is also telling. 'Cultural studies' is distinguished by the fact that on the whole, it treats with equal seriousness all manifestations of contemporary culture, from television soap operas to reality TV, cinema, advertising, and, of course, art. Defenders of 'cultural studies' as an especially 'contemporary' global discipline claim that its eclecticism and inclusiveness are inherently democratising, as it finally levels any remaining elitist or chauvinistic distinctions between 'high' and 'low' cultures and any insulated, nationally-determined cultural biases.9

Attempts to understand contemporary 'global culture' through the favoured medium of 'cultural studies', rather than being automatically inclusive and non-hierarchical, however, have been said instead to specifically favour 'First World capitalism's universe' by forcing adherents to 'reassert [their] fidelity to the basic American liberal-democratic framework'.10 More insidiously, it has been suggested that as a favoured trans-disciplinary educational model, 'cultural studies' is 'performing the ultimate service for the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its presence invisible'.11 At the same time, the primary role of tertiary art institutions comes to be perceived globally as 'impacting cultural competence in a unifying and filtering way to a widening constituency of consumers'.12

Concretely, from an international perspective, globalisation's commodifying push for the transnational privatisation of tertiary education saw countries of the European Union (EU) agreeing in May 2000, in an agreement known as the Treaty of Bologna, to embrace 'cross-border trade' between their tertiary institutions. This was only agreed, however, once a code was established to assess international education on strictly educational, not 'free trade', criteria. The signing of such a 'social contract', designed to protect the freedom of academic institutions, subsequently threw the WTO into counterattack mode.13

The tertiary education situation is radically different for countries such as Britain,

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7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 91.
11 Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology, p. 218.
12 Steven Connor, 'Postmodernism and the Academy' in Steven Connor, Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary, pp. 14–15.
13 Carolyn Allport, 'The trade agenda and international education', p. 2.
Australia and Canada, whose educational institutions are today directly influenced by the economic prerogatives of United States-style corporatised education. Under present conditions, recourse to such a model encourages ‘academics who act as capitalists within the public sector’, and as ‘state-subsidized entrepreneurs’.¹⁴ Meanwhile, and not surprisingly, corporate culture has an increasing influence in the broad field of educating people.¹⁵

As neo-liberal globalising processes encroach further into the world of education generally, art education is founded less and less on encouraging a climate of open, curiosity-driven critical thinking from which potential social or political dissent might emerge. Art is instead encouraged to be the unquestioning production of useful and desirable commodities that are economically viable on the global market. Finally, corporate imperatives inevitably inhabit such ‘art industry’ ‘products’, which are then passed on to and promoted in other related institutions of the global ‘culture industry’, namely new museums and commercial galleries.

4: 1 (i) The ‘importance’ of new museums: Museums ‘making’ art

Just as art education has become increasingly corporatised and populist as a result of the centralising pressures of globalisation, so new museums of contemporary art have also been transformed by the same contemporary shift, and the escalation in their construction worldwide has reflected their infiltration by global corporate and commercial values.

The result of this is a significant alteration in public perception of the role of such art institutions — no longer are they seen as sites of social criticism. This change occurs once ‘the notion of the museum as a guardian of the public patrimony … gives way to the notion of a museum as a corporate entity with a highly marketable inventory and the desire for growth’¹⁶ At the same time, the new museums’ contents tend to be regarded coolly as financial assets. In the same way, their international identity is virtualised as it capitalises on the promotion of contemporary art as indicative of explicitly ‘global’ — that is, ‘universal’ — cultural values.

The sense of the new museum as an ideological proponent of ‘universal’ ‘global culture’ is institutionally conditioned at two levels. First, the universalisation of contemporary ‘global culture’ is produced through the self-conscious ‘product-branding’ of such museums — their individual institutional identities and corporate logos are traded virtually in a global economic context. Second, the popularisation via virtual means of the immaterial corporate image of new

museums of contemporary art, as well as of the works they contain, is affected by art’s global value as ‘cultural collateral’; the separate spheres of culture and economics are here seamlessly joined. In fact, the value of the new museum of contemporary art as a global virtual commodity, trading on the strength of its dematerialised corporate image, could be said to be considerably more than the actual art it contains.\textsuperscript{17}

Operating alongside these aspects of the global proliferation of new museums of contemporary art is their self-conscious reliance on art’s current hyper-spectacularisation. By creating architectural spaces that are overtly impressive physically and ‘sculpturally’, the very physical spaces of new museums of contemporary art effectively dominate their contents, as they ‘monopolize the eye and reduce the works they contain to midget status’,\textsuperscript{18} often rendering secondary the art-critical intentions of the works they display. In fact, the spectacular ‘product identity’ of new museums of contemporary art almost makes them entertainment complexes. These cultural sites, though more reified, are proliferating in much the same way — and to the same degree — as are Western-styled supermarkets, shopping malls, airports and other public architectures designed solely for commercial motives.

As the global ubiquity of new shopping and tourist complexes is being matched by the increasing global ubiquity of contemporary art museums, so the distracted and compulsive browsing of international shopping is emulated in the kind of ambient experience encouraged by new contemporary art museums. As a result, today’s art audiences are everywhere enveloped by clean, reflective, featureless and cavernous interiors. Meanwhile, audience subjectivity is equally transformed, so that the subject is no longer conceived as analytically split between thought or feeling or as a traditional biographical subject focused on interpreting personal intensities.\textsuperscript{19}

Instead, these new museums of contemporary art encourage contemporary art to be responded to as a series of randomly discontinuous experiences adrift from attachment to a greater external social context:\textsuperscript{20} the experience of art in these purged, universalising museum contexts is as a series of isolated ‘entertainments’ framed by the enveloping, more impressive ‘entertainment’ of the museum architecture itself. Such architecture is also intimately linked to the instant recognisability of the ‘corporate brand’ by which it is globally promoted.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
The bland grandiosity of such spaces and the distracted experiences they proffer arise precisely from their intimate dependence on global corporate sponsorship. In particular, the very existence of such new museums is enabled by multinational corporations' need to activate economic surplus to offset the possibility of falling global profits.\textsuperscript{21} The new museum therefore also becomes a site at which multinational corporations display the excesses of the global capitalist system. At the same time, the museum becomes excessive in its need to display itself as a signifier of a new, explicitly 'global', culture.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure18.png}
\caption{Figure 18}
\end{figure}

Needless to say, because new museums of contemporary art are expensive to build, and defensive of this fact, their internal operations are rarely exposed to public critique. Neither do they tend to be sensitive to the sites where they are constructed. Indeed, 'site specificity', once a hallmark of international critical art,\textsuperscript{22} is anathema to the 'global' contemporary art museum. A prime example of this is Canadian-born architect Frank O. Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (see Figure # 18), conceived in the universalizing non-space of virtual afforded by high-tech computer design technology. The Bilbao Guggenheim's specific geo-political location becomes incidental. This is especially ironic given that the Bilbao museum has become a tourist signpost for a heavily industrialised and otherwise far from picturesque city.\textsuperscript{23} Even more ironic is the fact that the museum lies in Basque territory, a region of Spain whose political independence is hotly, often violently, contested by local separatists. Paradoxically, through the

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 611.
\textsuperscript{22} See Miwon Kwon, \textit{One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity}.
\textsuperscript{23} Gehry's Bilbao has actually come to be known as a 'destination building' — its very existence is enough reason to visit Bilbao. Unlike the touristic attractions of other kinds of architectural monuments, buildings like Gehry's resist, rather than enhance or reveal, the specific geo-political conditions of the locations in which they are constructed. Thus, Gehry's Bilbao museum becomes a product 'in-itself' promoted to a 'global' audience as a spectacular generalised expression of today's neo-liberal 'global culture'.
construction of the Bilbao Guggenheim, this global political ‘hot spot’ is rendered symbolically as an emblem of a ‘universally’ benign ‘global culture’, realised through anonymous multinational corporate intervention.

Similarly, the Bilbao Guggenheim’s regressively gestural and ‘expressionistic’ physical appearance signals a model of new global museums as indicators of individualistic ‘artistic free expression’. The contrived hyper-individualist aura of such spaces in fact displays exaggerated architectural ‘style’, where surface is everything, as the fundamental expression of the role of the contemporary art museum. The nature of such architecture implies too that it ‘could be dropped, indifferently, almost anywhere, in LA, Bilbao, Seattle, Berlin, New York’, as it ingratiates itself ‘on the model of the advertisement, to a public projected as a mass consumer’.

The culture and politics of global neo-liberalism fervently pursued by the United States reveal globalisation’s hegemonic ideological and territorial interests. No matter how critically conscious the art exhibited in many such international new museums, its worldwide dissemination also embodies issues of global economic, cultural and ideological power. The intersection of these now re-creates the contemporary artwork in alignment with a vast global corporate network whose interconnectedness emblematically encapsulates the regulatory space of the virtualised global market. However, the ‘global market’ that new museums of contemporary art see themselves responding positively to is a neo-liberal market favouring industry specialisation, not the ‘mass market’ of civic society generally. Therefore the new spectacle-orientated museums of contemporary art, such as Gehry’s Bilbao Guggenheim, favour a corporate and privatising model of contemporary art, a global audience of consumers.

4: 1 (iii) Global exhibitions: Why biennales are popular

Alongside the global proliferation of new museums of contemporary art is the rapid increase in numbers of international biennales. These large-scale presentations of contemporary art in an ever-enlarging multitude of sites are by now thoroughly global events. This is true to such an extent that currently, patterns of economic globalisation have resulted in what has been described as the ‘biennialisation’ of the international art scene. It has also been noted,

25 Ibid., p. 32.
importantly, that ‘art from all of the various parts of the world is often only viewed in this way’.27

This ‘biennalisation’ of the contemporary art scene has had two effects. First, and in keeping with the supposedly ideologically ‘neutral’ inclusiveness of globalisation and its concomitant emphasis on global ‘free trade’, artists from more and more countries that were once considered ‘peripheral’ have been invited to participate in the big-name biennales such as Venice or São Paolo. Second, and in keeping with the same expansionist rhetoric, the phenomenal spread of biennales around the world has seen such exhibitions spring up in a multitude of locations, including many in economically ‘developing’ regions such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Indeed, the unprecedented proliferation of biennales on practically every continent ultimately sets them up as the paradigmatic exemplar of international exhibition in the age of globalisation.28 Consequently, they also expose globalisation’s dominant economistic predilections and neo-colonial ‘celebration’ of global cultural difference.

Tellingly, the higher international status accorded to artists who exhibit in the network of international biennales is well accepted. Successful commercial art dealer Gene Sherman, of Sydney’s Sherman Galleries, supports this, claiming that the ultimate signifier of an artist’s potential career value is the presence on his or her Curriculum Vitae of the names of those who curate biennales and triennales.29 Attitudes like this, coming from market professionals such as Sherman, rather than being ‘neutral’, indicate the potential economic value of international biennales for them as individual dealers. Indeed, globalisation’s ‘biennalisation’ of the international art scene provides commercial galleries with ever increasing access to new global art ‘products’ and trends.

It is no surprise then that commercial galleries represent the vast majority of artists

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27 Ibid.
28 A recent global checklist of international biennales of contemporary art reads as follows: the ‘Venice Biennale’ (Italy), the ‘Berlin Biennale’ (Germany), the ‘Barcelona Art Report’ and the ‘BIACS Biennale’ (Spain), the ‘Istanbul Biennale’ (Turkey), the ‘St Petersburg Biennale’ (Russia), the ‘Yugoslav Biennale’ (Belgrade), the ‘São Paolo Biennale’ (Brazil), and also in that country, the ‘Biennial Ceará América’ in Fortaleza and the ‘Mercosur Biennial’ in Porto Alegre, the ‘Havana Biennial’ (Cuba), the ‘Shanghai Biennale’ (China), the ‘Busan Biennial’, the ‘Gwangju Biennial’ and ‘Media City, Seoul’ (South Korea), ‘DAK’ART’ (Senegal), taking the place of the now defunct South African ‘Johannesburg Biennale’, the ‘Sharjah Biennial’ (United Arab Emirates), the ‘Whitney Biennale’ (United States), the ‘Liverpool Biennale’ (Britain) and the ‘Sydney Biennale’ (Australia). And this does not include other regular large-scale international exhibitions such as the Kassel ‘Documenta’ in Germany, which takes place every five years, and ‘Manifesta’, a showcase for contemporary European art, which also takes place every five years in different European locations.
29 Gene Shermann, quoted in Matt Buchanan, ‘Exhibitionists’.
exhibiting in globally distributed biennales. For example, *Delays and Revolutions*, curated by Francesco Bonami and Daniel Birnbaum as the major platform of the 50th international Venice Biennale, held in 2003, included work by 46 contemporary artists, who were represented by 53 international commercial galleries, of which 46 were in the United States or Western Europe.\textsuperscript{30} From this vantage point, the rapid increase in biennales of contemporary art worldwide parallels globalisation’s demand for increased global market integration. Furthermore, such exhibitions suggest, through their sheer scale and self-conscious emphasis on multiculturalism, an image of a transnational, trans-cultural, ‘global’ culture, of universally shared values founded on mutual co-operation.

The apparent inclusiveness of global biennales in terms of the number of artists and diversity of cultures they exhibit is, however, undermined by their intrinsic exclusivity. This is because the contemporary art they display is ‘always but a small selection presented from the personal perspective of curators’.\textsuperscript{31} Such a view of global art and its curating then comes to be more determined by an artists individual professional reputation, as the same artists are exhibited repeatedly in a multitude of global biennales, and less by a theoretically searching or analytic curatorial methodology. The stringently competitive individualist model this establishes in the global art world is the same model as the one that is fundamental to global corporate competition. Thus underlying the rationale of biennales the core tenets of capitalist competition must be upheld in order to appear to generate, here under the banner of ‘multiculturalism’, worldwide commodity choice and consumer ‘value for money’.

In this way an unspoken competition is established, not only between the work of individual artists, in terms of whose is ‘best’, most ‘entertaining’ or most ‘significant’, but also between nations with regard to which regional outlook is considered most clearly reflective of the present global Zeitgeist. This would explain why contemporary art from particular geographic regions — Eastern Europe, Latin America and most recently China — has come to inhabit momentarily the forefront of the self-consciously ‘global’ art world. Moreover, international biennales, through such explicit highlighting of ‘multiculturalism’, promote not only images of exoticism but the aura of difference as well. It is this repeated reiteration of cultural difference within the globalised art world that is then commodified and marketed as, paradoxically, a ‘universal’ global value. Likewise, difference supplies the individual cultural

\textsuperscript{30} See Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa, eds, ‘Dreams and conflicts: The dictatorship of the viewer’, *50th International Biennale da Venezia* catalogue.

‘brands’ by which ‘global art’ is mobilised (especially through biennales) and made attractive to the globalised art market.

As an alternative response to the frequent global co-option of difference via commercial means, many recent high-profile international exhibitions, including 1997’s Documenta X: Politics–Poetics and Documenta XI of 2002, have specifically focused critically on issues of globalisation and transnationality. 2004’s Manifesta 5 biennale of European art also directly addressed issues of global geo-politics. In fact these exhibitions sought to problematise, within a specifically globalised contemporary culture, the dominance of neo-liberal corporate/commercial hierarchies. They did this through emphasising non-object orientated, temporal, experimental and networked forms of contemporary art, including an explicit focus on video art, interactive and multimedia projects. Likewise, such exhibitions also deliberately cast themselves inside broad socio-political frameworks, evincing a desire to undermine, through critical and dematerialising strategies, the contemporary unquestioned identity of art as an elite global circulatory commodity. Implicit to such critical strategies is a questioning of the framing of contemporary critical cultures by the universalising trends of a global corporate/commercial ambience.

However, the sheer scale demanded by exhibitions of contemporary art conceived on a global scale, such as biennales, encourages — indeed requires — precisely the type of corporate infiltration mentioned above. In addition, the ethical questions raised by art within the context of such shows are, ironically, presented via their dependency on sponsorship from large multinational corporations. Indeed, social critics of globalisation have directly cited global corporate sponsors of contemporary art, especially those most ubiquitously associated with its processes — Microsoft and IBM, for example — as well as corporations such as Sony and Transfield, for their unethical and exploitative investment in the economies of ‘developing’ and ‘Third World’ nations.\(^\text{32}\) Likewise, these global corporate institutions, based as they are on an enveloping culture of neo-liberal privatisation, have been accused of provoking, generally, global socio-political relations based explicitly on exploitation and inequality.\(^\text{33}\)

Not surprisingly, such investors require that such shows are ultimately ‘popular’ and therefore profitable; this encourages an image of contemporary art as ‘accessible’ rather than ‘critical’. For example, 2004’s Manifesta 5, held in San Sebastián — which, like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, lies in the heart of Basque territory in Spain, a region, ‘marked

\(^{32}\) See, for example, Manfred B. Steger, ‘The power of transnational corporations’, in Manfred B. Steger, Globalization, pp. 49–51. See also Bruno Amoroso, On Globalization: Capitalism in the 21st Century.
by more struggles and political tensions than almost any other in Europe— was noted for its aura of sentimentality, open apoliticism and core theme of 'closing one's eyes'. As globally distributed biennales of contemporary art become increasingly dependent on massive corporate backing, their image as inclusive and positively 'multicultural' is changing: they are now seen as more likely to instead disallow, or at least weaken, the genuine assertions of difference necessary for any effective critical cultural engagement of contested positions or oppositional frictions.

4: 2 Global/commercial: Contemporary culture now

The conventional frames of art discourse, its history and ethics, have largely dissolved with the rise of cultural studies and the nearly complete dominance of the art market.

Under the pressures of globalisation, the commercialisation of the contemporary art world, its institutions and its 'products', has accelerated to an unprecedented degree. Contemporary art now commands higher prices than ever before as a result of the integration of global markets. New urban and monetary hubs are displacing those intimately associated with the 'old world' European history of modernist art and industrialisation such as Paris; other global 'techno-centres' have sprung up in their place. These new-market metropolises, cities such as Beijing, Singapore and Taipei, are connected by the spectral global flows of virtual capital. This rapid expansion of global markets has produced new relationships between global corporations and contemporary artists, especially through the enlarging web of international commercial galleries seeking to profit from the globalised 'culture industry'.

The emphasis on the economic status of contemporary art as just another series of tradable global commodities has seen not only a decline in oppositional critical culture exhibited in commercial spaces, but also a rise in the extent to which contemporary artists are willing to unquestioningly and uncritically embrace corporate and commercial identifications. The closing circle between corporate influence and contemporary artist’s, their dealers and the museums in which they exhibit is, however, often predatory rather than equitable. As a type of global predation, the corporatisation of the global art market and its appropriation of critical practices through overt tactics of commodity 'branding' emulate the predatory activities of global

33 Ibid.
34 Marco Scotini, 'Sentimental in San Sebastián'.
35 Ibid.
36 John Mateer, 'Empires, ruins + networks: Art in real time and culture'.
37 Matt Price, 'Markets confident as records broken'.
corporate culture generally. Meanwhile, globalisation attempts to remove any ideological or ethical barriers to its ‘free trade’ ethos. Similarly, artists are also captured by the de-territorialising visibility of global design, fashion and commercial advertising networks.

Through such commercial means, the criticality of contemporary art as a medium of political engagement and cultural resistance, even if necessarily flawed or partial, is replaced by the enthusiastic embrace of populist and commercial agendas. This de-territorialising action, although two-way, still generally favours those global industries operating out of dominant financial Western centres such as New York. Thus contemporary ‘global culture’ becomes ever more synonymous with Western commercial culture even as it remains keen to portray its benevolent embrace of ‘difference’. Crucially, in this ‘global culture’, issues of social criticality are usefully commandeered as representations of radical, though in fact co-opted and defused, ‘alternatives’.

4: 2 (i) The globalisation of the commercial art market and the corporate share

The contemporary global art market is a singular and essentially circulatory entity. Under globalisation, it pursues its commercial agenda as a form of industry specialisation. Such market specialisation is also determined by a conception of art history that is often both regressive and amnesiac. The feigned or actual ignorance of art-critical histories, and especially their socio-critical dimensions, is relied on by the ‘neutral’ network of ‘branded’ commercial galleries to sell contemporary art ‘products’ globally. ‘Criticism’ is reframed here as a means of promoting continual desire for aesthetic novelty in a greatly expanded (though basically self-protective) market. Such commercial spaces, including but not limited to those currently initiated or sponsored by multinational corporations, are designed specifically to sell contemporary art — they have become part of the commodity culture of global capitalism.

While it could be argued that the global spread of commercial dealerships is not in itself responsible for the subsequent evident withdrawal of criticality in many of the examples of contemporary art they exhibit, it can also be argued that their deliberate and opportunistic courting of global, expressly corporate, culture is intrinsic to this transformation. This is because pressure, whether direct or implied and supported by the promise of capital, may influence such galleries to exhibit only work that is acceptable to the image of the corporate sponsor. Such a transformation occurs furthermore precisely because corporations and the advertising cultures they produce also rely on promoting a particular desirable self-image. More so under globalising conditions, they seek to offer that image to the widest possible transnational markets often via the marketing and selling of ‘universally’ desirable, usually western, leisure orientated
lifestyles. Now, the practice of contemporary art as socially committed, critical or analytic is being replaced concomitantly by its promotion of certain, unerringly middle-class Western lifestyles, marketed mainly according to recreation criteria.

In the global corporatisation of the art world, and via the influence within it of transnational media conglomerates, it is often implied that ‘creative’ lifestyles can simply be bought. At the same time, the narrowing of possibilities for genuinely ‘alternative’, non-consumerist lifestyles, or indeed art, is exacerbated by the growing dominance of a de-politicised global corporate culture. From an art perspective such a situation results because this culture, promoting its own power in terms of the sheer weight of its economic leverage, is made to seem on the one hand, benevolently attractive to contemporary artists seeking financial support for their work while on the other, its increasing domination of urban space withdraws sites once available for artists to practice and exhibit in through accelerated acts of privatisation. Additionally, everywhere available lifestyle ‘options’ are actually produced by globalisation’s popularisation of contemporary commodity culture — not, as is often assumed, the other way around. The contemporary production and consumption of art takes part in producing and promoting this universalised vision of a totalising global commercial culture. This is especially the case because the production of art has always been associated with a certain type of ‘freedom’ — traditionally, the artist is seen to be able to do and express what others in society cannot.

Under today’s global conditions, such creative freedom is assumed to be universal in precisely the same way that ‘consumer culture appears universal, because it is depicted as a land of freedom in which everyone can be a consumer’. Still, this freedom to consume is predicated on some very rigid expectations: at the same time, and particularly under the present economic pressures of global capitalism, ‘everyone must be a consumer: this particular freedom is compulsory’. In these circumstances, creative freedom and success are both based on an allegiance to a global commercial aesthetic that is in fact derived from the ‘core aesthetic of American capitalist culture, offering a vision of the good life and of paradise’. This quasi-corporate aesthetic is used in an instrumental way, to simply move and sell creative goods in volume, as, overall, contemporary artistic production ‘joins the consumerist system of signs’.

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38 See Jean Baudrillard, The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures, p. 189.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., p. 131.
The manner in which global capitalism produces a universal culture of commodity signs is especially evident in the way that commercial galleries display and sell contemporary art transnationally today. Indeed, the general dissemination of contemporary ‘global’ art is dependent on its affiliation with networks of international commercial galleries. Such galleries intervene to provide ‘brand equity’ for the art they exhibit, just as do many recently erected museums of contemporary art, as we have seen. Furthermore, internationally reputable commercial art galleries similarly promote a lifestyle conception of contemporary art linked to the economic rationalism of global investment criteria and aligned with the particular ‘brand identity’ the gallery has deemed most appropriate for the client demographic they aim for.

It will be obvious by now that the machinations set in motion by the expansion of global markets for contemporary art closely emulate the corporate and media cultures upon which they inherently depend for exposure. Within this generalised contemporary ‘global culture’, dominated more than ever by commercial and media forms, the role of art as a critical medium is regularly de-emphasised. In the same way, those who promote and mediate popular ‘lifestyle’ cultures also ‘tend to be politically conservative and hostile to criticism of a status quo in which they are major beneficiaries’. The self-protective role of the corporate commercial global art sector functions precisely according to the same logic, and major international advertisers scour a variety of media for references to themselves, ‘to determine whether they contain any editorial content that may be considered provocative, offensive or harmful’.

The influence of global corporate culture on the international art market and commercial gallery scene does not, however, preclude provocation or ‘criticism’ entirely. Indeed, provocation may be used specifically as ‘brand equity’ by commercial galleries to sell ‘challenging’ contemporary art, just as extreme violence is used to sell Hollywood movies worldwide. Once again, signs of the ‘freedom’ and ‘difference’ of the contemporary artist’s ‘alternative’ lifestyle become crucial selling points. This is regardless of the fact that many artists, faced with an enlarged free market in which to sell their work, rapidly conform anyway, especially in Western countries, to the corporate benefits that the globalised commercial art system suggests are on offer. All this while the artist’s supposedly inherent ‘difference’ is

43 Edward Herman and Robert McChesney, quoted in Joost Smiers, Arts Under Pressure: Promoting Cultural Diversity in the Age of Globalization, p. 133.
44 Ibid.
46 See, for example, this insightful reference in French novelist Michel Houellebecq’s 1999 fictional work Platform, which is underlined by an anti-globalisation narrative and whose principal protagonist,
precisely the commodity on sale on the art market, as a lifestyle option to be vicariously consumed by global, frequently corporate, art buyers. Of course corporate culture is innately vicarious, trading in images and representations of contemporary art based on conservative notions of the ‘universal’ ‘freedom’ and ‘difference’ of the artist as the ‘correct’ counterpoint to the self-disciplining be-suited ‘seriousness’ of global corporate culture.

Figure 19

The regressive return to ‘origins’ in reiterations of the ‘free’ lifestyle of the artist — now fully supported by a multinational global corporate climate — produces many examples of related artistic and corporate coupling. These expose the types of political and ideological values to which such couplings are firmly attached. For instance, Sydney-based artist Nell appeared in August 2004 on the front cover of local Australian independent newspaper, The Hub. In this photo, Nell, while not explicitly appearing in her role as an artist, though remaining recognisable as such, was modelling the return of ‘Little Johnny ’50s Retro’ fashion (see Figure # 19). The ‘Little Johnny’ of the headline is also an epithet for Australia’s conservative,

curiously, is a contemporary art bureaucrat working for the French ‘Ministry of Culture’: ‘Most of the artists I knew behaved exactly like entrepreneurs: they carefully reconnoitred emerging markets, then tried to get in fast. Just like entrepreneurs, they had been at the same few colleges, they were cast in the same mould’. Michel Houellebecq, Platform, p. 138.

47 In this instance, the contemporary video art of Australian practitioner Sean Gladwell comes to mind. The ‘difference’ consumed in the corporate collection of Gladwell’s work is located in such works’ deliberate celebration of ‘alternative’ youth cultures such as skateboarding, Bicycle Motor Cross (BMX) and break dancing. Such culture is likely to be especially attractive to corporate buyers because of its emphasis on a supposedly ‘free’, sporting, anti-authoritarian lifestyle. See Chapter 5 — The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation’s reinstated centre, 5: 2 (ii) Performing adolescence: The predictable global marketability of youth’s eternal return.

explicitly ‘corporate friendly’ Prime Minister, John Howard. Nell is represented by Sydney high-profile commercial gallery, Roslyn Oxley-9 so this representation of a contemporary Australian artist, here indirectly became a conduit connecting contemporary reactionary politics with equally nostalgic lifestyle values, especially those of the 1950’s, acceptable to a neo-conservative global corporate culture.

From a broader perspective, examples like this indicate a waning of Australia’s critical culture. As contemporary Australian artist and art theorist Charles Green notes:

The markers of this passing were the auction houses’ take-over of the contemporary art secondary market, the reappearance of predatory galleries skimming the top off the commercial mix and the rise of industry magazines like *Australian Art Collector*, unashamed in their boosterism and ruthlessly insightful in their instrumental use of almost all Australia’s most significant critics, and … whose role was now, pretty much, to lubricate the market machine. 50

The globalisation of the contemporary art market is infected by corporate demands, influences and practices to such an extent that today the culture of contemporary art, rather than being critical, ‘has lost ground to business culture, and become a franchise of the pervasive global marketplace’. 51 This marketplace uses contemporary art as the setting for ‘commercial messages’ whose task it is ‘to create the ambience in which the production of desire can take place’. 52 At the same time, the exclusionary nature of the commercial gallery system mimics contemporary commercial media and entertainment forms. Therefore reality TV shows such as Big Brother, produced globally in a variety of different countries, revolve around the somewhat sadistic pleasure audiences derive from the humiliation, marginalisation and exclusion of individual house members. 53 Likewise, the elitist and anonymous nature of global corporate culture, a culture aiming to present itself ‘differently’ and benevolently in every context, is ultimately hegemonic and endemically exclusivist.

49 Clive Hamilton, ‘Self-absorption wins the day’.
51 See Hal Foster, *Design and Crime and other Diatribes*.
53 Referring to this covert dimension of the way in which a reality TV show like *Big Brother* function psychologically, Slavoj Žižek extends further analogies to how the 2003 Iraqi war as represented in the same domesticated medium of television, renders the real suffering of Iraqi civilians, rarely seen anyway, practically nil. In the more benign context of *Big Brother* however, the expulsion and humiliation of house embers assumes in comparison an exaggerated significance. This is because Žižek argues, the everyday situation in post war Iraq is too extreme to be comprehended as a reality by those not directly affected, especially in the west, where at the same time, the banal yet in fact, heavily mediated and
The globalisation of corporate values via the exclusionary nature of the contemporary global art system and its worldwide dealerships further imitates the division of the contemporary geo-political world into ‘winners and losers’: those who uncritically embrace the corporate rhetoric of ‘free trade’ are winners, and those opposed to it are simply dismissed as economically or ideologically irrelevant. Overall, the quasi-corporate culture extolled today via globalisation’s neo-liberalisation of the global art market appropriates the same elitist criteria as were aimed at the oppositional culture of the historical avant-garde, simultaneously reducing art by de-territorialising evidence of its socially critical motivations.

Finally, the tendency of the global art market to favour discrete and transportable ‘products’ able to circulate more freely around the world has at the same time encouraged artists who are more than ever willing to capitalise on the portability and conventionality of ‘traditional’ media: painting, object-based sculpture, photography. For many contemporary artists faced with ‘a cultural-commercial system which threatens to engulf us’, creative motivation arises as seeming desire for complete and unquestioning incorporation into the now global market system — at the expense (although obviously there are exceptions) of any identifiable socio-critical or resistant positioning, especially with regard to this totalising system.

4: 2 (ii) Transgressing disciplinary boundaries: Global art as design, fashion and advertising

The economic paradigms of globalisation convert the semi-autonomous ‘impossible’ space of critical contemporary art into a space producing consensual commercial messages. Contemporary artists have today, as a result, internalised the designed spaces of new museums of contemporary art and the increasingly ‘designer’ spaces of the global shopping experience. The pervasive image of youthful ‘cool’ associated with contemporary popular and commercial culture succeeds in seducing not only average consumers but contemporary artists as well. Consequently, many artists courted in this way respond to an implied promise of a variety of

54 See Manfred B. Steger, Globalization.
57 See Thomas Frank, ‘The corporatisation of cool’.
commercial stardom once restricted solely to movie stars and television and media personalities.\textsuperscript{58}

The globalisation of the contemporary art market has also meant that artists increasingly place their works deliberately in commercial, often overtly ‘designer’ contexts. ‘Bad boy’ of the Young British Artists (yBa) scene, Damien Hirst, for example, transported his coloured ‘spot paintings’ — 300 of which he had produced up to 1999\textsuperscript{59} — to the fashionable context of a slick London bar.\textsuperscript{60} Here, the existing pseudo-Pop formalism of the work functioned as decorative ‘wallpaper’ while creating a ‘lifestyle’ ambience of inner-city chic. At the same time, Hirst’s self-conscious notoriety and reputation for art-world provocation was covertly commandeered, in the absence of any obvious ‘content’, as Hirst’s individual ‘risqué’ ‘brand’ became an advertisement for the commercial enticements of the bar itself. Not content with simply contributing to the creation of such designer social spaces though, Hirst later established his own restaurant, called Pharmacy, in London’s salubrious Notting Hill Gate. ‘Pharmacy’ was also the name of one of Hirst’s existing artworks: it dryly presented dozens of prescription medications in wall-to-wall glass cabinets. This effect was employed in the restaurant to create a clean, ‘empty’, neo-minimalist designer ambience — albeit in this case lent a ‘cutting edge’ through Hirst’s reputation as ‘provocative’.

Meanwhile, the economic conditions of globalisation continue to forge new sorts of corporate relations with artists. This occurs to such an extent that the actual living spaces of well-known contemporary artists can themselves be made to promote the same depersonalised, neo-minimalist and corporate ambience as that of new museums of art. The best example of this is the house of British contemporary artists Tim Noble and Sue Webster. Architect David Adjaye designed the artists’ house, ironically referred to as the ‘Dirty House’, in London’s gritty — but increasingly gentrified — East End. What is notable about it is the extent to which it projects the private subjective lives of the contemporary artists it houses. This is evident in the building’s general institutional appearance, its sheer scale, and the museological ambience of its interior spaces (see Figures \# 20 and \# 21).

\textsuperscript{58} This phenomenon was particularly evidenced by the yBa ‘movement’ in its harnessing of the contemporary tabloid and other popular press and its inflated media presentation of the ‘lifestyle’ of the contemporary (British) artist. See Julian Stallabrass, \textit{High Art Lite}.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., p. 161.
\textsuperscript{60} See Matthew Collings, \textit{This Is Modern Art}, episode 1: ‘I am a genius’.
The contemporary ‘designer’ experience is echoed also by contemporary artists eagerly locating their work in the coveted world of global fashion. However, this increasingly popular admixture bestows upon the contemporary art produced as a result an air of fashionable conformity rather than one suggestive of any critical cross-disciplinary transgression. In fact, today’s global fashion world, inherently reliant on the elite hierarchies established between competing labels, demands an *a priori* consensus about what is considered fashionable. Consequently it is innately politically conservative in the sorts of images, lifestyles and ‘looks’ it promotes, no matter how ‘avant-garde’ or ‘alternative’ they may superficially appear to be.

Today, when contemporary artists seduced by the fashion phenomenon attempt to bend it to other (possibly critical) ends, the results often still favour the commercial industry aesthetic. This is because it is in commercial and corporate realms that globalisation’s neo-liberal economic interests are most heavily invested. Italian artist Vanessa Beecroft, for instance, is currently highly regarded internationally for her performance tableaux, which are made up of ensembles of nude, or partially clad, (predominantly young female) models. Curiously, the uniformity and visual repetition of dress detail within these performance pieces serialises and subsumes the subjectivities of individual participants, turning them effectively into ‘living’ commodities.

The artists’ deliberate use of models from a multitude of ethnic origins at the same time tends to result in a packaging of race based on neo-colonial exoticist suggestions of nationally inscribed physical difference. It could also be claimed, however, that Beecroft’s work actually represents a self-reflexive feminist critical strategy commenting on the dehumanising standardisation of female experience and its representation under the hegemonic pressures of economic globalisation. Whichever view is correct, the artist’s models — she first
used friends and volunteers but now uses paid professionals — incite, more often than they criticise, the type of distanced, voyeuristic, sexualised though sexless, titillation central to the desire-producing machinations of the globalised worlds of fashion and advertising. Likewise, Beecroft's models, once dressed in awkward idiosyncratic 'anti-fashions', are increasingly attired in seductive clothing that uncritically enhances the global commodity mystique of elite haute couture (see Figure # 22).

![Figure 22](image)

![Figure 23](image)

Elsewhere, other artists whose work appropriates the look and commercialised aura of the global fashion industry explicitly emphasise their support for the growing synonymity of contemporary art and fashion. For instance, New Zealand's Lisa Reihana, an artist of Maori heritage, has 'professed to liking fashion, seeing the work that she has done in the realm of fashion as being akin to her high art photography and video work'. Still other contemporary artists will completely avoid references to critical or social issues, promoting their interest in fashion in simple entertainment terms: as British artist Sylvie Fleury, known for — amongst other things — her fetishised arrangements of high-end designer shopping bags (see Figure # 23), exhorts, 'I urge the audience to enjoy; whatever they must do to get their kicks.'

The origins of the penetration of contemporary art by international fashion are by no means ambiguous. In the end, it is a phenomenon thoroughly grounded in global neoliberalism's demand that contemporary art prove its relevance principally on populist and

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61 Part of the press generated by Beecroft's 1998 Show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York reads as follows: 'VB-35, Show featured 20 tall, gorgeous women, mostly professional models of a certain hauteur': Roberta Smith, 'Standing and staring, yet aiming for empowerment'.

62 Ibid. 'Fifteen wore elegant rhinestone bikinis and matching four-inch spike heels; the others just wore the spikes. This wardrobe was designed by Tom Ford of Gucci; the makeup, by Pat McGrath, included light body makeup and powdered hair that contributed to the walking mannequin effect'.

commercial industry grounds. Radically, even artists whose careers have for many years explicitly focused on intensely critical socio-political analysis can now successfully be détourned and used simply as adjuncts to the global world of high-class fashion. This is particularly evident in the particularly schizoid promotion below, which appeared in the apparently ‘neutral’ context of an Australian newspaper magazine supplement:

This month we invite you to tour William Kentridge’s latest exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, sponsored by Hugo Boss. Join the MCA’s head of artistic program, Judith Blackall, in a tour of more than 70 works from this internationally renowned South African artist. Then retire to the upstairs balcony for cocktails and a preview of Hugo Boss’s latest women’s range.

Another South African artist, Kendell Geers, has recognised the increase in this type of situation, pointing out that, on the whole, contemporary ‘capitalism neutralises any challenge to its power by turning art and creativity into a fashion’. In complete contrast, other international artists, such as Juergen Teller and Wolfgang Tillmans — the latter of whose work in art and fashion is especially hard to differentiate — pursue the increasingly close relationship between contemporary art and the fundamentally commercial ‘lifestyle’ imperatives of design and fashion in a thoroughly unquestioning way.

As globalisation has increasingly viewed fashion as art, international exhibitions have emerged to support this notion. The large photographic show, Fashioning Fiction, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in April 2004, was one such exhibition. More importantly, through exhibitions like this, the branded modern art museum is transformed into a marketplace promoting not only contemporary art, but also internationally elite fashion labels such as Prada, Ferretti, Comme de Garçons and Kate Spade. Artists working in the ‘trans-disciplinary’ arena of art and fashion participate in this transformation of contemporary ‘hybrid’ global culture, a transformation wrought in the end by ‘desire for proximity to power and

64 Sylvie Fleury, quoted in Uta Grosenick and Burkhard Riemschneider, eds, Art Now.
65 See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 1: 1 (iii) The Internationale Situationniste.
66 Contemporary South African artist William Kentridge is especially renowned for his poignantly critical analysis of the tumultuous events of his home country: apartheid and the subsequent disruptive and manipulative transition to democracy via the global ‘free-market’.
influence, with special emphasis on the art world.\textsuperscript{71} The concept of contemporary artistic fashionability is central to such an emphasis.

Elsewhere, writers on art and fashion such as Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who ‘deplore the definitive collapse between art and commercial culture exemplified by exhibitions such as \textit{Fashioning Fiction} as “tendentious, and worse, deeply boring”’,\textsuperscript{72} often conceal the influence of global commercial agendas. In fact Godeau, writing in the same article in New York’s \textit{Artforum}, earlier promotes the magazine on the exact grounds that over the years it has explicitly encouraged the cross-over between commercial fashion and contemporary art, ‘by featuring fashion as a subject relevant to contemporary art’, and, more revealingly, by ‘serving as a site for upscale fashion advertising’.\textsuperscript{73} The internationally disseminated ‘critical’ art journal is therefore presented here as also deliberately encouraging of the increased global consumption of Western fashion commodities and the cultural and class values they inevitably support.

Under globalisation, much ‘creative’ advertising has utilised its new-found cross-cultural allegiance to the globalised art world to its own advantage. Revealingly, the creative culture such advertising promotes has also explicitly denigrated oppositional political and social events. In particular, the iconography of mass protest has been inverted intentionally through such advertising in ways that ridicule the viability of social and cultural protest in general. For example, the United States-owned Diesel jeans and clothing company recently used imagery

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Abigail Solomon-Godeau, ‘Dressing down’, p. 196.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p. 193.
depicting glamorous youth in urban settings imitating the postures of protesters like those who participated in the massive spontaneous street actions of May ’68 in Paris. It was just such an adversarial anti-capitalist ‘street’ culture that those like Guy Debord, the Paris-based leader of the Internationale Situationniste, were also particularly influential, through cultural means, in supporting.

In the Diesel jeans advertisement, however, the ‘protesters’ are shouting and bearing placards upon which are written various banalities, such as ‘Free all goldfish’ (see Figure # 24), and ‘More green traffic lights.’ In cases such as this, contemporary critical and ethical concerns and the demand for social justice by actual protesters, as well as the historical relationship of such actions to international revolutionary politics, are replaced by the purely symbolic ‘lifestyle freedoms’ supposedly now available to ‘everyone’ via the unfettered global consumption of Western fashion commodities. This attempted reducing of contemporary critical and political culture in the global terrain of advertising was insightfully caricatured by contemporary cultural critic Thomas Frank in his sarcastic catchcry, ‘Resist! Rebel! Shop!’

While the advertising campaign did not involve contemporary artists directly, the campaign did emphasise globalisation’s appropriation of and strategic closeness to contemporary art trends. New York’s 2004 Whitney Biennial of American Art, for example — which occurs in the economic and cultural heartland of the empire of the United States — included numerous individual works that explicitly emphasised contemporary art’s ‘failed’ relationship to politics as well as the failure of the art of contemporary politics per se. Some, such as Sam Durant, underlined, no matter how knowingly, 1960’s protest culture, seeing its pathos and patina of nostalgia today. Others, such as the performance group Los Super Elegantes, visibly located social protest at the centre of commercial post-Pop culture, while producing photographic images of ‘ironic’ performances, in a spirit of ‘fun’, that look exactly like stills from contemporary MTV or advertising (see Figure # 25).

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74 See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 1: 4 (iv) Global protest and a-centrist opposition.
75 See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 1: 1 (iii) The Internationale Situationniste.
76 See Thomas Frank, ‘The corporatisation of cool’.
Of the Whitney Museum of American Art, where this particular show was staged, it has also been said that since the 1980’s, no other museum has ‘identified itself more thoroughly with corporate America’.\textsuperscript{77} Under globalisation, advertising and art combine, seeming to simultaneously divert and neutralise contemporary possibilities for social dissent. Furthermore, contemporary art’s allegiance to ‘utopian’ social-revolutionary avant-gardes such as Constructivism is wholly diminished through the blatantly populist corporate manipulation of its imagery. This fact is evident as well in advertising’s reinvigorated and atavistic use of the imagery of the political avant-garde, as in Nike’s simulation of Russian avant-garde socialist design to advertise its global ‘fun run’ (compare Figures # 26 and # 27). Here, oppositional ‘socialist’ culture is instrumentally evoked in a simple attempt to sell more sports shoes; shoes manufactured, incidentally, for the global (essentially United States owned and directed) Nike Corporation by low-paid workers in ‘peripheral’ Third World countries.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77} Chin Tao Wu, \textit{Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980’s}, p. 189.
These significantly commercialised deployments of representations of cultural dissent occur today alongside the large-scale mobilisation of 'anti-globalisation' protesters around the world. The latter phenomenon has even led some observers to warn, even via conservative media channels such as the London Financial Times, that 'the protestors are winning. They are winning on the streets. Before too long they will be winning the arguments. Globalisation is fast becoming a cause without credible arguments.\textsuperscript{79} Threatened by opposition at this equally enlarged societal level, the neo-liberal economic model extolled by globalisation covetously propels the contemporary art world away from its potential alignment with social critique, forcing it increasingly into a fixed contractual relationship with a contemporary corporate/commercial 'global culture'.

**4: 3 Globalisation and institutional hybridity: Complexity or opportunism?**

'Hybridity' is one of the core preconditions of the current era of globalisation. The cross-pollination of commercial and socially critical disciplines, as represented, say, by the contemporary mix of design, fashion, advertising and contemporary art, is part of globalisation's general hybridisation of contemporary 'global culture'. The effects of this are not always restrictive and socially negative. In fact, hybridity has also produced post-colonial critical cultures concerned with resisting colonialism's traditional emphasis on cultural purity and stylistic continuity.\textsuperscript{80} Accordingly, some critics have looked to this global model of hybridity to reassess the contribution of cultures usually conceived as lying outside the centralised, usually Western, domains of contemporary cultural and economic influence, arguing that 'in post-colonialist theory's world-picture of annexed subjects, attention should be paid to artists in peripheral societies in terms of their contributions to mainstreams, rather than exclusively of their subversion of those terms'.\textsuperscript{81}

What this emphasis on hybridisation has done, in terms of the creation of new models of global contemporary art institutions, is foster similar trans-disciplinary hybrids. But rather than producing socially and critically engaged global art communities, this tendency towards

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\textsuperscript{78} See the Make Trade Fair campaign at http://www.oxfam.au/labourrights.  
\textsuperscript{80} See, for instance, Chapter 3 — Contested global contexts: Critical regionalisms contesting globalisation's 'new world order'.  
\textsuperscript{81} Rasheed Araeen, quoted by Charles Green in, 'Empire', Meridian: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art catalogue, p. 11.
institutional hybridisation has often succeeded in producing the opposite. The deliberately ambiguous ‘between-space’ created by the formation of such hybrid institutions is another reflection of the fundamental conditions of globalisation’s economically integrationist agendas.

The present accelerated hybridisation of global art institutions willingly facilitates multinational corporations in their de-territorialisation of contemporary art as a socio-critical practice. These corporations, such as IBM and Sony, now house ‘hybrid’ galleries within their own premises, premises that are identified automatically with branded and overwhelmingly profit-orientated motives. At the same time, other very different types of contemporary art spaces, such as Australia’s Asia Australian Arts Association (4A) and Europe’s Soros centres, have maximised the potential economic benefits they might gain under current globalised conditions by specifically marketing themselves on multiple seemingly contradictory platforms, as semi-commercial, semi-government funded international ‘cultural centres’. Even more indicative of globalisation’s hybridising cultural effects is the way in which certain contemporary artist-run initiatives (ARIs), such as Melbourne’s 1st Floor and a range of other such spaces and initiatives in Britain and the United States, once considered places for independent, non-profit critical cultural engagement, have themselves assumed an overt institutional and commercial ambience. The alterations such hybridisation makes to a global contemporary culture founded on autonomous critique, even if only partial, and ‘curiosity driven’ experimentation, are often significantly negative indeed.

4: 3 (i) Hybrid model (1): The global corporate gallery

Among the most obvious instances of hybrid galleries today are those that are physically installed on corporate premises. Moving art visibly into the corporate domain, into the showroom, office or large financial institution, effectively enables such contexts to appropriate the social and ‘critical’ values of contemporary art. At the same time, art’s supposed socially ‘benevolent’ identity becomes inextricably linked to its potential financial value. Also, art housed in corporate premises is inevitably disengaged from its social or critical capabilities, instead coming to stand in for the commercial identity of the corporation and the aura of global ‘political’ power it exudes.

At present, global distributed corporations such as IBM, Sony, the William Morris cigarette company, Pirelli, Volvo and BMW all house art galleries within their premises. This relationship has been promoted by such organisations in terms of ‘good corporate citizenship’, 82

82 Chin Tao Wu, Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980’s, p. 189.
and explicit evidence of the respective corporations' global cultural awareness. However, corporations maintaining public gallery spaces simultaneously 'not only obtain substantial financial benefits from the public sector as a hidden public subsidy, but also retain the ownership of the gallery space' even if "corporatised public space" itself is ultimately an oxymoronic concept that cannot be equally true for both parties involved'. Meanwhile, the corporation's control of the 'public' gallery space it has absorbed diverts attention from its acquisitive and exploitative global aspirations by promoting the artworks it exhibits purely for their aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, such aestheticisation is employed to glamorise already elite markets, such as the high-end car market.

Global corporations, in the process of establishing such hybrid gallery contexts, not only portray them as places of 'corporate entertainment', but also target the art world through inviting the participation of internationally recognised artists and curators, as was the case with Britain's NatWest bank. The bank's corporate gallery employed, with much media attention, Rosemary Harris, who had spent 9 years as a curator at London's Tate Gallery. The press releases and catalogue texts produced for global exhibitions in such new hybrid-corporate art spaces likewise emulate an air of research and scholarship. Corporate-housed galleries of this type, however, definitely do not aim to provide an 'experimental space or one for articulating any dissenting voice'. Instead the corporate art space uses contemporary art to globally market its own products, services and commodities. That such a trend is indeed global is made especially clear by the IBM gallery in Manhattan, whose exhibitions have been 'drawn from different continents, making it one of the itinerary stops on the international cultural circuit'.

The global circuit created by the spread of multinational corporate invested 'hybrid' galleries uses contemporary art as a symbol and an advertisement for its expanding control of global markets. So the issue of multinational corporate control appears also in the realm of contemporary culture, where it has the same effects as it does in contemporary politics: it removes urgent socio-critical concerns, and replaces them with the apparently rational, 'neutral' economic ones of global neo-liberalism.

83 Ibid., p. 201.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 209.
87 Ibid., p. 207.
4: 3 (ii) Hybrid model (2): The multi-platform international ‘cultural centre’

The emergence of hybridised art institutions, witnessed by the rise of corporate-run, corporate-owned galleries, is perhaps most explicitly evocative of the effectiveness with which a global corporate ambience has pervaded the terrain of contemporary art. However, other types of global hybrid spaces betray quite different operations. Within the globalised field of contemporary art production, a terrain which supposedly intrinsically values cultural ‘difference’, such difference may use, for example, as a selling point: to both advertise specific cultural values and win additional funding from specific sources.

A good example of this type of global hybrid gallery is the Asia Australia Art Association, of which Gallery 4A, located in central Sydney, is a foundational component. What marks Gallery 4A as a product of globalisation’s hybridising tendencies is its successful maximisation of a number of parallel, though seemingly contradictory, cultural and economic identities: it is at the same time corporate-commercial, government-funded, and artist-run. Financial support from the Australia China Business Council, as well as from foreign national embassies and the Sydney City Council,99 have proven instrumental in Gallery 4A’s expansion and present identity as a ‘serious’ ‘multicultural’ institution. Gallery 4A stages many shows that specifically target particular Asian communities, presenting works by contemporary artists from Southeast Asia, for instance, or focusing on the history of Chinese and Asian communities in Sydney and Australia. Gallery 4A has also regularly obtained funding, despite its semi-privatised status, from the federal arts funding body, the Australia Council for the Arts. It has been able to access such funds because Gallery 4A also deliberately targets contemporary Australian culture ‘in general’, exhibiting many artists who do not have Chinese or Asian heritage as well as those who do. In addition to all these incomes, Gallery 4A has also received funding from the Australia Council Young and Emerging Artists Initiative for artist-run organisations, despite the fact that it does not publicise itself in any way on these grounds.90 Presently the situation is slightly different, with Gallery 4A more commonly referred to by its umbrella title, the Asia Australia Arts Centre, and recognised primarily as a government funded Contemporary Art Space (CAS). Nevertheless, Gallery 4A’s list of corporate sponsors is extensive. At the same time, the gallery type it is still listed in other contexts as commercial.91

A contemporary exhibition space such as Gallery 4A is a curious product of the

90 Ibid.
globalisation process, because it maximises its portrayal of cultural difference while simultaneously aiming at a generalised, non-specific concept of international contemporary art. Meanwhile, it also capitalises on the culture of ‘alternative’ artist-run spaces, spaces that are by nature voluntary and self-directed by artists on a non-profit basis. Galleries such as Gallery 4A also have counterparts in highly visible international locations such as New York,\textsuperscript{92} and are echoed by other hybrid exhibition spaces, such as the globally distributed Soros Centres for Contemporary Art (SCCA), which themselves form part of the larger global ‘educational’ and cultural institution, Open Society Foundation Soros (OSFS), which is funded by United States billionaire entrepreneur George Soros.\textsuperscript{93}

Such hybrid multi- or trans-cultural spaces, while productive in their engagement with local cultures and diasporas, tend to avoid overt or site-specific representations of critical issues, preferring instead rather generalised displays of ‘multicultural’ diversity. The general terms in which such cultural diversity is represented become then a convenient means of marketing across the broadest possible cultural field globally. This is very similar to the way multinational corporate conglomerates seek to capitalise at one time on as many parallel global markets as possible. They do this by concealing, behind a seemingly unified corporate image or ‘brand’, multiple companies producing unrelated products. With the current global preference for this type of ‘multi-platform’ hybridisation, cultural specificities and ‘difference’ and the critical issues they raise in site-specific contexts regularly mask the pursuit of international contemporary culture that is part of the dominant neo-liberal business model.

\textit{4: 3 (iii) Hybrid model (3): Independent artist-run organisations simulating commercial and state institutions}

Contemporary art’s capitalising on the underlying imperatives of the global ‘neo-liberalisation’ of contemporary culture has further flow-on effects. These appear also in the ‘grass roots’ activities of independent artist-run initiatives (ARIs). Within this terrain, the effects of globalisation’s valorisation of economic prowess are particularly acute. ARIs are, historically, self-directed, critically autonomous spaces not automatically beholden to the economic and narrowly ‘professional’ legitimisations demanded of commercial galleries and museums. The fact that many contemporary ARIs have begun to imitate the operational structures and

\textsuperscript{92} Such a sister space is New York’s Asia Society, whose current director Melissa Chiu, was previously the director of Sydney’s Asia Australia Arts Association.

\textsuperscript{93} This organisation operates mainly in Central and Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union, but also in Guatemala, Haiti, Mongolia, Africa, and the Caucasus, Southeast Asia, Turkey and the United States. See www.soros.al/English

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emphases of such corporate-affiliated institutions is telling. It indicates the extent to which
globalisation’s promotion of an international commercial aesthetic has succeeded in permeating
even those communities previously most likely to act in socially critical or culturally resistant
ways.

Indeed, without the necessity to follow commercial or institutional criteria, ARIs that do
ape corporate art galleries and museums do so more through the desire to be symbolically
associated with the prestige of new global flows of capital. The specific transformation of the
socio-critical role and direction of ARIs occurring now suggests, globally as well, ‘the wider
failure of a culture of opposition’.94 From this failure, the idea of autonomous contemporary
exhibition spaces comes to be associated more and more with deliberately catering to the
expectations of the existing ‘market’ represented by contemporary commercial galleries and
new, ‘spectacular’ museums of contemporary art. Consequently, the notion of an oppositional
‘anti-establishment’ artist-directed critical culture is gradually eroded as it is regarded as more
‘contemporary’, and certainly more beneficial from a ‘career’ point of view, to simply ‘accept
the establishment and work alongside it’.95

The Freeze exhibition, central to the birth of the yBa ‘movement’, is a good example of
the aforementioned tendency. It was staged in a London Docklands warehouse in 1988 by the
then recently graduated — but now world famous — Damien Hirst, amongst others. The
exhibition strongly evidenced the recent consensual hybridisation of the international artist-run
scene as a potential critically engaged ‘alternative’. In the spirit of entrepreneurialism, Freeze
strategically targeted those in the British art world who ‘mattered’, especially the cities’
numerous elite collectors and curators.96 At the same time, an expensive ‘coffee table’ style
catalogue was produced, exactly mimicking those offered by ‘official’ cultural institutions such
as the nearby Tate Gallery, to market the show both for its duration and afterwards. In the same
spirit of corporate imitation, Hirst and two fellow artists went on to form the very corporate-
sounding Sellman, Hirst and Freedman ‘company’, the purpose of which was to stage and
promote exhibitions — and sell the work — of London art graduates.97

Overt entrepreneurialism is certainly apparent in the activities of recent ARIs, such as 1st
Floor in Melbourne. 1st Floor frequently exhibits design objects and contemporary fashion,
regularly participating in the internationally visible Melbourne Fashion Week, at the same time

94 Julian Stallabrass, High Art Lite, p. 54.
95 Critic Carl Freedman, quoted in Ibid.
96 Ibid., p. 52.
97 Ibid.
as staging shows of contemporary art, many of which have a distinct pop-culture focus. Yet, from a socially critical perspective, it has been stated elsewhere that ‘1st Floor, one of the best alternative artist-run spaces in Melbourne, showed no significant indication of the vast social shifts in Australia, or even locally.’98 The key orientation of this model of ‘hybrid’ artist-run spaces is therefore a concern to mimic contemporary ‘global culture’, usually meaning culture buoyed by overtly commercial or explicitly ‘professional industry’ biases. Furthermore, such quasi-commercial hybridisation devalues site-specific critique, preferring an image of contemporaneity dominated by the ‘universalisation’ and highly visible global circulation of commercial cultural images and codes.

The reason why so-called emerging artists are willing to defer to this system, it could be suggested, is because they are seduced by the inflated symbolic significance, exaggerated under globalisation, of ‘pure’ economic exchange.99 It is further illuminating that such a shift in the critical identity of contemporary ARIs occurs at the same time that ‘In Australia, it is difficult to imagine a radical intervention at any level in the art world, as there are few gaps that aren’t controlled either by the dictates of the government art infrastructure or the art market.’100 This situation further testifies to the waning critical engagement of independent ARIs hybridised in this manner, which everywhere ‘seem concerned to avoid political confrontation’.101

This apparent diminishing of critical or cultural opposition produced by ARIs under globalisation is perhaps most telling in the United States, where globalisation’s core values are most fervently pursued. It is consequently also not surprising that in the United States, ‘in the alternative-space movement … what has been constructed … is not an alternative to, but a miniature replica of, the contemporary art market, a kind of Junior Achievement School for young culture-industrialists’.102 In instances like this, hybrid ARIs, responding to the increase of corporate influence over the international contemporary art world, mirror, no matter how impractically, its dominant values by foregoing their potential for semi-autonomous socio-critical engagement.

100 John Mateer, ‘Empires, ruins + networks: Art in real time and culture’, p. 3.
101 Ibid.
4: 4 ‘Benevolent’ domination: Globalisation’s vision of the contemporary ‘culture industry’

The current ‘streamlining’ of contemporary art under the neo-liberal economic paradigms of globalisation dramatically recasts their critical function. This is especially true as the institution of contemporary ‘global’ art depends increasingly on the attempted worldwide economic integration of its various interrelated institutions: art schools, museums and commercial galleries, as well as the hybrid intersections these elicit. While such hybrids can and do function critically in particular instances, at another extreme, they also reflect globalisation’s driving cultural motivation: to integrate contemporary art’s institutional scaffolding into a culture-industry model now applied on a global scale. In this process, art-criticality is drawn safely into the orbit of a contemporary ‘neutral’ ‘global culture’ saturated with commercial and corporatised symbols. The dominant discourse of global neo-liberal economics at the same time favours a Western liberal democratic\textsuperscript{103} consensual ‘middle ground’. Here, the concept of art as actively practised socially or ethically is of purely representational significance. This is because in contemporary art, as elsewhere, the prevailing focus on the integrated global economy leads to a situation where ‘politics is reduced to a theatre of appearances’.\textsuperscript{104}

Meanwhile, the general integration into the global art world of corporate ‘administering’ spaces, plus a pervasive corporate ambience, enact a dual transformation of the identity of the contemporary artist and of his or her audience. Under such conditions the artist is constructed narrowly and unquestioningly as an ‘industry specialist’ and contemporary ‘service provider’\textsuperscript{105}, at the same time as audiences are treated as distracted consumers, randomly grazing diverse cultural products across a globally diffuse, tourist-orientated plateau. Furthermore, the increasingly interconnected aspects of the institutionalised ‘global art world’, as well as its foregrounding of the image of the contemporary artist as an uncritical ‘culture industry specialist’, tends to iterate a dominant hierarchical model of cultural production determined by the intimately intertwined, though ultimately separated co-dependence of artists, curators, dealers and corporate sponsors. Under globalisation, the latter now intervene to actually help


\textsuperscript{105} See Sheila Slaughter and Larry L. Leslie, Academic Capitalism: Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University.
define the very productive conditions and meanings of 'global' art and culture.\textsuperscript{106}

It is no coincidence that these types of transformations occur at precisely the same time that multinational corporations are massively investing in contemporary art globally. This reverses the once central role of social criticism within contemporary art: criticism is now instrumentally employed as 'brand equity', which the individual artist trades on the global art market. Simultaneously, the artist comes to be regarded as a 'commodity with a special purchase on criticality'.\textsuperscript{107} Supported by an increasingly corporate-commercial global art network, criticality itself, as an 'immaterial good', the product of 'invisible' intellectual labour, is made accessible to the global commodity market as a virtual 'object' via globalisation's spectralisation of economics and its continuing privatisation of the social sphere.

As this happens, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between 'critical art' and entertainment forms. Likewise, it becomes equally difficult to distinguish between a dominant global culture of neo-liberal affirmation and one of historically informed critical contestation, as 'subversion in the service of one's own convictions finds easy transition into subversion for hire; criticism turns into spectacle'.\textsuperscript{108} The global condition this provokes in contemporary art is well described by Polish-born conceptual and photo-media installation artist Piotr Uklanski, who rightly states, 'It's so hard to decipher the difference between “criticism” and marketing these days.'\textsuperscript{109} Under globalisation, the crisis of the critical 'object' of contemporary art — though this 'object' resists complete integration — pervades every level of contemporary cultural production. This is especially so as the corporate imperatives of globalisation continue to pursue the neo-liberal market integration of the related institutions of the contemporary art world.

\textsuperscript{106} See Chin Tao Wu, \textit{Privatising Culture: Corporate Art Intervention Since the 1980's}, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 47.
Chapter 5

The view from here: Contemporary Australian art targeting globalisation’s reinstated centre

Today, globalisation discourse self-consciously categorises contemporary Australian culture as ‘post-colonial’. Previously, Australian culture was invariably perceived as irredeemably ‘antipodean’ in its marginality to European and U.S. centres of cultural influence. However, far from simply dislodging a previous hierarchical cultural model based on a centre and its peripheries, globalisation, largely and paradoxically through its prioritising of the ‘placeless’ virtuality of contemporary media forms, merely supplants an older form of centrism with a newer, as ‘representation goes mad, but with an implosive insanity which, far from being eccentric, casts longing eyes at the centre, toward its own repetition en abyme’.¹ Thus in cultural and economic terms, the current empire of the United States, heavily dependent on its endlessly productive ‘image factories’ and on massively inflated in the sense of the symbolic importance they are presently accorded, financial institutions such as the World Bank and the WTO, could easily be regarded as the ‘epicentre (but in no sense the sole embodiment) of globalisation’.² It is towards and occasionally against the cultural and institutional values of this contemporary hegemonic culture that contemporary Australian art, currently obsessed with its global ‘presence in the centre’,³ is orientated.

This global situation explains why ambitious artists from all parts of the world, including Australia, direct their professional attention towards those urban centres — such as New York or Los Angeles — most likely to enhance both the economic and ‘contemporary’ status of their creative production. This situation would also explain why ‘frequently, being “international” or “contemporary” in art is nothing but the echo of being exhibited in elite spaces on the island of Manhattan’.⁴ In this way, the ‘global’ validation of an artist’s work is still considered to be represented primarily by either physically relocating from the southern (‘antipodean’) periphery to the northern centres of global economic and cultural influence, or deliberately emphasising the similarities of the peripheral culture to that of the hegemonic global centre.

¹ Jean Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death, p. 146.
² Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 11.
Meanwhile, Australia continues to develop its positive political and cultural relationship with globalisation’s economic centre, the United States. At the same time, it continues to pursue authoritarian, self-protective and insular domestic policies that emphasise its physical as well as metaphoric status as an island, 'extending a fortress mentality at home'.\(^5\) The current Australian government, buying into this ‘land of plenty’ island outpost mentality completely, wholeheartedly attempts to insulate this country’s ‘singular’ democratic freedoms from outside (especially non-Western) cultures that are regarded with suspicion, particularly in a ‘time of terror’. Whether or not contemporary Australian artists themselves vote for the right-wing social and political agendas of the Howard government, the sheer success of that government, its ‘popularity’ and domination of the current local political and cultural climate, is undeniable. This political climate deeply affects, both directly and indirectly, much of the culture currently being produced by Australia’s most globally ‘successful’ artists.

Australian culture’s longing to be rewarded by being placed visibly at the centre of a ‘global’ culture is evident in its harnessing of numerous nationalist myths about what actually constitutes an ‘Australian’ mentality. Such myths portray contemporary Australia as quintessentially ‘classless’, made up of an undifferentiated, ‘aspirational’ and supposedly ‘neutral’ middle-class.\(^6\) Affiliated with this myth is the myth of Australia’s innate youthfulness, its sport-fixated celebration of physical prowess and its identity as a ‘young’, globally emergent nation. Revealingly, it is on these last grounds particularly that Australian culture promotes itself — alongside the many campaigns of multinational advertisers saturated with positive images of today’s youthful ‘global culture’.

Additionally varieties of ‘progressive’ contemporary Australian art seek to stress their critical opposition to the sorts of mainstream political, social and cultural values central to globalisation, such as rampant individualism. However, often apparent in such overtly ‘socially directed’ work is a pervasive attachment to narrowly ‘professional’ criteria and narcissistic self-promotion that merely reiterates the central modernist myth, now applied to the contemporary ‘global’ artist, of creative individualism. In such cases, institutionally marketable ‘self-branding’ often precedes and overrides any effective contesting engagement with the urgent socio-critical

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\(^5\) Nikos Papastergiadis, ‘South-south-south’, ibid., p. 3.  
\(^6\) In this way, contemporary Australian culture seeks to distance itself from the class-determined culture of its British parent, presenting itself as instead the most likely ‘new world’ partner of the contemporary United States.
issues facing Australian culture. This is not surprising in a global scenario where ‘concepts become “brand names” made available for all kinds of ideological operations’.  

Obviously, crucially central also to Australia’s global cultural identity is the question of the place of contemporary indigenous art within it. Today, in the ‘post-colonial’ era of globalisation, contemporary indigenous art has aligned itself increasingly with overtly technology-based, cinematic or related photo-media practices, as a way of distinguishing itself from the assumed cultural fixity of the ‘traditional’ indigenous art of a ‘dead centre’. 8 Either that or it has adapted traditional forms in ways that are both virulently critical of the present political sideling of Aboriginal issues and politics and affirming of the potential of indigenous cultures to resist their wholesale mainstream/commercial appropriation. At the same time, it has to be recognised that the current worldwide popularisation of contemporary Australian Aboriginal art, of both ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ kinds, has not simply been achieved through the activist agency of its individual practitioners. In fact, such popularisation has resulted as well from globalisation’s prodigious capacity to appropriate, internalise and market cultural difference. In fact, the very term ‘Aboriginal art’, so popular on the global market, has additionally been criticised as a Euro-centric neo-colonial invention, ‘a white man’s thing’.  

5: 1 The Invention of a ‘new’ middle class: Recent Australian art aiming to portray a culture of undifferentiated affluence

The resounding 2004 victory of the Australian conservative Liberal/National coalition, which has also given it control of both upper 10 and lower houses of parliament for the first time in 23 years, has been claimed to have been produced by the ‘narrow-mindedness and preoccupation with self that characterises modern Australia after two decades of market ideology and sustained growth’. 11 Significantly, the current dominance of market ideology defining the Australian

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8 Australian indigenous art is linked to dual territories of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’. On the one hand, such art has been colonially parcelled as representing Australia’s ‘true’ interior: a ‘dead centre’, a terra nullius of supposed techno-cultural absence. On the other hand, this supposedly ‘empty place’ is the traditional homeland of what is in fact Australian indigenous art’s indissoluble cultural complexity.
9 Aboriginal art has become a product of the times. A commodity. It is the result of a concerted and sustained marketing strategy, albeit one that has been loose and uncoordinated. There is no Aboriginal art industry. There is, however, an industry that caters for Aboriginal art. The key players in that industry are not Aboriginal; they are mostly white people whose areas of expertise are in the fields of Anthropology and “Western art”: Richard Bell, ‘Bell’s theorem: Aboriginal art, it’s a white man’s thing’.
10 Curiously, the upper house majority is represented by only one member.
11 Clive Hamilton, ‘Self-absorption wins the day’.
middle class is also reflected in the increasingly centrist policies of the opposition Labor Party. This is particularly evident in Labor’s economic plans to strategically target Australia’s ‘new’ middle class, ‘with its army of contractors, consultants, franchisees and entrepreneurs’.12 Labour’s core policies are likewise self-consciously aligned with a consistently lauded middle-class culture of material aspiration13 where, it is believed, ‘consumption is inherently individualising’.14

Of course such prevailing attitudes appear in contemporary Australian art also. Thus young artists ‘whose is only motivation is to become successful’15 are left with an obvious dominant field of activity, the expanded commodity market, ‘for which they can only supply commodities’.16 Meanwhile, second-generation ‘professional’ artists have ‘graduated from art school fully expecting to have steady sales, frequent exhibitions and a comfortable lifestyle’.17

Contemporary art produced in Australia confirms these socio-political conditions at two levels. First, certain work self-consciously harnesses recognisable contemporary media imagery, aiming to portray ‘neutral’ contemporary lifestyles — lifestyles which in fact affirm global neoliberalism’s ideal of an undifferentiated majority culture of middle-class affluence. The favoured representational centrality of this endemically passive and pacified middle-class subject, Caucasian almost without exception, also frequently achieves prominence in contemporary depictions dominated by the iconography of material comfort that is supposedly indicative of the nationalist myth of Australia as the ‘lucky country’,18 as a nation devoid of class antagonism.19 Second, such directions are represented within naturalised, local/domestic

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12 See Mark Latham, ‘ALP must be a middle class party’.
13 See Chapter 2 — The Empire and its allies: ‘Enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus, 2: 2 (iii) Contemporary art in Australia: Between masters in the middle of the road.
16 Ibid.
17 See Marc Spiegler, ‘Too many galleries, not enough art’.
18 The myth of Australia as the ‘lucky country’ has been central to its self-image for some time. The phrase suggests Australia as a land of unlimited natural wealth and unlimited physical beauty. At the same time, Australia’s identity as an ‘island continent’, a land separated and protected from the sorts of wars and political crises endemic to ‘old Europe’, is also crucial to this national mythology. Furthermore, the term ‘lucky country’ has also often been used to suggest the ‘fair play’, considered typical of the Australian ‘way of life’, which readily makes room for diverse and aspiring Others. Yet the notion of such ‘outsiders’ belonging to a specific national consciousness occurs only if they demonstrate willingness to embrace the dominant national mythology of Australia’s supposedly inherent fairness. This paradox has become only too obvious via the Australian Liberal/National government’s recent and rigid policing of its territories and authoritarian incarceration of ‘boat people’.
19 Lately this formative myth of Australia as a ‘classless’ society was seriously challenged, by noted Australian psychologist and social researcher Dr Hugh Mackay. Mackay told a meeting of local councils in Canberra that ‘the traditional Australian notion of a classless society no longer exists and the country

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micro-narratives that succeed symbolically in evacuating any serious references to external narratives of contemporary cultural and political accountability. The seemingly myopic inwardness of such work attempts to deny that ‘struggle’, including class struggle, is foundational to the construction of contemporary subjectivities.20

5: 1 (i) Art at all the Right parties: Contemporary Australian art privileging a ‘non-struggling’ class

The coincidence of the current rise of the Australian conservative Right, with its ‘relentless promotion of self-interest and the rejection of the politics of social progress’,21 and an ‘emerging’ Australian contemporary art which places at its centre the symbols of a pervasive and affluent consumerist culture, is not accidental. A good example of such art, one among many, is that of young Melbourne-based practitioner Sean Meilak.

Meilak’s work was included in 2004 in the exhibition Swoon at Melbourne’s redesigned Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Swoon was self-consciously promoted as ‘groovy and gorgeous’,22 its curatorial intention said to be ‘to elevate the viewer beyond the mundane of the everyday’.23 However, the ‘everyday’ from which the viewer is being elevated in this exhibition, and specifically in Meilak’s work, is one that includes ‘actually existing’ social, political or class struggles or issues of cultural difference.

Meilak’s works, such as his 2003 series of gouache paintings The Way We Live Today (see Figure # 28), depict his immediate circle of friends, described as ‘young and cool acquaintances’,24 minutely and laboriously transposed from photographs. In these works, glamorous local youths pursue leisure activities within the precinct of a Melbourne suburban home. Some recline on prestige cars, imitating the clothing and postures of contemporary fashion advertising. Overall, Meilak’s paintings represent a localised quasi-fictitious urban milieu where, it is implied, lifestyles and values can simply be purchased.

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is heading instead towards a society based on the distribution of wealth [ ... and furthermore] that Australia is fast developing into a society focussed solely on income': Hugh Mackay, quoted in ‘Australia no longer a ‘classless’ society': Researcher', Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC), at www.abc.net.au/act/news/200411/s1239336.htm, 9 November 2004.
20 Michel Foucault was particularly thorough in his explication of the power relations that structure individual subjects. See Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge.
21 Clive Hamilton, ‘Self-absorption wins the day’.
23 Ibid.
Additionally, they espouse a vision of an Australian middle-class defined, as well as constrained, by its conspicuous consumption habits. It is a myopic vision of a social scene and reaffirms the hierarchical politics of inclusion and exclusion, a centre and its peripheries, ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’; rather than critiquing this scene, the works seem consciously to aspire to the values it supports. Likewise, the underlying neutral ‘classlessness’ assumed to define Australia as the ‘lucky country’, which underlies the social scene Meilak has chosen to depict, represents a mainstream that is increasingly depoliticised, seemingly unaware of or unconcerned about the often exploitative global relations that enable such local urban privileging.\textsuperscript{25}

The nearness of Meilak’s work to globalisation’s ascendant commercialised leisure culture is additionally testified to by its ‘soap opera undercurrents, revealing an affinity with the gauche characterisations of The Bold and the Beautiful’\textsuperscript{,26} and central characters who are ‘the embodiment of an unattainable and enviable lifestyle. The preserve of the young.\textsuperscript{27} Yet despite the potential for ironic postmodern readings of such uses of ‘kitsch’ pop culture, Meilak’s work, particularly through its formal precision and laboured realism suggests its earnestness in wanting to be read at ‘face value’. The omnipresent and oppressively undifferentiated ‘look’ of the world Meilak implicitly affirms the normative myth of contemporary Australian culture as affluent and ‘classless’. This myth corresponds precisely to a global situation where ‘true

\textsuperscript{25} For example, the 2004 landslide victory of the Australian Liberal/National coalition occurred despite considerable and repeated criticism and negative publicity over its harsh treatment of refugees and asylum seekers — people who were displaced by global conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, conflicts in which Australia played a part. This has been said to have resulted in Australia in a dissonance reflecting ‘a country that likes to think of itself as happy-go-lucky while coolly perpetrating state-sanctioned violence on some of the planet’s most vulnerable people’: Daniel Edwards, ‘History’s great escape’, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{26} See Sean Meilak’s artist’s profile at Niagara Gallery, Melbourne, at www.niagara-galleries.com.au.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
politics”28 has been replaced by the ‘politics’ of the neo-liberal Right, which proclaims ‘Capital itself as the Real of our age’.29

5:1 (ii) Talking about nothing: The contemporary pursuit of a consensual Australian culture

This vision of a celebratory and struggle-free contemporary Australian culture, a culture of undifferentiated affluence — which, not coincidentally, emerges under globalising conditions — also appears in the work of other artists. It is especially evident in the videos of highly regarded contemporary Melbourne artist David Rosetzky. Frequently in Rosetzky’s work, the passivity and receptiveness of the self-as-consumer arises at the level of subjective speech. In this work, ‘innately’ middle-class subjects are granted central importance as they display themselves in repetitious and circulatory narratives of individualistic self-disclosure. Rosetzky is well known for individual video works such as Maniac de Luxe (2004) and Custom Made (2002) and Weekender (2001).

In these, friends, acquaintances and local art ‘celebrities’ are depicted, usually ‘talking about aspects of their lifestyle: their clothes, their attitudes, their relationships’,30 in ‘a kind of lifestyle interview or real-life documentary’.31 The real-life ‘characters’ in Rosetzky’s video works are shown either against ‘neutral’ monochromatic backgrounds or enclosed within insulated domestic settings bespeaking uniform middle-class comfort (see Figure # 29). The actual ‘stories’ related in Rosetzky’s videos are often subtitled, lending them an air of deliberately detached artificiality. The contrived distance established between the speaker and listener/viewer evokes a populist, Warholian ambivalence: the subject’s ‘real life’ is presented as

28 Contemporary philosopher Alain Badiou defines ‘true politics’ as distinct from a politics of rhetorical convention or democratic consensus. True politics necessarily involves risk and fidelity to a ‘truth-event’, an event that is a singular rupture with the prevailing status quo, and that radically alters the coordinates of the contemporary ‘possible-political’. He writes, ‘When the content of a political statement is a repetition, the statement is rhetorical and empty. It does not form part of a thinking. On this basis one can distinguish between true political activists and politicians. True political activists announce an unrepeatable possibility of a situation while a politician makes speeches based on the repetition of opinions. True political activists think a singular situation; politicians do not think’: Alain Badiou, Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy, pp. 80–81.
29 Slavoj Žižek, The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology, p. 276.
31 Ibid.
the ultimate contemporary consumer object, and ‘the postures and accoutrements that identify individuals are saturated with the visual conventions of advertising’.\textsuperscript{32}

![Figure 29](image)

The circulatory nature of the narratives in Rosetzky’s videos, their ultimate non-disclosure,\textsuperscript{33} effectively smooths out and conceals all external critical content. Thus questions of privilege or class difference remain conspicuously absent. Instead, Rosetzky’s productions affirm the global ‘rise of a politics of private individuals’.\textsuperscript{34} While it could be argued that such work posits ‘criticality’ entirely at the level of quotidian subjectivity, it does so today, and as Charles Green says, ‘at no time more clearly than the present has it been so obvious that the personal is not political’.\textsuperscript{35} This is especially the case once the artist, as an ‘ordinary’ person, has completely ‘ceased to believe in the possibility of choosing alternative social arrangements [thus granting] globalism’s capacity to construct passive consumer identities even greater strength’.\textsuperscript{36}

Rather than attempt to contest through artistic means the current domination of global culture by a depoliticised neo-liberal materialism, young Australian artists such as Rosetzky, in symbolic consensus with such a world-view, exaggerate instead the supposed neutrality of

\textsuperscript{32} Lara Travis, ‘Sign of the times: Art, music and fashion’ in Tessa Dwyer ed, \textit{Good Thinking: Words and Pictures on Contemporary Melbourne Art}, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{33} In Rosetzky’s work this non-disclosure is seen when subjects appearing to divulge secrets about themselves in fact reveal very little at all. The act of speech therefore covers up the ‘real’ identity of the speakers, who, in the absence of any given background on their daily lives, simply ‘perform’ themselves on camera.

\textsuperscript{34} Lara Travis, ‘Sign of the times: Art, music and fashion’ Tessa Dwyer ed, \textit{Good Thinking: Words and Pictures on Contemporary Melbourne Art}, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{35} Charles Green, ‘Empire’ in Rachel Kent, Russell Storer and Vivienne Webb eds, \textit{Meridian: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art}, p. 12.
middle-class values. Here the middle class is presented as the quintessential ‘non-class’, and therefore ‘global’ in its universalising ambitions. This is especially so in ‘post-socialist’ circumstances, where questions about the privileged centrality of an inflated middle-class self-as-consumer — particularly within materially wealthy, self-consciously ‘aspirational’ nations such as Australia — have apparently ceased to be an issue worthy of serious critical debate. This is not surprising, because the ‘new’ ‘global’ middle class ‘spreads ... on the strength of its reserves and the flows of consumer goods, which are its weapons of harmony and of shared well-being’.  

5: 2 Youth in the spotlight: Marketing adolescent iconographies in Australia’s emergent ‘global art’

An important part of Australian art’s current desire to insert itself in a global context is its recognition of the extreme visibility of the ascendant global ‘youth market’, and of that market’s receptiveness to contemporary art. The expanded influence of the worldwide youth commodity market, orientated primarily towards popular film, fashion and music cultures, has additional import in contemporary Australia, where a nationalist mythology of ‘youthfulness’ has held a crucial place for some time.

The ease with which examples of emerging art in Australia have gravitated towards repeated deployment of adolescent iconography that is imitative of a highly commercialised and generic global ‘youth culture’ is unsurprising. In fact, the promotion of a contemporary universal ‘global culture’ that is increasingly infiltrated by — and deferential towards — the economic and iconographic intervention of multinational corporations renders the alignment of ‘young’ Australian art with the inflated commodity signs of the globalised art market entirely logical.

Furthermore, in a contemporary Australian cultural context that is particularly beholden to a sporting ethos, the politics of consumption exerts a very specific influence. This is particularly so with regard to the present global popularity of sports and ‘youth’ street brands such as

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37 Writing of the assumed innate neutrality of the middle class, Slavoj Žižek writes, ‘the only class which, in its “subjective” self-perception, explicitly conceives of and presents itself as a class is the notorious “middle-class”, which is precisely the “non-class” ... in its very “real” existence, the embodied lie, the denial of antagonism’: Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*, pp. 186–87.
38 Ibid.
39 A historical precedent for this pervasive national image of a symbolically eternal and quasi-mytological Australian youthfulness is Australia’s ANZAC troops in World War I, who fought in such nationally celebrated campaigns as Gallipoli.
Adidas, Nike, Reebok and Stüssi. Overall, the favouring in recent Australian art of youth
iconographies affiliated with globalisation’s internationally targeted adolescent consumers helps
insert emerging Australian art into the centre of a specifically ‘global’ cultural context. At the
same time, the often self-conscious populism of such work becomes, within the field of global
contemporary art, a justification for generalised expressions of the ‘global contemporary’ as
being ‘naturally’ the ‘product’ of the global market, because today ‘no real consensual value
other than an economic one seems to exist’.

5: 2 (i) Inbuilt obsolescence: Australian art’s institutional valorisation
of ‘global’ youth culture

The 33-year-old artist Ricky Swallow is perhaps the most influential and internationally
successful Australian artist of his generation. His work has had a meteoric trajectory from its
initial appearance in Melbourne’s artist-run gallery scene to its inclusion in 2005’s Venice
Biennale. Indeed Swallow’s work has become a regular and favoured fixture within Australia’s
institutional art circuit and in local and international art publications. At the same time, the
artist’s work is heavily imbued with specific adolescent references — arising, it is said, from the
‘metaphoric possibilities of stuff found in an adolescent’s bedroom’. Related narratives
include 1950s-style Boys’ Own science fiction, BMX bikes, (see Figure # 30), computer
games, skulls and skeletons, rock music, (see Figure # 31), DJ culture and commercial
streetwear and sportswear. Swallow’s work also directly references classic ‘adolescent’
Hollywood films such as Star Wars, E.T. and The Planet of the Apes.

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40 Carlos Basualdo, ‘Focus: Bataille Monument, Documenta 11, 2002’, in Benjamin H. D. Buchloh,
Alison M. Gingert and Carlos Basualdo eds, Thomas Hirschhorn, p. 97.
41 Justin Patton, Ricky Swallow: Field Recordings, p. 25.
42 See works such as Building Better Beings (2000) and Wronging the Robots (2001).
44 See Game Boy (Concept Model) (2000).
45 We the Sedimentary Ones/Use Your Illusions, Vols 1–60 (2000) and The First One Now (2000)
(amongst many others).
48 Everything is Nothing (2003) and the self-portrait And the Moment Will Come When Composure
Returns (Decoy) (2002).
49 For example, Monument for a Sunken Monument (1999).
50 For example, I Don’t Want to Know If You Are Lonely/Henry Feinberg’s Communicator (2000).
This litany of references to populist youth culture is not without a certain conceptual grounding in Swallow’s work. The artist’s objects and images are therefore often presented as part of an anthropological fiction made up of various recent pop-culture artefacts. Nevertheless, Swallow’s simulated cultural anthropology at the same time suggests the ‘inbuilt obsolescence’\(^{52}\) and severely limited historical sense endemic to the endlessly commodifying system of ‘global’ contemporary art. Likewise, the critical and sometimes political acuity of conceptualism in Swallow’s work is ‘mutated into a model-making and a sneaker aesthetic’\(^{53}\) that is also, crucially, ‘grounded in an extreme hobbyist’s vision of the ethic of work’.\(^{54}\)

Overall, the features that might elsewhere define youth as rebellious, anarchic or politically engaged\(^{55}\) are symbolically atrophied in Swallow’s work. Here, any vestiges of youthful revolt are compressed into the fixed container of generic lifestyles promoted by global capitalism’s territorialisation of the ‘idea’ of youth. As a result, the artist’s objects, even his meticulously carved self-portrait, _And the Moment Will Come When Composure Returns (Decoy)_ (2002), which appears more as a death mask, constantly emphasise the internalised conditions of their _a priori_ institutional and museological fixing. This pervasive sense of stasis

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52 The notion of an object’s ‘inbuilt obsolescence’ exemplifies the modern system of capitalism, which is dependent on its own self-perpetuation, and thus constantly produces commodities with ‘use-by’ dates. That is, commodities are deliberately designed to fail after a certain period of time, or to be rendered obsolete by the unending production of ‘latest models’, which themselves imply progress.


54 Ibid.

55 Think, for instance, of the large number of young people who have gravitated to the activist cause of the conveniently and simplistically labelled ‘anti-globalisation’ movement, a movement which, significantly, also has ‘well-developed forms of cultural expression’. See Julian Stallabrass, “‘Cashing-in’ at the Whitechapel Gallery, London’. See also Tom Mertes, ed., _A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?_
suggests the socio-critical inertia — which is perhaps ironic — of the artist’s chosen mode of production.\(^{56}\)

Additionally, from a global perspective, the selection of Swallow as Australia’s representative for the 2005 Venice Biennale is curious: the artist has lived outside this country for the past three years. In 2002 Swallow moved to Los Angeles, the home of the North American film industry and a ‘centre of global culture’.\(^{57}\) He has since moved to London, and stated that he has no intention of returning to Australia.\(^{58}\) The reasons for the current centrality of this artist in Australian art are thus likely to be identical to those generically cited by John Kaldor, the Australian High Commissioner, for Swallow’s inclusion in the internationally famed biennale: ‘Swallow’s art is one of brilliant contradictions: totally contemporary in concept, the work remains in the spirit of the great tradition of sculpture. He executes each work meticulously to perfection.’\(^{59}\)

This statement is illuminating. It points to the dual criteria, not at all contradictory, by which Swallow’s art is validated in an art context dominated by global institutions. On the one hand, the validation occurs because the works display unquestionable manual skill and an extreme technical perfection, reiterating the trompe l’oeil techniques associated with traditional museum spaces and art history. On the other hand, the work is granted contemporary branding not on the basis of its conceptual or critical framing or social awareness, but through its elevation of highly recognisable, albeit generic, globally popularised ‘youth imagery’. Such explicit emphases within art like Swallow’s potentially expand audiences for contemporary museums by making such institutional domains increasingly attractive to young gallery-goers already immersed in commercialised global ‘youth culture’.\(^{60}\)

Ultimately, the core presence of ‘adolescent’ iconographies in the art of Ricky Swallow places it at the art-institutional centre of a global cultural ethos that explicitly encourages

\(^{56}\) The artist’s work *Killing Time* (2004), a painstaking sculptural rendition of a 17th century Dutch realist painting, although departing from ‘youth imagery’, illustrates to the nth degree the artist’s museological orientation. Here Swallow’s institutionally valued — indeed fetishised and fetishistic — sculpture is granted contemporary significance because of its title. The primary activity of the contemporary artist thus becomes ‘killing time’ through the production of objects that demand extreme manual attention, but whose socio-critical ‘meaning’ or ‘content’ is secondary, if not irrelevant.

\(^{57}\) Tom Mertes, ed., *A Movement of Movements: Is Another World Really Possible?* p. 25.

\(^{58}\) Gabriella Coslovich, ’Taking flight from fame’.

\(^{59}\) John Kaldor, quoted in ‘Breaking news’.

\(^{60}\) Contemporary museums under government and corporate pressure rely more and more on having to ‘pitch’ their activities to target audiences. They also have to prove their general ‘popularity’ via recorded attendance levels. Consequently, global cultural institutions have realised the value of the ‘youth sector’ as a means of improving visitor statistics and thus ensuring their continued economic viability. See
identification with commodity-desiring youth subcultures. Any oppositional subcultural content in Swallow’s work is now reiterated primarily via its inextricable entanglement with symbols of globally marketed youth lifestyles and their attendant purchasable entertainments.

5: 2 (ii) Performing adolescence: The predictable global marketability of youth's eternal return

Allied to the overt youth orientation of adult Australian artists such as Ricky Swallow are many other local examples. In all such examples, the role of the artist is dominated by an apparent desire for a kind of secondary, post-Warholian, pop-culture celebrity and fame. At its most extreme, such uncritical identifications with a strategically marketed ‘global’ youth culture can seem a kind of ‘sycophantic internationalism’; the ambition of many young artists of today is in fact no different from the juveniles who want to be successful pop stars before they are twenty.

Thus what many of Australia’s younger generation artists who are working principally with commodity-orientated ‘youth’ imagery actually do is perform, in a public context, their often already long-gone adolescents, seeking favour from the culturally conservative commercial and institutional arenas. Here, explicit evidence of a locally productive ‘youth culture’ is doubly attractive: it signifies ‘youth alternatives’ as indicators of contemporary avant-gardism while at the same time producing nostalgia for a perpetually mythologised (in Western societies at least) ‘peak’ life period.


61 Such examples include the novelty toy and skateboard imagery of Sydney artist Tim Silver, at least one of whose works — Untitled, Something to Swallow (2003) — begs to be read explicitly as a critical rejoinder to Ricky Swallow’s meteoric rise and dominating popularity within contemporary Australian art. Other related outlooks are evident in the pop-spiritualism and narcissistic self-image branding of Sydney artist Nell, the self-conscious faux-porn cartoon fantasies and adolescent club-house scenarios of Melbourne’s James Lynch, and the frequently ‘teenage’ posturing of acritical Melbourne art collective DAMP.


63 Rasheed Araeen, Complex Entanglements: Art, Globalisation and Cultural Difference, p. 146.

64 Subculture has moved into the slot vacated by ... the historical avant-garde and is not restricted to artistic practice': Sande Cohen, ‘Critical Inquiry, October and historicizing French theory’, in Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, French Theory in America, p. 209.

65 This fact is clearly attested to by the degree to which contemporary advertising, film culture, music and fashion inflate the centrality of the mythology of ‘youth’, equating it with values of desirability, health and learning.
A recently and highly visible example of this exact trend in contemporary Australian art, and related also to the nation’s valorisation of sport as a signifier of its supposedly innate youthfulness and physical vitality, is the works of Sydney’s Shaun Gladwell, whose career ascent has been, like Swallow’s, ‘phenomenal’. 66 Gladwell, who was a competition skateboarder at the age of sixteen and is now represented by one of Sydney’s highest grossing commercial art dealers, Sherman Galleries, 67 has successfully capitalised on his image as an ‘insider’ and initiate of a particular contemporary urban youth subculture. His recent videos feature scenes of professional BMX bicycle stunts 68 break-dancing, 69 and skateboard tricks, including some performed by the artist himself 70 (see Figure # 32). Each of the sequences depicted in these works is filmed in slow motion, lending the works a ‘serious’ balletic, aestheticised and reverential quality and further confirming them as legitimate examples of contemporary Australian ‘fine art’.

Significantly, each of these works is also ‘like an MTV sequence or extreme sports program … dilated with exhibitionist elation’. 71 Their ‘subcultural’ branding is not determined by rebelliousness or evident critical awareness of socio-political or cultural issues specific to a contemporary Australian context. Instead, the ‘subcultural’ dimension of Gladwell’s art appears

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67 See Chapter 4 — The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled?, 4: 1 (iii) Global exhibitions: Why biennales are popular.
68 For example, Hikaru Sequences (2001).
69 See the artist’s Gods speed Verticals (2004).
70 Such instances include Gladwell’s works Storm Sequence (2000) and Kickflipper (2000–03).
in its generic flaunting of the signifiers of a global ‘youth culture’ — where skaters, incidentally, are ‘supersized consumers of youth brands’.

The description of Gladwell’s work as intrinsically ‘subcultural’, a conception on which such work depends for its ‘authenticity’, stems in fact from underlying references within it to the performative, and occasionally confrontational and politicised, youth subcultures of hip-hop, break-dancing and ‘free-styling’ rap music — all of which were once genuinely ‘alternative’. Significantly, in today’s global cultural context, these once semi-marginalised idioms now inhabit the commercialised centre of North American mainstream consumerist culture. Meanwhile, Gladwell’s self-styled ‘attitude of cool egotism’, insofar as it conceives contemporary art as critically intervening in the urban spaces of the city, does so merely according to ‘an adolescent thrill in violating a [social] code that really isn’t … dangerous’ — filming a friend doing a wheelie on a BMX bike in a supermarket, for instance.

Overall, the sort of ‘social critique’ offered by a ‘young’ Australian practitioner such as Gladwell sets up the artist as ‘an inhabitant of modern middle-class leisure time [who is then transformed] into a post modern nomad, an underemployed slacker drifting along the migratory routes of the urban underclass’. Conveniently, the urban ‘underclass’ supposedly represented in Gladwell’s work lies at the centre of globalisation’s consumerist ethos. The ‘migratory routes’ his work is said to trace are identical to globalisation’s international ‘free trade’ paths, purveying homogenised and instantly recognisable youth consumer products worldwide.

5: 3 Ethics and self-promotion in Australian contemporary art: Narcissism as criticism

Another defining aspect of contemporary Australia involves a crisis in the nation’s ethical identity. While the ruling Australian Liberal/National government encourages adherence to globalisation’s core neo-liberal principles of ‘free trade’, domestic politics encouraging unchecked accumulation fosters insularity and cultural narcissism. Related to such insularity is the Australian government and media’s demonisation of ‘queue-jumping’ refugees, mainly

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72 Ibid., p. 87.
73 Ibid., p. 89.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., p. 85.
77 See Clive Hamilton, ‘Self-absorption wins the day’.
78 This notion of refugees as simply impatient ‘queue jumpers’ transgressing legal procedure was popularised in sections of the Australian press, forming a negative impression of outsiders seeking asylum from political persecution and victims of trauma. See Stephen McDonell, ‘The queue jumpers’, Four Corners, ABC-TV.
from crisis-ravaged countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq — whose current seemingly insoluble destabilisation Australia has played a significant role in, through its wholehearted participation in the U.S. led ‘global war on terrorism’.  

At the same time, within contemporary Australian art work has emerged that is clearly responding to what appear to be unethical transgressions of the ‘enlightened’ vision of universal human rights claimed to be on offer via a globalised model of Western liberal democracy. Two of the most visible of these are the ethnically ‘empathetic’ performances involving self-mutilation by well-known contemporary practitioner Mike Parr, and Patricia Piccinini’s dystopian ruminations on global neo-liberalism’s ongoing commodification of all possible territories — including human genetics, in its potential privatisation of the human genome.

Both Parr and Piccinini’s practices, though they are very different superficially, also reflect, ironically, the insular individualism marking contemporary Australian political and economics. This is because both artists harness controversial ‘ethical’ issues that are highly visible in the global media. These are invoked as ‘universal’ from a humanitarian point of view, but they function equally as a means of promoting the individual ‘critical’ authority of ‘socially conscious’ Australian artists in an international context. This use of the ‘aura’ of ‘critique’ mirrors the neo-liberal individualism’s regressive returning of the ‘naturalised’ self to the centre of global art production.

5: 3 (i) Expressionist empathy: Appropriating the pain of ‘others’

The heated controversy surrounding the Australian government’s treatment of refugees and asylum seekers has provoked responses from some of the country’s foremost contemporary artists. Most apparent of these is the series of performances by Sydney-based artist, Mike Parr. The first of Parr’s related performances, Close the Concentration Camps (2002), was presented a number of times during that year, each time with a different focus and involving acts such as

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79 Ibid.
80 The human genome is the DNA map that determines the genetic makeup of every human being. Contemporary genetic engineering, cloning and stem cell research are potentially highly profitable businesses, and have been implicated in the possible ‘manufacturing’ of ‘designer babies’: that is, of children without genetic ‘defects’ or abnormalities.
81 This situation could be read as a reversal of French theorist, Roland Barthes’ famous postmodern concept of ‘the death of the author’ (see Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 1: 3 (iii) Style as critique). The ‘naturalised’ self represents the re-birth of the contemporary artist as self-proclaimed authorial identity.
82 Australia’s response to its ‘invasion’ by unwelcome refugees and asylum seekers has been to incarcerate such groups in often remote purpose-built detention centres within the country (Curtin and Port Hedland in Western Australia, Woomera and Baxter in South Australia) and outside it (in
the artist having the word ‘alien’ branded onto his leg or ‘sewing up his lips in solidarity with the refugees who, on a hunger strike, had sewn up their lips’ ³³ (see Figures # 33 and # 34). This strategy was followed by the performance *Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi, (Democratic Torture)* (2003), lasting 30 hours, at Sydney’s Artspace. As part of this performance, which was webcast, viewers on the internet could deliver shocks to the artist’s face, which was bound in electrical wire, by clicking a ‘hotspot’ on their computer screens. Lastly, in Parr’s performance *Malevich (A Political Arm)*, presented from 2 May to 5 May 2003, also at Artspace and also webcast, the artist had his arm nailed to the gallery wall, and ‘stayed there with tape over his eyes, drinking, not eating, urinating onto the floor through his pants and deprived of all sensory stimulation’. ³⁴

Parr’s ‘protest’ performances, in the ‘dramatic way [in which] they both formalise and ritualise discomfort’, ³⁵ claim to respond to a local situation where ‘real thinking and rigorous political analysis [have] been overwhelmed by a culture of selfishness and ignorance’. ³⁶ However, the formalised ‘expressionism’ of Parr’s performances is also heavily aestheticised and firmly reiterates the authorial centrality of the image of the artist. Parr’s self-aestheticisation is especially pronounced because it occurs within the insulated safety of an institutional context that is wholly removed from either direct evidence of the suffering of the detainees or

³³ See Robert Lort, ‘Mike Parr and Adam Geczy: All swaddled up’.
³⁵ Ibid.
³⁶ Ibid.
revelations of the political manoeuvring that has produced an Australian culture in which the majority support the mandatory detention of dispossessed outsiders.87

This overtly aestheticising dimension of Parr’s performances, and their multiple art-historical references,88 rather than upsetting the ‘language of authority’ through which ‘the refugee body is denigrated as stateless, lawless, homeless and nameless’,89 actually assumes this authorial role on their behalf. This is especially the case as there remains an obviously irreconcilable gulf between the perpetration of these separate acts of self-inflicted harm, comfortably staged by an artist who has made a professional reputation and career from similar acts of self-harm,90 and those enacted by detainees91 out of desperation and in defiance of the ruling Australian authority. Here, the artist consciously ‘uses’ the currency of his contemporary art-world persona and the free speech granted him through his automatic inclusion in a Western liberal democratic system, while those incarcerated by the same system have this supposedly fundamental ‘universal’ human right denied them. It can only be assumed, additionally, that as there were no public non-art contexts for these performances, Parr was unwilling to forego his status as an institutionally inscribed art-world identity and do something that could have exposed him to genuinely unpredictable risks or denouncements.

Despite Parr’s ‘critical’ intentions in these performances, they simultaneously evidence the internalised logic of globalisation’s institutionalised separation of those it includes and the ‘others’ it excludes. Indeed, Parr’s performances end by emphasising the logic of inclusion by elevating the contemporary ‘global’ artist as individualist par excellence. Also — and unbeknownst to Parr, it seems — his proposed dystopian future scenario, in which ‘the final throes of capitalism will see it selling back to us as the ultimate commodity our access to, and experience of, the real’,92 is already part of the voraciously virtualised conditions upon which

87 Indeed, the Liberal/National government’s unyielding stance on asylum seekers and refugees has been cited frequently as crucial to its overwhelming election victories.
88 Parr’s performances are imbued with tactics similar to those of ‘Viennese Actionismus’, which rose to international prominence during the 1960s and 1970s. This movement incorporated, as one of its core strategies, deliberately ‘shocking’ acts of self-degradation and mutilation. Yet at the same time, the frequently collaborative performances of these Viennese artists (Günter Brus, Otto Muehl, Rudolf Schwarzkogler and Herman Nitsch), while claiming to be guided by a search for catharsis, were nevertheless deeply aestheticised, painterly and ‘expressionistic’.
89 Robert Lort, ‘Mike Parr and Adam Gecey: All swaddled up’.
90 These include the artist’s ‘notorious’ actions of the 1970s, the most famous of which involved Parr, who was born with only one arm, appearing to hack off, with a small hatchet, what was in fact a substitute limb filled with blood and meat, in front of an unsuspecting — and in some cases outraged — audience.
91 Acts such as sewing one’s lips together, amongst others. See Stephen McDonell, ‘The queue jumpers’, Four Corners, ABC-TV.
92 Mike Parr, interviewed by Bruce James, ‘A stitch in time'.
the spread of global capitalism depends. And as a ‘global’ artist, Parr capitalises professionally from the commodity of his self-suffering artistic persona. In this role he speaks paternalistically on behalf of those actually subjected to the ethically distorted reality of a globally institutionalised system of monopoly capitalism that turns the abject degradation of ‘others’ into profit.\(^93\)

5: 3 (iii) The microscope reversed: Selling the global artist as popular scientist

Like Parr, the work of Australian artist Patricia Piccinini similarly locates the ‘natural’ body as its principal ‘critical’ territory. Indeed, Piccinini’s art focuses almost wholly on the ‘controversial’ highly mediated issue of scientific accountability, particularly in relation to the ethics of genetic engineering. Through these means, Piccinini has pursued the marketing of her biomorphic sculptures on a truly global scale.\(^{94}\) Revealingly, the artist has described these sculptures as ‘strange and loveable life forms’,\(^ {95}\) and as ‘her family’,\(^ {96}\) whom she loves\(^ {97}\) (see Figure # 35). Through such sentimental and humanising language, Piccinini symbolically collapses critical analysis of genuinely challenging socio-scientific technologies emerging as a by-product of current global capitalism into populist and futuristic biological illustration.

The dominant critical discourse surrounding Piccinini’s practice, which she describes as ‘[my] personal perspective on some of the most challenging bio-ethical issues of our time’,\(^ {98}\) repeatedly attempts to court the legitimising ‘objective’ discourses of contemporary science and anthropology. Consequently, the physical presentation of her art, somewhat like Swallow’s, frequently aces ‘an exhibit from a museum of natural history’.\(^ {99}\) This is doubly appropriate, as the contemporary global turn from the discourse of “history” to [the discourse off “culture” suggests a new affiliation with anthropology as the guardian issue”.\(^ {100}\) The anthropological dimension of the current ‘global culture’ of the pure present, and its ‘dissociation of words,

\(^{93}\) Australia’s detention centres are facilitated and run by private security companies including the U.S. based Protective Services Personnel. Thus the imprisonment of those who seek a better life, according to the tenets of a ‘fair go’ for everyone — claimed to be central to a specifically Australian democratic way of life — is ultimately conducted as a profit-orientated offshore business.

\(^{94}\) Piccinini has had solo exhibitions and has participated in international biennales in Australia, Japan, China, Taiwan, Peru, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom. See Jane Silversmith, ‘Patricia Piccinini represents Australia in Venice Biennale, 2003’.

\(^{95}\) Ibid.

\(^{96}\) See Peter Clarke, ‘Patricia Piccinini: We are family’, Australian Story, ABC-TV.

\(^{97}\) Ibid.

\(^{98}\) ‘Patricia Piccinini: We are family’, at the website for the Ancient Future Arts Festival, Japan, at http://ancientfuture.australia.org.jp/eng/about/php.


\(^{100}\) Hal Foster, Design and Crime and Other Diatribes, p. 90.
symbols and images from meaning', at the same time gives rise to a situation where ultimately, as in advertising, 'the subject is understood as a kind of image'.

![Figure 35](image)

With such logic in mind, Piccinini is able to capitalise on her international image as a sort of contemporary Renaissance figure straddling several disciplinary discourses at once: art, science and anthropology. Such self-presentation in the context of the globalised art scene is doubly facilitated tactical, as global 'finance capital has flowed to two sites above all others, technology and biology, and especially to convergences of the two, such as ventures concerning the human genome'. As a self-consciously 'global' artist, Piccinini harnesses precisely this aspect of contemporary global capitalism.

Tellingly, the industrial manufacturing of Piccinini's work, such as The Young Family (2002-03), exhibited at the 50th Venice Biennale, employs special effects model-making techniques practically identical to those used in many recent popular Hollywood 'science fantasy' films. At the same time, Piccinini's emphasis on this type of manufacturing sees her

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103 Ibid, p. 98.
104 Various teams of specialists and technicians industrially execute Piccinini's works, frequently lending her works the appearance of 'mass-produced' commodities. This is particularly the case with works such as Truck Babies (1999) and Car Nuggets (1998), both of which are 'deformed' fictional vehicles.
105 Globalisation has been said to attest to the current 'precedence of models over the Real': Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 72.
106 Piccinini's creatures recall similar creations, both grotesque and 'cute', that have appeared in such 'blockbuster' films as The Lord of the Rings (2001–02), in the guise of Gollum, and Harry Potter and the
also celebrated as a populist mass producer whose work ethic of ‘making and making and making’ has earned her the reputation of ‘the Henry Ford’ of Australian contemporary art. Under the present acceleratedly globalising market, this analogy is particularly telling, because the literalness of Piccinini’s bio-artworks fulfil perfectly the preconditions of Marx’s famous dictum on commodity fetishism that inanimate ‘“things” take on the even more fantastic form of human agents’, whilemore and more, ‘things’ as ‘products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own’; a theory that has, incidentally, ‘received a great upgrade in the present’.

Finally, the success of Piccinini’s cloyingly titled *We Are Family* (2003) as Australia’s official contribution to the 50th Venice Biennale has been further attributed to the related merchandising of shopping bags printed with digital images of the artist’s creations — creations which are otherwise, paradoxically, suggested to be ‘critical’ and ‘disturbing’. At Venice, Piccinini’s ‘skin’ bags were commercially employed as a means of asserting ‘Patricia’s presence *en masse* all around Venice’. Again, the contemporary Australian artist’s first-person creative persona becomes a branded image strategically deployed to familiarise a media-friendly example of current Australian art to a global audience. And if such work actually represents ‘antipodean anxieties’, as has been claimed, it does so less from a position of ethical or critical contestation than from one concerned to ensure the contemporary Australian artist’s presence at the centre of a globalised art scene.

*Chamber of Secrets* (2003), in the figure of the house-elf Dobby. Additionally, ‘Hollywood directors have been called in as consultants by antiterrorist strategists’, ibid.

107 Henry Ford was the North American industrialist and arch-capitalist largely responsible for the birth of the worldwide automobile industry. The authoritarian and dictatorial aspects of ‘Fordism’ were famously parodied in U.S. actor–director Charlie Chaplin’s cinematic vision of a modern industrialised dystopia, *Modern Times* (1936).

108 See Michael Fitzgerald, ‘Driving out demons’.


110 Ibid.

111 Significantly, the undeniable success of Piccinini’s work at the 50th Venice Biennale was indicated not only by the fact that it had over 165,000 visitors in five months, but more specifically by the fact that it was also personally endorsed by Australian conservative Liberal Party Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer, who was ‘one of the most impressed’ by the work. See Louise Tegart, ‘Patricia’s a hit: Artnotes’.

112 This professional invocation of the ‘global artist’ on a first-name basis is particularly telling: it emphasises Piccinini as an international art ‘personality’, not ‘merely’ a professional practitioner. See Louise Tegart, ‘Patricia’s a hit: Artnotes’.

113 Ibid.

114 See Michael Fitzgerald, ‘Driving out demons’.
The struggle for Australia’s ‘other’ centre:
The international popularisation of contemporary indigenous art versus globalisation’s co-option of difference

Under globalisation, the worldwide popularity of indigenous Australian art has skyrocketed. Both ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’ versions of ‘Aboriginal’ art have fetched record prices on the global market — they received particularly positive attention in the U.S. Indeed, the current scale of economic and popular success accorded Australian ‘Aboriginal’ art fundamentally underscores global capitalism’s enormous capacity to profit from the deliberate packaging of cultural difference.

The magnified presence of contemporary Australian indigenous art on the global market therefore becomes as well a means of portraying a particularly anthropological, ‘authentic’ vision of ‘originary’ Australian culture. This anthropological emphasis on Australian indigenous art may still be critically informed, acknowledging the colonialist bias on which false assumptions of ‘primitivism’ are made. Nevertheless, the focus on ‘Aboriginality’ as basically ‘pure’ and critically incontestable simultaneously ‘hypes’ related work. Such work is, as a result, regarded as signifying absolute difference, difference whose celebrated alterity is, ironically, marketed abroad for its incommensurably exotic ‘otherness’.

This ‘othering’, however, within the domain of globalisation’s neo-liberal markets, has also become uncritically trans-culturally attached to the history of Western modernist abstraction. And it is from this perspective as well that contemporary Australian indigenous art has been popularly commodified internationally — ironically, by refuting the very difference that has otherwise been crucial to its global market success. At the same time, this overlaying of a validating Western art-historical voice, especially via the context of the United States’ central and equally authorising art market, takes on a distinctly universalising aura. This is highly in keeping with the regressive ‘neo-Enlightenment’ values of globalisation, values that in this case are not liberationary at all, but are simply imposed from above via the supposed ‘neutrality’ of the global commodity market.

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115 This is especially since the large-scale survey show, Dreamings: The Art of Aboriginal Australia (1989), organised by the New York Asia Society and exhibited in its galleries. Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis, ‘Aboriginal Art: Symptom or Success?’ in What is Appropriation, ed, Rex Butler, Institute of Modern Art (IMA) publishing, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, 2nd edition, 2004, 197-209


117 See Chapter1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation. 1: 4 (iii) Neo-Enlightenment and the continuation of modernity?
Faced with this degree of co-option and assumed primitivist ‘authenticity’, much contemporary Australian indigenous art, like that of Tracey Moffatt and Destiny Deacon,\(^{118}\) has deliberately employed technological and media forms to problematise reactionary concepts of an *a priori* and ‘naturally’ static Aboriginal culture. Meanwhile, other contemporary Aboriginal artists, such as Gordon Bennet, have re-appropriated central icons of Western modernism\(^{119}\) or twisted traditional Aboriginal ‘desert’ art to relate highly politicised narratives of urban exploitation, as in the ‘naïve’ art of Harry Wedge\(^{120}\) or the critical conceptualism of Richard Bell.

Ultimately, however, it is the complexities and ambivalences of the work of Tracey Moffatt, undoubtedly Australia’s most globally successful artist, that reveal the extent of changing perceptions of contemporary Australian culture under globalisation. Often in this context, and once again reiterating the politics of globalisation’s voracious co-option of cultural difference, contemporary ‘Aboriginal art is promoted as something new simply because it is a new product in the art market place’\(^{121}\). Highly celebrated within that market, and deliberately turning away from contemporary ‘Aboriginal politics’, Moffatt reveals the ambiguities of today’s globalised system of art. At the same time, her work reveals how globalisation succeeds in producing market-friendly versions of generalised cultural difference, often stripped of overtly contentious, provocative or accusatory socio-critical content.

\(^{118}\) In Deacon’s work, such as her installation *Forced Into Images* (2001) and her photo-series, *No Fixed Dress* (2003), questions of the artist’s ‘Aboriginality’ assume a strategic and critical edge, especially in her deliberately kitsch reappropriations of Western populist representations of Aboriginal culture.

\(^{119}\) Bennett, through painting series such as *Notes to Basquiat: Modern Art* (2001), reverses post-modern appropriationary impulses, internalising the Western modernist art canon, then overlaying it with explicit references to colonialism and testifying, in a contemporary framework, to the deep historical connections between the two.

\(^{120}\) Wedge’s paintings, such as *Debating the Republic* (1993), *Mabo Country: Kingsize* (1993) and *Brainwash* (1994), employ a deliberately ‘naïve’ illustrational technique that superficially resembles crude Western cartoons or the intentional ‘primitivism’ of European modernists like Joan Miró. The artist furthermore directly uses autobiographical references to the negative experiences of his enforced exposure to Christian missionary culture. Wedge’s work appears both ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’, ‘traditional’ and ‘contemporary’, ‘rural’ and ‘urban’, but in every instance, its socio-critical aesthetic agendas remain clearly, and disturbingly, evident.

5: 4 (i) Case study: Tracey Moffatt, black-and-white between worlds:
The current global visibility of Australian contemporary art’s foremost (indigenous) artist

The career trajectory of contemporary Australian photo-media artist Tracey Moffatt is a paradigmatic exemplar of Australian art’s current global status. Today Moffatt is ‘Australia’s most internationally successful contemporary artist’.122 Living and working in New York, Moffatt, who has been described in the United States as being ‘of Aboriginal descent’,123 has joined the relatively small group of genuinely global contemporary artists’.124 Significantly, her global success has been attributed to the cultivation within her work of a deliberately ‘international look’.125 Central to Moffatt’s ‘international’ aesthetic are her frequent references to popular culture, particularly Hollywood film, ‘something the artist has admitted was a huge influence on her life growing up in Brisbane’,126 as well as her stated desire for a ‘universalist’ reading of her work:

I think the fact that I’m trying for a ‘universal’ quality, not just ‘black Australian’ is the reason why my work is getting attention.127

Moffatt’s stress on the ‘universality’ of her productions, done in generalised humanist terminology, consciously attempts to avoid its branding as ‘merely’ ‘black Australian’ art. However, Moffatt’s desire to avoid such convenient ghettoising of her work is not simply based on a recognition of the inherent complexities of contemporary Australian culture’s current global positioning. In fact, Moffatt’s creative perspective deliberately decries connection to Australian indigenous politics. This is attested to by the artist’s categorical refusal, since 1992, to allow her work to be ‘reproduced in exclusively Aboriginal or black-artist shows’.128

Such a refusal appears in contrast to a specific local crisis within Australia, a crisis exacerbated by the Australian Liberal/National coalition’s general disengagement with issues of Aboriginal reconciliation.129 In contemporary Australia, both the government and non-

124 In 2001 Moffatt exhibited in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Britain, Taiwan, South Korea, Germany, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Finland, Greece and Slovenia. See Russell Smith, ‘Tracey Moffatt: The international look’, p. 36.
125 Ibid.
127 Martin Hentschel and Gerald Matt eds, Tracey Moffatt, p. 20.
129 The issue of Aboriginal reconciliation was brought into public consciousness via the efforts of Torres Strait Islander activist Eddie Mabo (1936–92). It was aided by the introduction, by Paul Keating’s Labor government, (1991–96) of the ‘Mabo’ and ‘Wik’ laws relation to Aboriginal land rights; these have since
Aboriginal Australians continue to overlook highly evident and internationally criticised prejudices against the nation’s indigenous population. Indeed, Moffatt’s conscious desire to be treated foremost as a ‘global’ artist working from a ‘universalist’ position, rather than as representing an attitude of creative ‘neutrality’ based in poetic, ‘intoxicating, hazy narratives’, deliberately de-emphasises her art’s socio-critical potential. This is attested to once again by the artist herself, who, when faced with a direct political reading of her work, said:

I just get a little exasperated because this reading usually comes from the ‘Left’ and they are most of the time ignoring how I strive for poetry and make statements about the human condition. They can’t see that I’m trying to play with form and be inventive.

Moffatt’s argument here is for a primarily formal reading of her works. Her attempts, through such statements, to distance her practice from specific contemporary indigenous, or even Australian political concerns, play into the universalising econometrics propelling the contemporary art world under globalisation. In fact, it is precisely the strategically open-ended generality of such statements that Moffatt uses to emphasise that she sees her work as having a context-less ‘international look’ of ‘universal predicaments’. Furthermore, the artist says, this is what has enabled her to take her work ‘out to the world’. The ambiguity of Moffatt’s images, although it is an important part of their visual impact, simultaneously avoids any direct association with socio-critical content that may be considered too explicitly negative. Thus the artist avoids presenting, in an international context, critical reflections of contemporary Australia or its politics — images of deprived Aboriginals, for example — that may render it unpalatable to the global art market, where it is especially favoured today.

been radically curtailed, if not expunged, by the Liberal/National government. Reconciliation demands public acknowledgement of Australia’s colonisation as an invasion, and of the resulting dispossession of the nation’s indigenous population. It also calls for acknowledgement of the suffering caused by the forcible removal, during the 1950s and a long time before, of Aboriginal children, the ‘stolen generation’, from their own families in order to be placed with white Christian families. The reconciliation ‘movement’ has repeatedly called for a public apology from the Australian federal government, which it has consistently refused to give; neither has it officially acknowledged past transgressions. See Phil Glendenning, ‘ANTAR’s report card on Indigenous rights, Howard’s shameful record: 1996–2004’.

See, for example, Phil Glendenning and David Cooper, ‘Howard’s “fair and decent” vision blind to reconciliation’.


Martin Hentschel and Gerald Matt, eds, Tracey Moffatt, p. 20.


Ibid. Moffatt’s own work, for example, an edition of the artist’s Something More, sold in 2002 in the elite context of Christie’s Auction House for AUD$226,575, an Australian record. Russell Smith, ‘Tracey Moffatt: The international look’, p. 36.
From an alternative vantage point, Moffatt’s effort to detach her work from its identity as culturally ‘other’, thereby having it fetishised only for its ‘Aboriginality’, could be said to be a means by which the artist has defended her productions against globalisation’s endemic packaging and consumption of difference. From this viewpoint, Moffatt’s images can be seen to challenge cultural stereotypes while appropriating their power. Still, there has been a vast shift in Moffatt’s œuvre over recent years. Early photo-series, such as Scarred for Life (1994), specifically address socio-critical issues from an obviously Australian contemporary urban and indigenous context. Such issues include racial conflict and domestic abuse, issues that in many ways still define the actual living conditions of many Aboriginal communities, both urban and rural. Revealingly, Moffatt’s subsequent photo-series, such as GUAPA (Good Looking) (1995), depicting women roller-derby players engaged in unspecified violent competition and shot in San Antonio, Texas, Beauties (1997), emphasising ‘beauty and composition’¹³⁶ and said to be ‘a tribute to Andy Warhol’,¹³⁷ Laudanum (1998), concerning a ‘sado-masochistic relationship between a nineteenth century mistress and her Asian maidservant’,¹³⁸ but resembling ‘a 1970s ... soft-porn shocker’,¹³⁹ and her overtly cartoon-like Adventure Series (2004) (see Figure # 36), stand in stark contrast to the cultural specificities of the artist’s earlier socially critical concerns.

¹³⁸ Ibid.
¹³⁹ Ibid.
In addition, Moffatt’s most recent video works, such as *Lip* (1998) and *Love* (2003), have gravitated towards a celebratory reappropriation of Hollywood imagery and an ‘MTV aesthetic’\(^{140}\) which principally focuses on ‘images and stories generated by the mass media’.\(^{141}\) Thus Moffatt makes oblique autobiographical references to the circumstances of her ‘Aboriginal descent’, but in ways that are now dramatically filtered through the media of popular contemporary ‘global culture’. The significance of Moffatt’s work, from this perspective, lies in the fact that ultimately, the artist’s manipulations of the photographic image are ‘more calligraphic than contestatory’,\(^{142}\) while her work overall is consciously conceived as ‘not so much critical, as seductive’.\(^{143}\)

At the same time, if under globalisation contemporary ‘Aboriginal artists have acquired a global platform for their work’, this ‘does not constitute a platform from which to express their political aspirations’.\(^{144}\) Without a doubt, the significant achievements of highly successful, internationally visible contemporary Australian ‘indigenous’ artists such as Tracey Moffatt have firmly placed Australian art in a global context. However, such global recognition has done little to counter, other than occasionally symbolically, the ongoing domestic struggle of Aboriginal communities to achieve recognition of — let alone assistance in resolving — the significant social, cultural and political crises they still face.

5: 5 Australia’s hard core? Outbreaks of dissent on the global ‘Desert Island’

Central to the geographical and cultural mythology of Australia is its status as an island continent. Symbolic representations of Australia as an island continent have both negative and positive implications; today the country is dually cast as both negatively isolationist and a capitalistically contented utopian enclosure.

Contemporary Australia is isolationist in its pursuit of the detention and expulsion of unwanted ‘outsiders’, usually refugees,\(^{145}\) and it is utopian in its self-celebration as a haven of abundant middle-class affluence. The conjunction of these tendencies, one that is hostile to

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\(^{140}\) Ibid., p. 38.
\(^{141}\) Lynne Cooke, ‘Tracey Moffatt: *Free Falling*’.
\(^{142}\) Ibid.
\(^{144}\) Ibid., p. 207.
\(^{145}\) A 2002 Amnesty International Report *Into Human Rights* was damning in its view of the Australian Liberal/National government’s treatment of refugees and its advocating of mandatory detention for all asylum seekers. The report categorically stated that ‘Australia is the only Western country that has mandatory detention for all asylum seekers that arrive in Australia without valid documentation’: ‘Alternatives to detention’, *Amnesty International*, at http://www.amnesty.org.au.
outside influence and the other which openly embraces the material gain achieved through increased access to global markets, mirrors globalisation’s pervasive neo-liberalism. First it posits ‘global culture’ as resulting from the unrestrained pursuit of individual self-interest, which is a political value central to Western liberal democracy. Second, from a neo-liberal economic perspective, it celebrates increased trade and consumption as the way freedom through acquisition may be attained.

In Australia, recourse to this model has produced an overall image of the nation as a Pacific utopia, a fabled desert island secreted ‘down under’ but nonetheless still ‘plugged into’ the global mainstream of accelerated capitalist consumption. Thus the previously lamented geographical and cultural distance of Australia from the rest of the world, its ‘antipodean’ identity, has been symbolically replaced by a new global identity, one that nevertheless allows it to maintain its protectionist self-privileging as an island.

Recent critical practices of contemporary Australian artists rebuke this concept of Australia as a land of unproblematic material abundance, an island continent connected to but crucially and self-consciously ‘protected’ from the rest of the world. Tony Schwensen’s videos and installations attack contemporary Australian parochial nationalism. Stephen Birch exposes Australia’s connection to contemporary globalisation processes as one deliberately producing fear, especially as a result of the media’s perpetual reiteration of the ‘invisible’ threat of international terrorism, and as a means of social control. Meanwhile, the general disregard for the material circumstances and cultural contributions of Australia’s contemporary artists, as expressed in Australian party politics, for example, is addressed by the overtly politicised Sydney Art Seen Society (SASS), co-ordinated by contemporary Sydney artists and writers Gail Hastings and Lisa Kelly. SASS campaigns within and against the existing space of party politics while emphasising the intimate connection between contemporary art and politics. Meanwhile, contemporary new-media and installation artist Michael Goldberg parasitically appropriates globalisation’s virtualised market as his prima-materia rather than passively viewing it as the practical locus of contemporary art production.

Finally, the collective, Escape from Woomera, utilising computer-gaming technology, reveal contradictory challenges facing Australian artists working critically in a cultural and

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146 The term ‘down-under’ is a popular euphemism for Australia. It typically suggests Australia as a land blissfully protected from international strife through its geographic isolation from Europe and Britain in particular.

147 It is revealing in this respect that Australia appears to be following the example set by Britain, which has often cited its island status, its physical separation from mainland Europe and from European culture
political context where the values of a truly participatory democracy have, alongside the workings of the global economy, been virtualised. Considered overall, each of these examples of recent critical art production in Australia evinces a desire to intervene in the local and global spaces of an Australian contemporary situation. They do this in specific response to Australia’s embrace of both new global market connectivity and domestic isolationism.

5: 5 (i) Parochialism perverted: Countering the reappearance of a regressive Australian nationalism

A significant aspect of Australia’s current nationalist revivalism is predicated on the Liberal/National government’s controversial border protection policies. Yet it is also apparent in other guises; it appeared blatantly in the rise of Pauline Hanson’s now defunct One Nation Party, but also more subtly elsewhere — in the reinstatement of a parochial historicism emphasising white-settler history, often at the expense of urgent contemporary indigenous issues, in the reinflated valorisation of national myths of good-natured ‘mateship’ associated with the ANZAC legend, and in the highly publicised celebration of the nation’s various

and politics, as a reason for pursuing domestically isolationist cultural policies. See Robin Cohen, Frontiers of Identity: The British and the Others, p.30.

The policies of John Howard’s federal government have been especially severe in their patrolling of the nation’s borders. This has included passing laws that retrospectively excised numerous Pacific islands previously considered Australian territory in an effort to bar access to the Australian mainland by asylum seekers who had landed there. See Jane Murphy’s interview with John-Pierre Fonteyne, Professor of International Law at the Australian National University, ‘Borders of convenience’.

One Nation was the right-wing political party led by Pauline Hanson. The popularity and media visibility of One Nation occurred primarily because of its blatant reinstatement of reactionary nationalist agendas founded on race issues, which shocked many. One Nation was publicly vilified by both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party, but its reintroduction of racist and nationalist agendas into contemporary Australian politics actually allowed the ruling conservative parties to adopt some of its key themes, while appearing to distance itself from an otherwise unacceptable racist branding. ‘For a short period in the late 1990s, One Nation was taking supporters from both the governing Liberals and the opposition Labor party. John Howard’s response was to criticise publicly Pauline Hanson’s xenophobia and racism, but at the same time to quietly take many One Nation policies and adopt them as the Liberal party’s own’: Dominic Hughes. ‘Howard: Bare-knuckle boxer’.

For example, the health and living conditions of Australia’s indigenous people continue to be much lower than those of non-Aboriginal Australians, while the indigenous mortality rate, particularly of infants, and incidents of incarceration are much higher. ‘Indigenous people now have a life expectancy more than twenty years less than other Australians, and Indigenous infants are dying at the same rate as babies in some of the most impoverished developing countries’: Aboriginal health report quoting the Fred Hollows Foundation, European Network of Indigenous and Aboriginal Rights (ENIAR), at http://www.eniar.org/news/news-issues/health.html.

Australia’s national identity is heavily imbued with mythology relating to the World War I exploits of the ANZACs (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps). The year 2005, marking the 90th anniversary of the ill-fated Gallipoli campaign, attracted record crowds of Australians (and New Zealanders) both at home and to the Turkish site to mourn the nation’s war dead and celebrate the ‘spirit of ANZAC’, which usually refers to Australian goodwill and ‘mateship’ in the face of adversity. Prime Minister John Howard has also strategically invoked the ‘spirit of ANZAC’ as a means of identifying supposedly
sporting personalities. In contemporary Australian art, this revived nationalistic conservatism has resulted in the emergence of ‘neo-conservative modes of practice’ which encourage disinterested formal responses because ‘there is absolutely nothing you can say about the work other than, “how did they do that?”’

In response to such regressive revivalist nationalism, artist Tony Schwensen has repeatedly drawn from the repertoire of the ‘Australian vernacular and Australian humour’ to critically invert the return of an overt Australian nationalist agenda. Schwensen does this through deliberately emphasising Australian humour’s ‘bleakness, negative vision and aggressive/confrontational nature’, which arise from ‘the conditions of existence that colonial Australia provided’. The artist, particularly in his installation Border Protection Assistance — Am I Ever Gonna See Your Face Again? (Proposed Monument for the Torres Strait) (2002), draws explicitly from the presence of Australian vernacular humour in recent Australian popular culture, to indicate the deep-rootedness of (post-) colonial Australia’s continuing suspicion of and aggression towards outsiders.

The critical device of this particular work revolves around a reference to a song by once popular Australian hard-rock band The Angels, called ‘Am I ever going to see your face again?’ The live version of this song became famous nationally; following the lead singer’s main refrain, ‘Am I ever going to see your face again?’ the audience spontaneously responds in unison, ‘No way! Get fucked! Fuck off!’ Thus the underlying theme of a song ostensibly about regret over the imminent departure of a loved one is countered by spontaneous aggression that resounds consensually across the entire crowd. Here, the ‘social’, as embodied by the audience, rather than being inclusive or welcoming, coalesces around a politics of virulent exclusion. Physically, Schwensen’s work separates the retorts, ‘No way!’, ‘Get fucked!’ and ‘Fuck off!’ into isolated text fragments. Affixed to roadwork barricades, these magnify the insularity and racist connotations of this type of populist group identification, whose humour in this instance is considered ‘classically’ Australian (see Figure # 37).

quintessentially positive Australian national values and linking them to Australia’s participation in the war in Iraq. See ‘Record crowds honour Anzacs’, News, ABC-TV.

This tendency, already entrenched in Australian culture, was only strengthened after the nation’s hosting of that most ‘global’ of sporting competitions, the Olympic Games, in 2000; many of its top athletes won medals.

Tony Schwensen interview, 15 December 2004. See Appendix A.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.
Significantly, Schwensen sees his work as responding to a local situation where ‘Australia is continuously attempting to define itself on a global level’.\textsuperscript{158} Indeed, the critical success of Schwensen’s work, a good example of which is cited above, lies in its illumination of the hypocrisy of contemporary ‘global’ — that is, Western liberal — democracy. This is insofar as the contemporary globalisation of Western liberal democracy is simultaneously responsible for fostering, internally, protectionist dialogues of national identity.\textsuperscript{159} In this case, however, the return of a ‘core’ Australian identity is fundamentally based on the ongoing exclusion and/or expulsion of demonised ‘others’; the nation’s global connectedness, on the other hand, exists almost exclusively at an economic level.

5: 5 (ii) The ‘enemy’ within: Exposing the spectre of global fear

Australian culture’s current ‘globality’ is also heavily inflected by the ‘hype’ surrounding the global threat of terrorism, particularly as it appears unrelentingly in Western news and current affairs. Ever since the terrorist attacks of September 11, which reinvigorating U.S. imperialism,\textsuperscript{160} there lurks everywhere in the media the centralised spectre of Saudi Arabian ‘arch’ terrorist, Osama Bin Laden. In fact, Bin Laden’s insistent global media presence has made his an iconic and endlessly reproduced image. In this way, he is a product of

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{159} For example, Australia’s current nationalist self-presentation has also allowed it to selectively distance itself from acknowledging its ethical enmeshing in the affairs of other nations. Therefore, the Australian government has successfully managed to distance itself from admitting any responsibility for exacerbating the types of destabilising global mechanisms that produce global terrorism. It has been able to do this principally by representing itself as an innate ally of ‘all freedom-loving people’ through its wholehearted support for the United States’ ongoing and imperialist ‘global war on terrorism’.
contemporary globalisation processes. Today, Bin Laden is depicted as the mastermind of a new type of global negativity. This is doubly so as the spectralised image of him, replacing concrete knowledge of his actual whereabouts, is rendered even more threatening — he remains persistently invisible. Therefore, the threat supposedly posed to world peace by Bin Laden is, like globalisation discourse, everywhere and nowhere.

Australian contemporary artist Stephen Birch critically challenges the strategic use of ‘Osama Bin Laden’ as a pure sign that implicitly negates absolutely the value of Western democratic freedoms. Birch’s \textit{Frank} (2003) is a nude life-size model resembling the Al-Qaeda terrorist leader, Osama Bin Laden, but ‘not quite Osama’; it is rather a figure more connected ‘with the fear generated by representations (of him)’\textsuperscript{162} (see Figure #38). \textit{Frank} was conceived out of the artist’s perception of globalisation as essentially ‘a market force and phenomenon’\textsuperscript{163} and as a work ‘that intervenes’ in response to a local political and cultural climate where ‘dissent is mostly regarded as “whingeing”’\textsuperscript{164}

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\textsuperscript{160} See Chapter 2 — \textit{The Empire and its allies: ‘Enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus.}
\textsuperscript{161} In this way, ‘Osama Bin Laden’ as an individual identity has been transformed into a pure sign. In fact, the ‘absolute’ negativity associated with ‘Bin Laden’ now symbolises the absolute antithesis of a society based on the positive pursuit of transnational business — this model is encouraged by globalisation, which requires continuous productive participation. Therefore the sign ‘Bin Laden’ has become the obverse of the dollar sign, globalisation’s universal signifier of an equally absolute positivity.
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{163} Stephen Birch interview, 8 December 2004. See Appendix B.
\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
Birch’s *Frank* specifically references the ‘stupid’\textsuperscript{165} and obscene banality of the pervasive reductionism that allows Bin Laden’s media identity to circulate globally as a phantasmatic representation of Western democratic societies’ ‘Enemy Number 1’. This strategic deployment of Bin Laden’s image is explicitly produced by the fact that under globalisation, ‘media has a way of legitimising anything: that is, something mediated has a greater significance/currency than its original’.\textsuperscript{166} Therefore, the corresponding ‘banal’ simulacrum of Birch’s ‘Osama Bin Laden’, theatrically posed next to a doorway as though ready to pounce, is underscored by its critique of how the spectralised image of Bin Laden has been constructed in the West, where it contributes to a broader control of society\textsuperscript{167} and functions as an ever-present cipher of generalised unlocatable fear.\textsuperscript{168}

Birch’s ‘not-quite’ Bin Laden figure stresses that this local and global climate of fear is in fact based on continuously provoked acts of *mis*-recognition.\textsuperscript{169} Thus the approximate realism of Birch’s *Frank* reveals, on closer inspection, the obvious Anglo-European features of the ‘real’ figure upon whom it was modelled: the artist’s immediate studio neighbour, after whom the work is also literally named. The deliberate ‘obscenity’ of Birch’s figure, particularly its exaggeratedly large penis, suggests the ‘global war on terrorism’, especially after the humiliation and trauma of the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States, as equally located in the subjective terrain of globally warring masculinities. In addition, the work’s ‘pornographic’ aspect casts the figure *Frank* as a possible paedophile, a figure who is in ‘civilised’ Western democratic nations perhaps the ultimate reviled ‘enemy within’.

The overlaying of this sexualised reading implicitly casts the spectral figure of Osama Bin Laden as the ultimate defiler of democratic ‘innocence’, threatening to corrupt all positive self-representations of the supposedly ‘natural’ freedoms granted by the globalisation of Western democratic systems.

In the end, it is the ‘pornographic’ literalness of Birch’s *Frank*, questioning the obfuscating abstractionism of the global media’s virtual Osama Bin Laden that grants it its critical dimension. This is because the work exposes the paradox of a contemporary global

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} Gilles Deleuze, ‘Postscript on control societies’ in Thomas Y. Levin, Ursula Frohne and Peter Wiebel eds, *CTRL Space: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*, pp. 317–21.
\textsuperscript{168} As Birch explained, certain gallery visitors, suddenly catching a glimpse of his naked ‘lurking’ ‘Bin Laden’ figure, viscerally revealed this covert fear in the ‘shock’ it elicited. See Stephen Birch interview, 8 December 2004, Appendix B.
‘democratic’ system in which everyone is a potential suspect and is therefore reliant on the
state’s rigidly mediated control of its subjects.170

5: 5 (iii) Critical mass: The politics of re-socialising contemporary Australian art

Also overtly political in the context of recent Australian art is the Sydney Art Seen Society
(SASS). Founded in 2004,171 SASS addresses a number of key issues related to the effects of
globalisation on the Sydney art world. SASS’s immediate platform revolves around a
nationwide campaign petitioning the Australian federal government for the instatement of an
artist’s ‘acknowledgment fee’172 (see Figure # 39). More importantly, SASS directly links the
current production of art in Australia to the conservative political climate prevailing here, as a
challenge to it, and particularly ‘in [order to] urgent[ly] redress … the current decline of
standards in the professional environment of contemporary visual art in Sydney’.173

![Figure 39]

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169 ‘The faultless mastery of this clandestine style of operation … casts suspicion on any and every
individual. Might not any inoffensive person be a potential terrorist’?: Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of
Terrorism, p. 20.

170 Globalisation’s ‘deregulation ends up in a maximum of constraints and restrictions, akin to those of a
fundamentalist society’: Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 32.

171 As an organisation, SASS is also affiliated with the following groups, predominantly artist-initiated:
24HR ART (Darwin), Briefcase (Sydney), CCAS (Canberra), Citylights (Melbourne), CLUBSproject
Inc. (Melbourne), Conical (Melbourne), Downtown (Adelaide), DVAA (Darwin), KINGS (Melbourne),
KURB Gallery (Perth), Lives of the Artists (Sydney), MOP projects (Sydney), NUCA (national), Ocular
Lab (Melbourne), Platform (Melbourne), Seventh (Melbourne), SNO (Sydney), Soapbox Gallery
(Brisbane), TCB Art Inc. (Melbourne) and Watch This Space (Alice Springs).

172 The proposed ‘Artist’s Acknowledgement Fee’ includes a minimum fee to be paid all artists
exhibiting in public spaces in Sydney, but in overall design it is closer to an artist’s living wage. See Gail
Hastings, ‘What is an Artist’s Acknowledgement Fee?’.

173 Gail Hastings, SASS, The Campaign (Visual Artists say No to Nothing but YES to Acknowledgement).
See Appendix C, Part A of this thesis.
Crucial to SASS’s overall critical outlook is its apprehension of the collective, politicised dimension of contemporary art practice. This is in strict contrast to globalisation’s core agendas, which advocate privatisation, personal consumption and the identity of the contemporary ‘global’ artist as supra individual.\(^{174}\) Another response to this ‘new individualism’\(^{175}\) is SASS’s challenge to the present conditions of contemporary art production favoured by globalisation, where ‘visual culture is ... more and more determined by art-institutional programs rather than these programs being determined by the art’.\(^{176}\) Thus SASS, critically, in the face of this worldwide scenario, invokes the collective agency of the producer, the artist, specifically within the localised political context of the Sydney art scene.

This issue of localisation is a distinctly critical and political one for SASS, particularly at a time when ‘the comings and goings of our artists who exhibit outside of Australia are increasing’.\(^{177}\) From such circumstances SASS asks ‘whether the reference point of much of our contemporary art has drifted too far outside to have carried a local audience with it’?\(^{178}\) Such a question is particularly provocative because it challenges the belief that globalisation is uniformly respectful and encouraging of the specificities of local difference. Indeed, the question reflects negatively on a global system where the active fostering of locally engaged artistic communities is displaced by ‘the development of institutional, academic, market and artistic practices whose values carry attitudes in which dependency (on art outside Australia, in this instance) [is] ... a given’.\(^{179}\)

To critically reverse the effects of this global proscription, and making itself a singularly critical organ in recent Australian art,\(^{180}\) SASS challenges the culturally borderless ‘freedoms’ associated with art produced in Australia today. SASS identifies cultural ‘dumbing-down’,\(^{181}\) a result of the cultural policies of governments, which are in turn determined by a global economy

\(^{174}\) This scenario is referred to by SASS co-instigator Gail Hastings as ‘cultural-rationalism ... run amuck’. See Gail Hastings, *Contemporary Australian Art and Locality*, Appendix C, Part C.

\(^{175}\) Contemporary French theorist Paul Virilio, paraphrasing German Romantic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1844–1900), extends the nature of this ‘new individualism’ to ‘an egotism so colossal that the Universe cannot contain it’: Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, p. 6.

\(^{176}\) Gail Hastings, *SASS, The Campaign (Visual Artists say No to Nothing but YES to Acknowledgement)*, Appendix C, Part A.

\(^{177}\) Gail Hastings, *Contemporary Australian Art and Locality*, Appendix C, Part C.

\(^{178}\) Ibid.


\(^{180}\) It is important to note here that SASS is not an aesthetic movement and was not conceived in any way as an exhibiting collective. SASS is a politicised cultural body addressing government arts policies in Australia and providing an open forum for debating attitudes to contemporary art production.
of ‘rampant rationalism’,\textsuperscript{182} as the ‘new tyranny now plaguing us’.\textsuperscript{183} SASS refuses to conceive local politics as lying ‘outside’ culture, especially when local culture is obviously considered ‘inside’ such politics by the Australian government and is heavily impacted on by it. Finally, in recognising both spaces, those of politics and of culture, as essentially social, SASS confronts the neo-liberal individualism of contemporary mainstream Australian politics and culture. More broadly, SASS responds critically to a global scenario that replaces genuine social bonds with the simulated socialisation of capitalist exchange.\textsuperscript{184}

5: 5 (iv) **Global market free-for-all: Globalisation’s virtual market as contemporary art**

Globalisation’s pursuit of an expanded ‘free’ market obviously impacts significantly on the production of art. Indeed, Australian culture’s insertion into the global market becomes increasingly a means of making global what was once considered ‘merely’ local, marginal or antipodean. South African-born Australian artist Michael Goldberg, in his work *catchingafallingknife.com* (2002) (see Figure # 40), confronts contemporary Australian art production and its proximity to the virtualised space of the contemporary global market. Rather than perceiving the global market as a mere background to art practice, Goldberg highlights the centrality of its influence on the production of contemporary ‘global culture’.\textsuperscript{185}

\begin{figure}[h]
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\end{figure}

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\textsuperscript{181} Gail Hastings, *Contemporary Australian Art and Locality*, Appendix C, Part C.
\textsuperscript{182} It is the same rationalist perspective that rewards a vision of contemporary culture as based on institutional consensus and audience counts. See ibid.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} This is the so-called ‘myth of social bonds in a capitalizing system’. Sande Cohen, ‘Critical Inquiry, *October* and Historicizing French Theory’, in *French Theory in America*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{185} See Michael Goldberg, interview, 9 September 2005. See Appendix D.
\end{flushleft}
In *catchingafallingknife.com*, the artist conceives the art market as neither the neutral 'object' of his critique nor merely the natural goal of that practice. Instead, this work functions intimately within the virtual space of the global 'free' market, and cannot be conveniently extricated from it.\(^{186}\) To realise this work, Goldberg used the logic of 'casino capitalism'.\(^{187}\) He convinced three anonymous entrepreneurial 'speculators' who replied to an ad he posted in an online share trader 'chat room', enticed by the possibility of being perceived as 'patrons of art',\(^{188}\) to collectively finance his project, to the tune of AUD$50,000. This money was then traded by the artist in shares of Australian-born media magnate, Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation (Newscorp), chosen specifically by Goldberg because of its 'household name'.\(^{189}\)

'Behaving like a day trader',\(^{190}\) Goldberg traded in Newscorp shares from the art institutional context of Sydney's Artspace. At the same time, the real-time speculative space of the 'open' market symbolically replaced the autonomous reflective space of the artist's studio, traditionally projected as a haven. Acknowledging the seductions of the global market and its current accessibility to amateurs,\(^{191}\) Goldberg's work also indicates its increased risks. Indeed, Goldberg's *catchingafallingknife.com* suggests the extent to which contemporary art's enmeshing with a market now operating on a global scale is necessarily volatile and unstable. Thus, as the Newscorp shares the artist traded progressively declined in monetary value,\(^{192}\) a possible 'end-of art' scenario was also invoked. In the era of globalisation, art's 'fate' is suggested to be synonymous with the 'fate', even potential collapse of, the global economy.

However, Goldberg's *catchingafallingknife.com* equally implies an alternative question: 'can there be art at all in the absence of the market?' In Australia, for example, contemporary art is privileged — there are signs of its swelling investment value as highly visible capital flows

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186 In *catchingafallingknife.com*, Goldberg conceptualises contemporary art not so much as an inert product on the market but an enmeshed product of it.

187 See David McNeill, 'Trading down: Michael Goldberg and the art of speculation'.

188 Ibid.

189 Naturally, Murdoch's Newscorp is also the ideal medium for Goldberg's intervention, as it is simultaneously Australian — at least the Murdoch empire is intimately associated with an Australian cultural context — and eminently global, being one of the globalised world's ten largest media conglomerates. See ibid. See also Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization*, pp. 78–81.


191 Ibid., p. 13.

192 The value of the shares traded by Goldberg in Newscorp diminished from an initial $50,000 to $38,437.50 by the end of the fourth and final week of the artist's exhibition. Viewers could witness this descent via a real-time video projection onto one of Artspace's gallery walls. See David McNeill, 'Trading down: Michael Goldberg and the art of speculation', p. 13.
out of the share market and into art’s institutional spaces, museums and galleries.\(^{193}\) At the same time, however, perception of an artwork’s broader critical or social value is rendered equally speculative, and, indeed, secondary to the lack of ambiguity in its value as global capital.\(^{194}\) In the end, the critically dissenting aspect of Goldberg’s *catchingafallingknife.com* lies in its entwining with the virtualised space of the global market. Here, the distinctions between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ and between ‘producer’ and ‘consumer’ necessary for the successful promotion of art as a global commodity are not only complexified; they are rendered implosive and impossible.

5: 5 (v) Implosive ambivalence? The freedom of virtual subjects and the game of virtual democracy

The reliance on virtualised systems expressed in the workings of the global market are reflected also in the machinations of contemporary Western democracy.\(^{195}\) Virtuality and dissimulation are crucial aspects of the collectively authored 2004 video-art game *Escape from Woomera.*\(^{196}\) Partaking in a growing trend in contemporary art, the creators of this work ultimately ‘reject the barrier imposed between fine art and games’.\(^{197}\) The interactive game plan of *Escape From Woomera* involves players entering a realistic and accurate virtual representation of Australia’s

\(^{193}\) Reflecting from a local perspective on the interrelationship between contemporary art and the global market, the artist has expressly observed that ‘the records we’re seeing broken on the Australian art market at the moment are a direct result of the channelling of speculative capital out of the share market and into galleries’: ibid., p. 16.

\(^{194}\) This means that to valorise a contemporary artwork for the high price it attracts on the global market is to reduce the complexities of its meaning and/or critical content by subjecting it to the global system of capital that judges value according to *sameness*. French post-modern philosopher Jean-François Lyotard cites ‘capitalism as a prevailing phrase regime whose single language requires no translation: money’. Capitalism’s non-differentiated ‘indifferent’ language is *money*. See Jean-François Lyotard, quoted in Andrea Loselle, ‘How French is it?’ in Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen, eds, *French Theory in America*, p. 229.

\(^{195}\) This means that contemporary Western liberal democracy is located, more and more, purely at the level of its imagistic self-representation and in the accelerated exchange and global distribution of information: ‘our systems of information and communication have themselves too, and for a long time, been beyond the reality principle’: Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 59.

\(^{196}\) The game *Escape From Woomera* is the joint project of Australian journalist Kate Wild, Melbourne-based visual and sound artists Andrea Blundell, Stephen Honegger and Julian Oliver, and computer programmers and animators Ian Malcolm, Justin Halliday, Matt Harrigan, Darren Taylor and Chris Markwart.

\(^{197}\) Anne-Marie Schleiner, *New York Times*, August 2001. *Escape From Woomera* received an AUD$25,000 grant from the government’s principal cultural funding institution, the Australia Council for the Arts, under its New Media banner. This drew harsh criticism from former Liberal Party immigration minister Phillip Ruddock, who was instrumental in implementing and defending the government’s policy of mandatory detention of all refugees and asylum seekers. See also Melanie Swalwell, ‘The Meme Game: *Escape from Woomera*’.  

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most infamous detention centre,\textsuperscript{198} in order to help refugees and asylum seekers escape\textsuperscript{199} (see Figure \# 41).

\textbf{Figure 41}

The liberationary dimension of \textit{Escape From Woomera}, inviting players to participate in a game of virtual ‘direct democracy’,\textsuperscript{200} raises complex questions about local and global democratic forms and about contemporary art’s relation to them. For example, the designers of the game give it a critically democratic function — it allows anyone\textsuperscript{201} virtual access to secretive spaces that the Australian government has made strictly out-of-bounds, even to journalists.\textsuperscript{202} Furthermore, the designers of \textit{Escape From Woomera} argue that their game, as art, grants the virtual player democratic agency through immersively engaging their ‘minds,

\textsuperscript{198} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{199} In fact, before negative media coverage of Woomera contributed to its eventual closure in April 2003, such events actually occurred. In April 2002, real protesters gathered outside Woomera, cut security fencing surrounding the compound and helped a number of detainees escape. Many of the escapees were later secreted by the same protesters in tents pitched in the desert or in outlying suburban houses. Many were finally removed by Australian authorities between 2003 and 2005, but there remain nine who were not. See ‘Woomera detainees caught 3 years after escape’, \textit{The Age}, October 10 2005.
\textsuperscript{200} The term ‘direct democracy’ relates also to ‘direct action’, and may also be called ‘radical democracy’. It is a form of democracy that rejects the regulatory and consensual aspects of contemporary parliamentary democracy, where decisions and laws are handed down by an elected elite. Direct democracy advocates a ‘bottom up’ ‘interventionist’ model where citizens contribute directly to creating, in localised contexts that comprise the nature of the state, the political system in which they live. Subsequent political decisions therefore are to be made directly by citizens, not by an official body making them on their behalf. See Chantal Mouffe, \textit{The Democratic Paradox}.
\textsuperscript{201} Potential players can install the game onto desktop computers. See \textit{Escape From Woomera} founder, Julian Oliver, interviewed by Melanie Swalwell, ‘The Meme Game: Escape from Woomera’,
\textsuperscript{202} At the same time, these governmental orders contravene the freedom of speech supposedly inherent to global democracy, just as the operations of Australia’s detention centres have also been said to defy United Nations Human Rights Conventions. See ‘UN condemns Australia’s treatment of refugees’, \textit{The Guardian Unlimited}. See also General Press Release no. 249, Australia Press Council.
emotionally, ethically, intellectually', enabling, through play, ‘different engagements and encounters, making it possible to envisage things being otherwise’.

Nonetheless, a critical ambivalence underscores *Escape From Woomera*: it can be seen as feeding parasitically on detainees, people whose ‘real-life’ political and social status fundamentally questions the actual functioning of contemporary Australian democracy. It could be claimed, after all, that this game simply capitalises on the generalised use of refugee ‘characters’ as the substructure of technologically sophisticated ‘entertainment’. In the same sense, the case that ‘though there have been many studies done to try to prove a causal link between virtual actions in a game and the real-life actions of the game player, no link whatsoever has ever been found’ may also be used to negatively attest to the atavistic and unaccountable relationship between a virtualised system of contemporary Western liberal democracy and its existing social and civil spaces. It may be suggested, additionally, through such reasoning, that the only truly effective functioning of contemporary democracy is in a virtual form symbolically played out within the individual’s restricted private sphere.

*Escape From Woomera*, as a cultural initiative, aims to contest the dominance of authoritarian and corporatised ideological contents within globalisation’s virtualised representational matrix by actively inserting itself into it. The extent to which the game has a subversive socio-critical impetus, however, remains unclear. This is because as a work of art that is also a computer game played in the privacy of one’s own home, there is no way of gauging the game’s effect in an actually existing socio-democratic context. Indeed, the ambivalence of *Escape From Woomera* reflects a more general situation in critical Australian art production that engages specific local socio-political issues from a global outlook. In failing to treat such political content in sufficiently ‘neutral’, universalist, ‘global’ terms, these practices frequently risk being sidelined and relegated to positions of ‘specialist’ marginality.

Furthermore, their potential to embarrass the Australian government’s core funding body for contemporary culture, the Australia Council for the Arts (OzCo), as occurred when the

203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Criticism aimed against *Escape From Woomera* has come from various refugee lobby groups and from prominent spokespeople, such as the Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Sev Ozdowski, who described it as ‘at best … insensitive’: Sev Ozdowski, quoted in ibid.
207 This is certainly the case with regard to contemporary Australian art’s most domestically and internationally successful examples, often seen as ‘most successful’ precisely because of their self-conscious embrace of a de-specified and generalised ‘global’ aesthetic. In comparison, the critical
government reacted in a hostile way to the OzCo-funded Escape From Woomera, suggests an additional threat to the climate of contemporary critical culture in Australia.

5: 6 The ‘fatal shore’ of Australia’s contemporary critical culture

Globalisation’s effects on contemporary Australian art are experienced on multiple levels. Furthermore, these effects, rather than inherently encouraging difference — although difference proliferates also — particularly favour cultural production that accords with globalisation’s core econometric agendas. Therefore, much of Australia’s most globally successful contemporary art mirrors, intentionally or not, and/or courts actively, globalisation’s core values and dominant centres of economic power.

This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that contemporary globalisation processes promise to place Australian art visibly on an international, indeed transnational, platform. Additionally, for a minority elite of Australian artists, globalisation promises increased material and economic benefits. Thus globalisation, rather than being an unquestionably decentred and therefore liberationist discourse — the terms under which it is frequently critiqued and supported — paradoxically reinstates a contemporary cultural centre. This centre corresponds, of course, to the current centres of global power to which ‘other’ nations aspire. The seeking of these benefits, and this sense of a centre elsewhere, are evident in Australia, where there persist, as the Australian art critics Tony Fry and Anne-Marie Willis note:

specificities of art that contests globalisation may be reduced to ‘singularities drifting off on their own’: Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 91.

208 This title refers to art critic and historian Robert Hughes’ book of the same name, which paints a dark picture of Australia’s colonial history. The book stresses that at the time of its colonisation by the British, Australia was conceived primarily as a ‘prison island’, a distant repository for petty and serious criminals as well as political dissenters, such as Irish men fighting for their country’s independence from British imperial rule. This historical image of Australia is as a ‘negative utopia’, a hell on earth: it is an image vastly removed from today’s representations of Australia’s abundant physical and material wealth. At the same time, this title combines such references to the background of Australia’s national identity with French philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s theories of ‘fatality’, in which the practice of critique is theorised not as redemptive or oppositional but ‘fatal’: that is, it is seduced by the object of its critique, and the molding of critique and object produces an ultimately implosive, indivisible ‘fatal’ relationship between subject and object. See Jean Baudrillard, Fatal Strategies.

209 For example, Australian theorist Nikos Papastergiadis favours globalisation, stressing its positive dimensions as a transnational hybridising mechanism. Others criticise globalisation as a hegemonic order, equally strongly stressing its openness to constant transformation at every level as a negative. See Nikos Papastergiadis, ‘Cultural identity and its boredom: Transculturalism and its ecstasy’, in Nikos Papastergiadis ed, Complex Entanglements: Art Globalisation and Cultural Difference.
strong and lingering feelings among Australian cultural producers that they exist on the margins of international high culture. Success in New York or Los Angeles therefore carries an enormous weight.210

Thus, contemporary 'global culture' is shaped by Western economic centres, which celebrate difference while fostering hegemony.211 The hegemonic influence of 'global culture' on Australian art impacts especially on the nation's 'emerging' artists. In fact, much of the work produced by such artists symbolically supports the rise of a privileged global middle-class. The global ascendancy of this 'neutral' 'non-class' in the general absence of continuing debates on class difference is global neo-liberalism's dream.212 Related to this is the ambition of many young Australian artists to insert their work as quickly as possible into the matrix of the globalised art market by consensually embracing representations of a 'universal', highly commercialised global 'youth culture'. In turn, museums and commercial galleries now use the presence of such populist references as assurance of a work's global contemporaneity. At the same time, Australia's 'emerging' artists are keen to present themselves as young 'industry professionals' by engaging, with seriousness and respect, with the most pervasive representations of the system of global capitalism.

In relation to this system, it is significant, too, that even certain examples of contemporary Australian art that do explicitly address acute contemporary socio-critical issues ultimately restore to the centre of contemporary cultural practice an anthropologised image of the 'privatised' personality of the artist as creative individual. This curious critical inversion and de-socialisation of the artist's role occurs as an indirect result of the dominance in Australia of a culture of narcissistic consumption and material aspiration.213 Furthermore, and perhaps even more paradoxically, it is in this climate that the increased consumption of difference or

211 'The means of transmitting this model are local, the reach of the model is global ... the model has a local first, [then] northern and particularly Northern American identity': Annette van den Bosch, *The Australian Art World: Aesthetics in a Global Market*, p. 216.
212 Globalisation's assumed imminence only further encourages a dominant image of it in contemporary politics and culture, in Australia as elsewhere, as potentially or actually fulfilling the 'blindest and most delirious of hallucinations': that is, 'liberal-democratic capitalism' as a modern-day 'capitalist paradise'. See Jacques Derrida's scathing critique of Francis Fukuyama in *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, p. 80.
213 With this type of economic rationalism in mind, contemporary Australian artists today are frequently 'expected to add value by creating economic or creative benefits for other sectors', as the 'emphasis in economic and public policy [has] swung totally in favour of consumers [or voters on whom politicians rely] and away from the producers of culture': Annette van den Bosch, *The Australian Art World: Aesthetics in a Global Market*, p. 212.
'otherness' proliferates.\textsuperscript{214} It is precisely because of its 'difference' as a new product on the global market that contemporary Australian indigenous art — which, it could be argued, has been primarily responsible for placing contemporary Australian art in the global spotlight — is consumed. The positive reception of such representations of difference in such work is heightened when the work also 'fits' with a deliberately generalist 'global' aesthetic or self-consciously 'international look'.\textsuperscript{215}

The effects of this on the production within Australia of a resistant critical culture invoking politicised specificities are potentially 'fatal'. With this in mind, particular instances of Australian contemporary art that are engaged in such a way and facing globalisation's simulated systems of democratic and financial freedom, of virtualised political and economic exchanges, are responding equally to 'an urgent need to redefine the social contract of art with society in ways which ensure that the community recognises [that] the arts are an integral part of life'.\textsuperscript{216}

Such critical practices within Australian art are subversive because of their unpredictability and their awareness of the significant ethical shifts wrought by contemporary globalisation processes. At the same time, they remain relatively marginalised. This is because their complex, uncompromising and at times interventionist addressing of the localised politico-cultural effects of globalisation do not fare well in relation to a system of neo-liberal capitalism and Western liberal democracy that is eager to claim inherent 'neutrality', fairness and 'naturally' global applicability.

Australia — in art as in economics — favours the reductive economic rationalism of globalisation's neo-liberal prerogatives that everywhere valorise the pursuit of enterprising business practice. So in this climate, the production of contemporary 'global' culture is also increasingly expected to revolve around a business model.\textsuperscript{217} As a result, and answering to purported new global opportunities, Australian contemporary art increasingly foregoes its resistant or oppositional capabilities in order to pursue international success at the centre of contemporary 'global' culture, and primarily on populist and market terms.

\textsuperscript{216} Annette van den Bosch, \textit{The Australian Art World: Aesthetics in a Global Market}, p. 212.
\textsuperscript{217} A crisis results: "[it] stems...." from arts companies and the Australia Council buying the notion that culture is an industry, "As more and more money has been required, the big [arts] companies have fallen further and further into the hands of sponsors, and the sponsors dictate — in the nicest possible way — the terms on which they will give money": journalist Rosemary Neill, initially quoting Katherine Brisbane, 'a cofounder of performing arts-think tank Currency House'. See Gail Hastings, \textit{Contemporary Australian Art and Locality}, Appendix C, Part C.
Chapter 6

Unforeseen effects: The paradox of global culture, globalisation generating critical heterogeneities

Globalisation’s drive to centralise contemporary art and its institutions and thereby de-territorialise critical and oppositional practices,\(^1\) while highly effective, is simultaneously fatally flawed. The attempted global implementation of a combined Western liberal democratic and neo-liberal economic schema, and the cultural paradigms they purvey generates uncontrollable parallel zones of chaos and disorder;\(^2\) globalisation in fact accelerates the generation of a multiplicity of resistant and oppositional art-critical practices. These emerge out of the art of transnationally dispersed individual practitioners, but also, and perhaps even more forcefully, from globally networked heterogeneous artist and activist collectives. The latter, in particular, utilise globalisation’s core econometricism, its reliance on flows of ‘virtual capital,’ for example, to intervene and disrupt its territorialising influence on a wide scale.

This repeated failure of globalisation to universally ‘adhere’, in a transnational — indeed, potentially ‘universal’ — context only increases the imperialist and authoritarian ambitions of the ‘global’ empire of the United States. And if the disparate cultures and economies of the world are united today, in the era of globalisation, they are only ‘united by a new form of chaos, dominated by the imperium of the United States, though not controlled by it’,\(^3\) and representing a system ‘we lack the words to describe ... while being surrounded by its images’.\(^4\)

Globalisation’s seemingly paradoxical production of both centralised hegemonic authority and diffuse and ultimately un-containable chaos is evident in the domain of art. Here, this dualistic paradox configures contemporary art as either part of the realm of globally distributed consumer and entertainment products or as a counter-terrain of proliferating and reinvigorated art-critical and interventionist modes of practice.

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\(^1\) See Chapter 4 — *The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled?* Refer also to Jean Baudrillard, who writes that what we are experiencing today is a world situation where ‘no alternative form of thinking is allowed’: Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 9.

\(^2\) The ‘global order is already the site of such disorder and deregulation that there is no point whatever in adding to it’ (via acts of terrorism, for example). See Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, p. 55.

\(^3\) Alain Joxe, *The Empire of Disorder*, p. 81.

\(^4\) Ibid.
6: 1 Part 1: Contemporary critical practices: Global strategies and refusals

Evidence of the renewed flowering of critical contemporary art practices under globalising conditions appears at two dominant sites. First, it appears in the individual practices of particular contemporary artists. Second, it is evidenced in an expanding global network of various independent artist organisations and collectives. Globalisation's tendency to generate chaos also generates 'cracks in the Empire' which contemporary artists who are critical of the dominating econometric biases of globalisation, its underlying neo-colonialism and fostering of authoritarian urban 'control spaces', are able to maximise and exploit.

Contemporary artists who are critical of the effects of globalisation engage in a variety of critical strategies. Such artists may use globalisation's intrinsic dependence on the 'spectacularistion' of global culture, and indeed of war, conflict and violence, using the transnational terrain of art to produce contrary negative spectacles. In this way these artists expose the repressed, 'unenlightened' negative contents of globalisation that are disguised by its positivist rhetoric, harnessing that rhetoric instead as a critically oppositional value. Other artists critique globalisation's denigration of the singularities of locality, which it supplants with a conception of a universalised global commercial culture. Refusing to produce commodifiable 'objects', these artists simultaneously emphasise the endemic spectrality of the simulated, virtualised technologist 'global culture' of perversely disarticulated free-floating images. Recognising the permeability of global institutions, yet other critical practitioners attack the increasingly corporatised ambience through which such institutions voraciously 'brand' and consume cultural difference.

In each of these instances, the significant changes wrought by globalisation are specifically and negatively contested. This is especially insofar as they negatively encroach on art's continuing capacity to function socio-critically. The reinvigoration of art-criticality that emerges in these practices is consequently aimed at the fundamental(ist) ideological and

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5 Tariq Ali, 'Cracks in the Empire'.
6 See Gilles Deleuze, 'Postscript on control societies', in Ursula Frohne, Thomas Y. Levin and Peter Weibel eds, CTRL: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother.
7 See Hal Foster, Design and Crime and Other Diatribes.
8 For example, London art critic and theorist Julian Stallabrass writes, 'the ghostly, apparently immaterial character of the contemporary commodity goes hand-in-hand with the rise of neoliberalism. This militant form of capitalism was made possible by far reaching technological changes, particularly in computer communications': Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, p. 79.
9 'L]iberal globalisation is coming about in precisely the opposite form — a police-state goblinisation, a total control, a terror based on law-and-order measures. Deregulation ends up in a maximum of
economic discourses upon which the continued effective spread of globalisation relies.

6: 1 (i) Negative spectacle: Artists capitalising on globalisation’s chaotic effects

The hegemonic aspects of globalisation evidence an attempt, apparent within the network of contemporary ‘global’ art also, to absent obviously negative critical content.\textsuperscript{10} In art this occurs at every level of exhibition, and even at the level of the presentation of works in public collections, which ‘now requires sponsors … art that is not attractive to sponsors is rarely seen’.\textsuperscript{11} This overall denial of negativity exists despite the fact that global culture — especially global cinematic, media and televisual culture — relies intrinsically on what may be termed ‘negative spectacle’. That is, in globalisation’s spectacle-orientated vision of contemporary culture, negativity is a prime value.\textsuperscript{12}

Proof of the absolute destructive power of chaos as a negatively privileged contemporary value, eminently encapsulated by the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, therefore supplies additional rational justification for the current attempted imposition of a global ‘new world order’. Representations of violence, chaos and destruction harnessed by entertainment and media forms favoured by this global world ‘order’\textsuperscript{13} therefore seek only to redeem, ideologically, their negative value. This is achieved through spectacularising narratives of negativity in which destruction and chaos are ultimately surmounted by a greater positive, but in fact highly controlling, global social order.\textsuperscript{14}

Ironically, the advent of economic globalisation simultaneously causes everywhere ‘little wars, endless and cruel … savage contemporary wars that accompany the rise of an overwhelming world imperial power, [a] … power which only seeks to fill its pockets’.\textsuperscript{15} The spectacularised global consumer culture emphasised by the United States, this world imperial

\textsuperscript{10}This represents the contemporary ‘hegemony of the positive over any form of negativity’: Jean Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{11}Julian Stallabrass, review of the exhibition, ‘Cashing-in’ at the Whitechapel Gallery, London.

\textsuperscript{12}Evidence of such negativity appears, for instance, in the televised depiction of real and imaginary violence in the reframing and media support of global war and territorial invasions and in the regularly fetishised treatments of natural and man-made disasters.

\textsuperscript{13}Contemporary ‘global culture’ feeds on ideologically encoded simulations of disaster, mainly in films and on television. Therefore, ‘The countless disaster movies which bear witness to this fantasy [of destruction] clearly attempt to exorcise [it] with images, drowning out the whole thing with special effects’: Jean Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism}, p. 7.


\textsuperscript{15}Alain Joxe, ‘Chaos today’, in \textit{The Empire of Disorder}, pp. 80–81.
power, at the same time relies on ‘the incessant overproduction of objects of consumption’\textsuperscript{16} along with their ‘accelerated obsolescence’,\textsuperscript{17} which generates a ‘vernacular violence in the spaces of everyday life that regulates every spatiotemporal order and devalues all object relations’.\textsuperscript{18} This underlying duality of globalisation also leads to a situation where ‘military operations are carried out in the background in order not to disturb world commerce which envelops the whole world’.\textsuperscript{19}

Global culture’s obsession with representations of chaotic negativity is critically rerouted in the contemporary art of Swiss-born, Paris-based Thomas Hirschhorn, London’s Heather Burnett and Moscow’s Oleg Kulik. Each of these artists engages with the chaotic conditions generated by globalisation processes as well as global culture’s paradoxical celebration of the transnational violence that is accelerated as a result of its failure as a rationally totalising system.

Thomas Hirschhorn’s 2002 ‘display’,\textsuperscript{20} Plan B, for example, is literally configured as a chaotic and forlorn total environment\textsuperscript{21} (see Figure # 42). At the same time, the overriding sense of impermanence the work evinces is an implicit critique and parody of globalisation’s inflated claims that it is uniting the entire world economically and culturally.

Emerging from the surface chaos of Hirschhorn’s Plan B is a specific critique linking contemporary global conflict — the U.S. led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq in particular — to the Western sites of a globally accelerated consumer culture. Here such inextricable connections are invoked to suggest a space ‘seemingly out of rational control, the global space of triumphant capitalism, with its war of all against all’.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, physically in this work, hugely oversized and materially impoverished models of the Islamic holy book, the Koran, directly face equally monstrous replicas of packets of brand-name laundry detergents.\textsuperscript{23} The latter reference the

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20}The artist proposes the term ‘display’ over the by-now thoroughly art-institutional term ‘installation’. See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ‘Cargo and cult: The displays of Thomas Hirschhorn’.
\textsuperscript{21}In this respect the environmentalism of Hirschhorn’s art may be seen to have precedents in the alternative art movement of the 1960s including Environments, Happenings, Land Art and Performance Art, and in the manifestations of individual artists such as U.S. Pop artist Claes Oldenburg’s similarly accumulative, ‘environmental’ work, The Street (1960) and The Store (1961). See Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, ‘Thomas Hirschhorn: Lay-out sculpture and display diagrams’ in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Alison M. Gingeras and Carlos Basualdo, eds, Thomas Hirschhorn, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{22}Tom McDonough, ‘Thomas Hirschhorn at Barbara Gladstone, New York’, p. 106.
\textsuperscript{23}This seemingly antagonistic pairing could also be read as a comparison of differing fundamentalisms. See Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism.
puritanism of the United States’ self-proclaimed mission of spreading a particular ‘cleansing’ ‘brand’ of global imperial ‘justice’.

This work, like most of Hirschhorn’s work, ‘often looks like confusion’;\textsuperscript{24} but its dimension of chaos is proposed as a socio-critical strategy to engage audiences, who find it impossible ‘to tell whether that confusion is his or ours’;\textsuperscript{25} Chaos, as a fundamental by-product of globalisation, in Hirschhorn’s work becomes an alternative opening through which the contemporary de-fetishised\textsuperscript{26} gesamtkunstwerk or ‘total art work’\textsuperscript{27} incites critical consideration of the significant structural inequities globalisation produces.

![Figure 42](image)

Other contemporary artists who critically invert globalisation’s endemic logic of ‘negative spectacle’ are more brutal, less textual than Hirschhorn. Consider, for example, the 2001 video work \textit{Witness: An Aesthetic}, by British artist Heather Burnett. Burnett’s work, consisting of two video monitors, installed side by side, is shocking indeed. On the first monitor, Burnett presents an edited barrage of predictable Hollywood dramatisations of violence and chaotic destruction: multiple explosions, invasions, ritual executions and other killings.\textsuperscript{28} Meanwhile, the second monitor screens, in glaring contrast, amateur footage secretly shot by the artist in war-ravaged

\textsuperscript{24} Adrian Searle, ‘My ugly laundrette’.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Hirschhorn’s work is ‘de-fetishised’ specifically by its irreducibility, its resistance to being reduced to a series of individually detachable and commodifiable aesthetic components.
\textsuperscript{27} The gesamtkunstwerk, popularised during the 19th century, was a notion where culture was conceived as ideally incorporating all contemporary art forms: literature, music and the plastic arts. The resulting artwork was therefore ‘environmental’ and immersive.
\textsuperscript{28} Films referenced include well-known Hollywood movies such as \textit{Top Gun} (1986) and \textit{Reservoir Dogs} (1992).
Bosnia Herzegovina as well as footage of the vicious African conflicts in Rwanda and Sierra Leone, filmed by the journalist Sorious Samura\textsuperscript{29} (see Figure # 43).

The clumsy, artless, ‘matter-of-fact’ nature of material on the second screen, added to the viewer’s sudden exposure to it from the contemplative comfort of a gallery, ruptures typical audience disassociation: the base, casual ‘anti-spectacle’ of the documentary violence shown in such close proximity to the ‘heroic’ violence of Hollywood’s globalised ‘image factories’ is as disturbing as it is deeply critical. This is because while the ideologically driven productions of the latter deliberately grant violence and chaos an ultimate rational and positive purpose, violence in the former appears wholly accidental and therefore devoid of a ‘higher’ ‘redemptive’ meaning. The highly structured and controlling violence of Hollywood’s globalised representational system is utilised to reinstate a dialectic of ‘universal’ values such as ‘good’ and ‘evil’ and consequently to assert an unarguably ‘global’ reality.\textsuperscript{30} In contrast, actual evidence of globalisation’s exacerbation of multiple regional conflicts is dominated by the singularities of an uncontrollable global reality-in-excess.

![Figure 43](image)

The debasement of the individual and of community evident in Burnett’s savage appraisal of the economic and political climate under globalisation appears elsewhere in staged versions of such debasement that critically locate the artist in a similarly unenviable position. The Russian artist Oleg Kulik, for instance, references economic globalisation’s failure to positively

\textsuperscript{29} As part of footage from Sierra Leone, the audience witnesses a shirtless teenage boy who has been shot in the chest, bleeding profusely from his wound and lying in excruciating death throes in a decrepit dusty street, while military assailants stand by, kicking him.

\textsuperscript{30} In fact, the U.S. film industry’s obsessive depiction of man-made catastrophes suggests that the terrorist attacks of September 11 may have fulfilled a repressed ‘passion for the Real’, a desire for the return of an ‘absolute’ reality in which the incontrovertibility of the Real is gauged precisely in terms of its absolute negation. This, in turn, re-establishes the most fundamental of critical binary oppositions, that between ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. See Alan Badiou, quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 5.
transform post-Soviet Russia, where glaring disparities between the rich and the destitute have continued to grow in a chaotic socio-political climate also overseen by powerfully networked profit-motivated mafias. Kulik uses the spectacle of violence, so central to contemporary ‘global’ culture, to stage his uncompromising socio-critical public performances.

One such notable performance was, *I Love Europe and Europe Doesn’t Love Me* from 1996. The performance was at least partially a sarcastic response to the famous German, Fluxus affiliated artist Joseph Beuys’s, 1974 performance *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* in which Beuys spent five days sharing an American gallery with a coyote.

In Kulik’s work, the artist employed security guards with German shepherd guard dogs to intimidate him as he knelt naked and chained to a collar in an abandoned square in central Berlin (see Figure # 44). In this performance, Kulik growling and barking like a vicious dog and thereby mimicking the dogs’ trained aggression only exacerbates their reactions, as the spectacle of staged violence simultaneously becomes a fantasy of public lynching. Here Kulik performs an excessive and dejected variation of the sadistic pleasure global television audiences derive virtually from witnessing, for instance, the humiliation of individuals in reality TV shows such as *Big Brother.*31 In both cases, what is played out is the triumph of a highly staged authoritarian spectacle globally marketed as benign entertainment.

![Figure 44](image)

Kulik’s self-denigrating performance, however, resounds with broader criticisms of globalisation’s authoritarian subjugation of populaces that are ill placed to take part in its system

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31 *Big Brother* is a commercial, globally produced television series appearing in the United States, Britain, Australia, Italy, Scandinavia and Poland, among many others. The central concept of *Big Brother* in all countries involves ‘exposing’ the ‘real life’ personalities and foibles of individual contestants to global television audiences in ‘real time’. Such television audiences gradually vote out those house members they like least.
of consumer gratification. In the artist’s native Russia, the nature of this ruthlessly acquisitive global corporate environment is well summarised by the slogan of the country’s leading privatiser, Boris Beresovsky: ‘Expansion is everything’. The wasting of public civic space that results from adherence to this dictum merely transforms what space cannot be capitalistically ‘used’ into a wasteland, a vast transnationally de-acculturated terrain, as the underlying meaning of contemporary culture is overwhelmingly shifted from the social to the economic.

Kulik’s ‘zoophrenia’, his adoption of animalistic alter egos, metaphorically suggests the debased quasi-naturalism of this new type of global ‘non’ space. At the same time, the artist performs the parallel reduction of human needs to their basest, most ‘animal’. This occurs alongside the global ascendency of an apparently rationalist — but in fact chaos-inducing — multinational corporate culture. Everywhere this new ‘global’ culture purveys an ethically voided ‘dog-eat-dog’ mentality of intensified private consumption and violent material competition.

6: 1 (ii) Dematerialising gestures: Reinventing the global/local

Globalisation’s general ‘spectacularisation’ of contemporary culture also relies on discrediting the singularities of locality. In fact, globalisation ‘takes infinitely varied local forms, while refusing to think of local variety except in terms of temporal uniformity: and it succeeds thanks to its ability to establish norms’. These global norms, economic and cultural, are central to the status quo demanded by the globalisation of a neo-liberal capitalist system. As a result, the local adaptation within globally dispersed communities of the ‘gifts’ of the Western free market economy, its ‘personalisation’ and internalisation of the market’s privileged forms, occurs at a purely symbolic level, while the core structure of the global economy and of the commodities it circulates remains essentially the same in every instance. It is through the reliability of simulated choice that globalisation is able to penetrate ever-widening international

34 Ibid., p. 172.
35 See, for instance, the documentary The Corporation (2004), which asserts that global corporate activity is predicated on psychotic competition and self-possessed individualism.
36 Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder, p. 81.
37 A good example of this is the way different cultures have adapted the fast food culture of U.S. fast food chain, McDonalds, so that it is possible to buy ‘Chilli burgers’ in Mexico and ‘Teriyaki burgers’ in Japan. McDonalds has adopted this exact strategy worldwide as a means of assuring its expanding global desirability. See Eric Schlosser, Fastfood Nation.
markets while remaining indifferent to the specificities of the local site.\(^{38}\)

Globalisation’s disparaging of locality corresponds, incidentally, with the ‘present long
and steady period of economic growth, especially in the United States.\(^{39}\) This situation has ‘not
been conducive to the production of political work, and has made assurances about the
disconnection between art and politics appear all too plausible’.\(^{40}\) Meanwhile, in the global art
world, there has appeared a ‘proliferation of vacuous or ideologically rebarbate objects meant
to hang or sit in the living rooms of patrons’.\(^{41}\) In general, the strategic aspects of the present
disconnection between art and politics and between the artwork and its site are particularly
revealing, given that the tradition of site-specificity in contemporary art stems precisely from a
politicised contestation of claims to the ‘universality’ of any particular cultural institution or
value.\(^{42}\)

Contemporary artists, critically aware of this de-politicised transformation of the concept
of locality, have turned such awareness against the highly fallible claims to universality that pro-
globalisation discourses encourage. Such critiques are enacted through various transgressive and
performative acts that reignite local memory in culturally specific ways. Either that or they
parody globalisation’s positive espousal of ‘site-lessness’ as a wholly desirable contemporary
cultural condition. In each case, though, the contemporary artist addressing the particularities of
his or her own culture is at the same time fully attuned to the radical, often paradoxical,
transformation of the local brought about by the globalisation of contemporary art.

Austrian artist Christian Phillip Müller, for example, conceives locality under globalised
conditions in terms of a ‘discursive nomadism’.\(^{43}\) The artist’s contribution to the 1993 Venice
Biennale therefore consisted of illegally crossing the wooded border between Austria and the
Czech Republic with the aid of commercially available maps. This performative act highlighted
that fact that in today’s supposedly borderless world, globalisation is perpetual re-inscribing and
increasingly vigilant policing the traditional geo-political demarcations of national territories.
This is because the ‘borderless’ world only really applies to capital, or those with capital, people
who have valued work skills or money. Indeed, under globalisation there are often legal heavy
legal restrictions preventing movement from the Third World to the First World.

Presenting this gestural act in photographic form at the Venice Biennale, Müller also

\(^{38}\) Globalisation ‘subjects the many different cultures, by any means available, to the unforgiving law of

\(^{39}\) Julian Stallabrass, ‘“Cashing-In” at the Whitechapel Gallery, London’, p. 45.

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.

\(^{42}\) See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity.*
questioned the illegality of this ‘simple’ action by openly exposing documentary evidence of it to the scrutiny of international audiences. Here, the Austrian artist was merely ‘visiting’ his Czech neighbour. This highlighted the contradictory character of the global border-site. On the one hand, such a site is universally privileged, for it allows the enactment of international law, which is founded on the notion of the absolutely necessary separation of adjoining nations. On the other hand, as physical sites, border territories are often distinguished precisely by their nondescript emptiness.

Müller’s transgressive exposure of this paradox, as well as of the law’s inability to successfully police all its territories at once, identifies one of the many gaps left open by globalisation processes, even as it multiplies new national borders and related conflicts for their control. Furthermore, if the ‘global’ artist is regarded today as a specialised ‘tourist’, then he or she is still able to confound such restrictive definitions by literally acting ‘outside’ international law and the boundaries it attempts to regulate at all costs in its magnified obsession with global security.

Other contemporary artists evoke the critical de-localisation that occurs as a result of globalisation’s attempts to capitalise simultaneously on as many international markets as possible. The Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan’s Hollywood (2001) is a good example. Cattelan’s work suggests the inherent placelessness of a global system propelled by a virtualised system of economic rationalism. Cattelan contests the contemporary dominance of such a system and the effects it has on the local site. The artist’s Hollywood is an exact replica of the world-famous Hollywood sign in California’s Hollywood Hills, but reconstructed now in the inauspiciously barren hills overlooking the main garbage dump in Palermo, the Sicilian capital (see Figure # 45).

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
The Hollywood sign, in Cattelan’s work, operates critically on several levels. First, it identifies the extent to which the underlying economics of ‘global culture’ are dependent on virtualised principles of ‘simulation’ which makes market trading of ‘virtual’ money more valuable than hard. These facilitate the global circulation of media and entertainment imagery as transnationally lauded symbols imbued with neo-liberal ideological content. The desire these elicit worldwide infiltrates even the remotest international markets. Second, Cattelan’s Hollywood imitation symbolically reverses the power dynamics central to globalisation as a phenomenon predominantly driven by U.S. economic interests; it relocates one of its most iconic symbols of glamour and capitalistic excess to a city that remains disproportionately poor, even in relation to its nearest Italian neighbours.

Cattelan’s Hollywood further suggests the voracity with which North American culture has globally installed incessantly negative stereotypes of Sicilians as violently corrupt gangsters, thieves and Mafiosi. Ironically, such images, popularised by Hollywood’s ‘dream-factories’, are then sold back to the local populaces they so disparagingly portray. Ultimately, Cattelan’s Hollywood figures the local site, under globalised conditions, as one simultaneously denuded and inflated by enforced transnational economic dependencies and endless deference to ‘global culture’, itself encapsulated by the sign ‘Hollywood’.

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45 Cattelan’s work is obviously deeply ironic on this level, given its huge scale and the sheer amount of local labour by which it was realised.
46 This remains the case even though Sicily accounts for a significantly high per person percentage of Italy’s total food production.
47 Good examples of this are Italian-born American director Martin Scorsese’s Goodfellas (1990) and the critically acclaimed U.S. produced television series The Sopranos (1999-2007).
49 Cattelan’s construction of the Hollywood sign above Palermo’s local waste dump further suggests the precariousness of the concept of Hollywood today. In fact, the term ‘Hollywood’ is now often evoked
Another contemporary artist, Spaniard Santiago Cirugeda, approaches the issue of site-specificity from a social, even socialist, perspective. He suggests that the celebrated ‘nomadism’ of the contemporary ‘global’ artist\(^{50}\) is critically different for those non-artists forced into nomadic urban lifestyles by the de-localising rules of economic globalisation. For migrants — immigrant workers as well as those individuals and communities displaced by poverty and the sorts of regional conflicts precipitated by globalisation processes — nomadism obviously has a very different meaning.

Of course issues regarding housing and homelessness are central to questions regarding the global displacement of individuals and populations. These issues are especially acute as displaced foreign workers the world over now vie competitively, unlike ever before, for jobs in alien cities. Indeed, radical dislocations of national communities are dramatically increased under globalisation.\(^{51}\) Furthermore, the embrace of many former Eastern bloc countries still facing significant economic problems by the European Economic Union (EEU) in 2004\(^{52}\) has led to both the migration of workers from the East to the West and a parallel wave of xenophobia in Western nations such as Britain (which in many senses prefers not to see itself as part of Europe anyway), where such guest workers are in many cases considered unwelcome.\(^{53}\)

Faced with rising levels of global homelessness alongside escalating rental costs in major European cities, Cirugeda has produced a series of plans for cheap nomadic housing for the transnationally displaced. Works like *Occupation of Empty Lot, The Closet Stratagem* (2003), while still connected to it, nevertheless operate, in many respects, outside the aesthetic and market emphases currently valorised in the globalised art world. Cirugeda’s plans propose

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\(^{50}\) See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*.

\(^{51}\) A good example of this is the civil war in the former Yugoslavia (1990–93) that broke out after the collapse of the Eastern bloc, in which the West (in the guise of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)) was unwilling to intervene — and only did so after increasing pressure from the United Nations (UN) and, more forcefully, Western public opinion. One hypothesis about the reasons for this passivity is that under present conditions of globalisation that repeatedly target Muslims as the ‘enemy’, the Serb militias, generally accepted as the aggressors in the Yugoslav conflict, were ‘basically doing the same work as we [the West] … were’, and that ‘if a sizable Muslim offensive were mounted, then you would see the international force becoming really effective’: Jean Baudrillard, ‘Western subservience’ in Baudrillard J. *Screened Out*, p. 64.

\(^{52}\) The ten new member nations of the EU, from 1 May 2004, are Hungary, Cyprus (Greek Republic), Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Estonia.

\(^{53}\) London’s *Daily Express* newspaper, for example, ran a campaign to prevent Roma (Gypsies) from new EU countries coming to Britain; this, in turn, led to the government announcing new restrictions. See ‘The great invasion 2004’, *Daily Express*, 20 January 2004.
erecting, potentially anywhere, elevated ‘parasitic’ urban housing designed to protect the itinerant occupant in public spaces. The artist has also widely distributed — on the internet and elsewhere — do-it-yourself plans from which such utilitarian site-specific habitats may be realised by individuals at minimal cost. In this way Cirugeda attempts to short-circuit the domination of localities by the globalised generalities of neo-liberal economic exchange. He does so critically, in recognition of both the often enforced mobility and the locally renewed and heightened socio-political engagement of various individuals and communities.

6: 1 (iii) Criticism from within: Infiltrating the ‘global culture’s’ institutions

In the meantime, the proliferation of new museums of contemporary art\textsuperscript{54} results in a global network of self-protective, semi-privatised institutions whose cultural interiority is also overtly authoritarian. Such a figuring of contemporary culture has become the target for the institutional critiques of numerous contemporary artists around the world. Unlike the institutional critiques of various post-modern artists,\textsuperscript{55} many of these contemporary artists have also used illicit or illegal means to enact their institutional critiques, at times making contemporary art institutions implicit in supposed acts of cultural ‘vandalism’. Good examples of the reinvigoration of this type of critical activity include the performative ‘works’ of Russian Alexander Brener, the virtualised reappropriation of Brener’s acts by Swedish artist Felix Gmelin, the critically ‘parasitic’ art of Dutchman Marc Bijl and the confrontational ‘contractual’ art of U.S. practitioner Andrea Fraser.

Alexander Brener, who has collaborated on numerous occasions with fellow Russian Oleg Kulik, in January 1997 stencilled a dollar sign on a famous work by the Russian avant-garde modernist Kasimir Malevich\textsuperscript{56} at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam (see Figure # 46). He was subsequently arrested. Brener’s explication of this act as a performed work of ‘art’ was overtly critical — it was a ‘political and cultural action against corruption and elitism in culture.’\textsuperscript{57} As a Russian artist working in a cultural milieu once excluded from mainstream Western modernism,

\textsuperscript{54}See Chapter 4 — The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled?, 4: 1 (ii) The ‘importance’ of new museums: Museums ‘making’ art.

\textsuperscript{55}Practices of institutional critique have existed for some time, and became especially notable in various post-modern practices, such as the work of German-born Hans Haacke and U.S. artist Barbara Kruger. The varieties of institutional critique practised by these artists, however, usually relied on an a priori ‘contract’ between the artist and the institution being critiqued. This is not to say that such relationships might not still be fraught, contentious or antagonistic. Indeed, there have been notable examples where the institutionally interventionist work of, say, Polish-born Krzysztof Wodiczko, the Frenchman Daniel Buren and Haacke himself have been either subjected to censorship by the public institutions with which they were ‘collaborating’ or destroyed by members of the public.

\textsuperscript{56}The defaced work in question was Malevich’s Suprematism (1920–27).

\textsuperscript{57}Alexander Brener, quoted in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, Iconoclash, p. 127.
Brener is doubly aware of the equally excluxory aspects of the public relations agendas of new 'global' museums. The general ambience of such spaces succeeds in reducing even the most 'radical' gestures to accessible signs of generalised modernist equivalences. In fact, Brener's gesture reactivates a historical awareness of the Anglo-American co-option of the Russian avant-garde, whose expressly socialist convictions were ultimately aimed at overthrowing museum culture altogether.\(^{58}\)

By 'defacing' Malevich's work, Brener confronts the underlying cultural consensus encouraged by global museums. This effectively removes the particularities of an artwork's political and critical origins by exposing it to the tyranny of globalisation's randomised exchange of signs.\(^{59}\) In this way, such work is rendered universally accessible, through reproduction and through the fetishised corporate 'branding' of 'museums of modern art'. For these, such art also serves as a promotional device. Through his action, Brener simply makes awareness of this contemporary transformation of the meaning of the avant-garde artwork 'pornographic'.\(^{60}\) That is, he fills the twice-evacuated space of Malevich's original with the explicit sign of its contemporary and base economic value.

Yet Brener's action, seen as contemporary institutional critique, is complex. By merely 'substituting' his work for Malevich's, the artist mockingly subscribes to a global culture where novelty, according to the pervasive logic of neo-liberal capitalism, is unerringly regarded as 'better'.\(^ {61}\) Furthermore, he exposes the universalising cultural prerogatives of globalisation, where all cultural production is equal, by bluntly drawing a line between the radicalism of his

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\(^{58}\) This 'negative' critical motivation underlying the Russian avant-garde was reinterpreted in the West according to the populist historised vision of modernism strategically pursued by U.S. entrepreneurs such as the highly influential Alfred H. Barr, founder of New York's Museum of Modern Art. See Chapter 1 — Literature review: The history of critical art and the challenge posed by globalisation, 1: 2 (ii) Critique of the avant-garde as 'negative dialectic'.

\(^{59}\) See Jean Baudrillard, 'Towards a political economy of the sign', in Simulacra and Simulations.

\(^{60}\) Refer, for instance, to Jean Baudrillard's notion of the pornographic and ob-scene, where 'obscenity' exists as a result of a global culture's endless indiscriminate circulation of images and information that 'reveals all', primarily at the level of the image. Images no longer conceal a hidden meaning to be analysed; they have nothing other than what their surfaces reflect. Such an alteration in the notion of the meaning of images and information is fundamentally conditioned by the circulatory global spectacle of virtual capital. Baudrillard writes, 'the commodity form is the first great medium of the modern world. But the message that the objects deliver through it is ... always the same: their exchange value. Thus at the bottom the message already no longer exists; it is the medium that imposes itself in pure circulation ... All secrets, spaces and scenes [are] abolished in a single dimension of information. That's obscenity. The hot, sexual obscenity of former times is succeeded by the cold and communicational, contractual and motivational obscenity of today': Jean Baudrillard, 'The ecstasy of communication', in Hal Foster, ed., The Anti-Aesthetic, p. 131.

\(^{61}\) This is ironic, given that, as a cultural phenomenon, modernism has been criticised for pursuing precisely the same rationale of the perpetual production of 'newness' for its own sake and for the sake of a market in which the 'new' is a core valued value.
own practice and that of his avant-garde predecessor. Finally, by superimposing the totally unambiguous sign, both empty and inflated, of universal economic exchange, Brener suggests the transnational marketplace as globalisation’s replacement social space, just as the global art auction could now be seen as an inverted socialisation of the once radical socialist artwork.  

The simple charge of ‘vandalism’ levelled against Brener’s work is made increasingly opaque and difficult to sustain given the added complexity of Swedish artist Felix Gmelin’s reappropriation of it. In 1996, Gmelin instituted a web-based ‘touring art collection’ called *Art Vandal*s. In this, he presents the virtualised domain of the ‘worldwide web’ as an art institution in its own right, one that is completely global. Within the virtual space of his global ‘museum’, Gmelin exhibits Malevich’s *Suprematism* (1920–27), ‘destroyed’ by Brener, as his own work, entitled, *Erased Green Dollar Sign* (see Figure # 47). Gmelin therefore reproposes Brener’s
act, condemned as wholly ‘negative’, as a retroactive collaboration between the Russian artists Brener and Malevich, whose practices are conceptually fused in his own.

Other artists have extended the ‘parasitic’ quality of Brener and Gmelin’s critical gestures towards art institutions to the global sphere of contemporary art publishing and criticism. The interconnectedness of these is, of course, crucial to the opinion-forming capacities of global institutions of contemporary art. Tellingly, much space within contemporary art magazines such as Flash Art, Art Forum, Contemporary Magazine and Art Journal is given over to advertisements for the global galleries and multinational corporate sponsors who fund such publications.

In addition, the institutionally accepted notion of professional impartiality the term ‘art criticism’ confers on the texts in such magazines is thrown into doubt as international galleries and art fairs paying to advertise in them have their shows appraised by their writers. In addition, the apparent ‘global’ inclusiveness of these magazines actually conceals a hierarchically established set of institutional and commercial relations. Ultimately, the economic realities of the globally distributed contemporary art magazine determine not only those global institutions it deems ‘important’, but the seemingly ‘autonomous’ ‘critical’ practices of the individual artists it promotes.

Dutch artist Marc Bijl, aware of this closed circuit, targeted Flash Art, a magazine that expressly markets itself on the basis of its global focus. Bijl produced an exact replica of Flash Art, in which all articles were dedicated to his own practice and were written either by friends, associates or the artist himself (writing under a pseudonym) (see Figure # 48). The very verisimilitude of this critique imitates globalisation’s tendency towards virtuality, and results here in a pseudo ‘product’ that is indistinguishable from ‘real’ editions of Flash Art. The nature of the content of Bijl’s ‘phoney’ publication exposes precisely the often disguised, self-

blackboard in front of an audience. This symbolic act of iconoclasm caused great consternation amongst those gathered, particularly amongst the ‘Productivist’ and Abstract Modernist artists in attendance. See Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., Iconoclash, pp. 111–32.

66 See, for instance, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, who, writing for Art Forum about the 2004 exhibition, Fashioning Fiction, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), in the same article promotes Art Forum on the exact grounds that over the years, it has explicitly encouraged the cross-over between commercial fashion and contemporary art, and has served as a site for upscale fashion advertising. See Chapter 4 — The global art machine: streamlined or steamrolled? 4: 2 (ii) Transgressing disciplinary boundaries: Global art as design, fashion and advertising.

67 See, for example, the Flash Art website, www.flashartonline.com, which is advertised in the magazine via the slogan, ‘Global art finally has its own website’.

68 It should also be acknowledged that to produce this ‘spectral’ critical version of Flash Art, Berlin’s Kunsthalle Bethanien, an institution financially backed by the government, rather than by corporations or privatised interests, funded Bijl.
referential and endemically circulatory mentality of globally institutionalised art journals. Bijl’s distribution of his simulated *Flash Art* magazine serves an actively critical role by revealing the undisclosed transnational agreements that today cement the multiple networked relations of the institution of ‘global art’.

The new museums of modern and contemporary art now also capitalise on the artist’s identity as a global commodity. In enacting this transformation, however, the global art system, has created vehement critics, such as U.S. based artist Andrea Fraser. Fraser’s critical performance/lecture, *How to Provide an Artistic Service*, co-authored with fellow artist and theorist Helmut Draxler, was presented at Vienna’s The Depot gallery in late 1994.\(^69\) In it, Fraser and Draxler identified the globalised conditions of contemporary art production and the artists’ relationship to their institutional framing as determined according to a service mentality, ‘defined in economic terms, as a value which is consumed at the same time it is produced’.\(^70\)

Extending her critique of the institutionalised ‘use’ of the contemporary artist in her video-performance *Untitled* (2003), Fraser deliberately amplifies the extent to which the

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\(^69\) From this position, Fraser repeatedly performed the conditions of the supposed obsolescence of the artist as critical agent practising within a globally institutionalised zone of social relations de-territorialised by neo-liberal economics. In the related performance series also from 1994 entitled, *Preliminary Prospectus*, Fraser advertised her artistic ‘services’ internationally, exactly according to the logic of a service mentality in contemporary culture. As an artist, and ‘service provider’, Fraser could be hired to expound (counter) cultural interpretations of contemporary artworks for public and non-profit museums and galleries. In this way, she subverts the increasingly passive, thoroughly ‘professionalised’ role of artists, according to which they are expected to simply supply cultural ‘goods’ for the display spaces of global museums. See James Putnam, *Art and Artefact: The Museum as Medium*, p. 99.

\(^70\) Andrea Fraser and Helmut Draxler, *How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction*. 

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econometric emphasis of the globalised art system feeds on that system's assumed unlimited access to an artist's 'authentic', 'private' self. The glamorised, often sensationalised identity of the artist promoted in the global market is overturned in Fraser's Untitled. In the work, the artist is shown having sex, 'in every imaginable position', with an unidentified American collector, who paid US$20,000 for the privilege.\textsuperscript{71}

The hotel meeting of artist and collector in this video, whilst explicit, is 'less sexually charged than oppressive',\textsuperscript{72} for a number of reasons. First, because the artwork here is pre-eminently contractual; a parody of the professional artist's contract with the coveted global cultural institution, it exposes the artist herself as a commodifiable 'art object'. Second, the general surveillance conditions of the global era, simulated in its markets, are also played out in this video, which was recorded under the fixed scrutiny of a closed-circuit camera attached to the ceiling. Finally, Fraser's Untitled, like Brener's treatment of Malevich, demonstrates, albeit in an utterly literal fashion, the 'pornographic' conditions of contemporary art production under globalisation, in which every social object or 'natural' relation is exposed to its potential capitalisation on the global virtual market.\textsuperscript{73}

6: 2 Part 2: Empire versus counter-empire: International artist collectives reclaiming the global commons

The second main domain of critical activity in contemporary art is made up of many transnationally distributed artist networks. These include independent artists' collectives as well as organisations utilising networked and media technologies in subversive ways. Considered overall, the increase in the collaborative, anonymous and interventionist creative activities of independent artists' groups may be said to represent a cultural 'counter-Empire'\textsuperscript{74} to that of contemporary 'global culture'. Such a culture is produced in co-operation with a world political system dominated by neo-liberal markets.\textsuperscript{75}

It is not surprising that the numerous socio-critical undertakings of contemporary artists' collectives parallel, while remaining distinct from, the deliberately anti-systemic opposition pursued by the 'anti-globalisation' movement. Activists involved in this conveniently labelled counter-movement understand the neo-conservatives' repeated reliance on readily identifiable

\textsuperscript{71} Isabelle Graw, review of 'Fraser at the Hamburger Kunstverein'.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Under such circumstances, it is precisely the economic relation which is pornographic, in its total exposure of the entire world to the homogenising influence of inflated Western markets.

\textsuperscript{74} See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire.

\textsuperscript{75} 'It is possible to see free trade and free art not as opposing terms but rather as forming respectively a dominant system and its supplement': Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, p. 6.
'enemies'. Such dependence is apparent in the current 'battle' against 'Arab terrorists', which may further be presented as a righteous, because 'necessary', struggle for world economic and territorial control. In contradiction, refusing to offer 'coherently' uniform critical methodologies, preferring instead to address the singularities of individual situations, the critiques of global artists' networks are unpredictable. At the same time, they also deliberately resist the sort of self-branding necessary for the marketing of identifiable cultural 'products'.

Contemporary independent artists' collectives rely, in fact, on the chaotic conditions provoked by globalisation's failed attempts to streamline the multitude of world economies and cultures. Independent Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs), at least those that resist imitating global commercial and institutional models, also practise forms of critique directed at fostering local, though globally interconnected, communities of critically engaged artists. They aim to reframe art predominantly according to social criteria, rather than according to the private or entrepreneurial criteria that demand the circulation of marketable artworks. Meanwhile, many contemporary artists' collectives deploy fictional group identities to parody and invert globalisation's visibly authoritarian and hegemonic ambitions. In doing so, they also regularly engage local publics in questioning the extent of their complicity with globalisation's dominant vision of a society framed, and contained, by controlling markets.

Other networked contemporary artist cultures capitalise on globalisation's incessant emphasis on high technologies — for example, in the escalating surveillance and control of public space. They intervene and corrupt such systems, whose covert operations are then made transparent to an unsuspecting public. Overall, the critical activities of these co-authoring, globally distributed and often anonymous, artist organisations, like the activities of 'antiglobalisation' activists, whose strategies and uses of contemporary technology are intimately related, seek to reclaim the global 'commons'. They utilise contemporary culture as a means of opposing and undermining the endemic rationalism of a global system of escalated capitalist privatisation that increasingly devours social space worldwide. Therefore, the critical 'object' of contemporary cultural practices of this sort is the radical re-inscription of art's sociality, in

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76 See Chapter 4 — The global art machine: Streamlined or steamrolled? 4: 3 (iii) Hybrid model (3): Independent artist run organisations simulating commercial and state institutions.

77 The notion of the 'commons' is intimately connected to 18th century Enlightenment philosophy. It presents a conception of the world in which the free traversal of lands, often regardless of their ownership, is a natural right of the individual. This stands in stark contrast to the contemporary economic politics of neo-liberalism, where public space is increasingly co-opted and controlled by corporate and privatising interests. Running in parallel with the rise of the conveniently labelled 'anti-globalisation' movement is the idea of 'reclaiming the commons', as a forgotten and abused communal contract. See
antagonism to a triumphant 'global culture' of virulently regulated private ownership and heightened individualism.

**6: 2 (i) Critical autonomy and global independent artist-run organisations (ARIs)**

The collective critical culture of independent ARIs is today evident at a number of levels. First, it is highly evident in transnational exchanges between contemporary sister-spaces. These encourage dialogues between diverse cultural groups, similarly determined to maintain critical independence from dominant commercial and institutional models. Second, the globality of independent ARIs is apparent in their frequent adoption of mobile, 'nomadic', identities. Such models question the fixity of the traditional gallery as a static container in an era marked by constant flows of objects and information. Third, critically orientated independent ARIs initiate critically 'parasitic' relations with the growingly globally integrated, bureaucratised and 'specialist' domain of mainstream cultural institutions. Lastly, the current neo-liberal reshaping and destabilisation of the global economic environment has seen critical artist-run activity expand into distant and remote locations. Here they attack globalisation's capacity to abandon and isolate particular locations and communities it deems economically insignificant.

Today, collaborations between independent ARIs are formulated as unfolding and participatory transnational events. Often the results, rather than being traditional 'exhibitions' curatorially determined in advance, emerge instead from a parallel concept of globality arrived at via open-ended communicative interactions. For example, the exchange, *Space Traffic: Artist-Run Spaces, Beyond a Local Context* (2002), initiated between Australia's Westspace in Melbourne and Hong Kong's Para-site, addressed the positioning of contemporary Australian culture within the overall geo-politics of the Asia Pacific region. Such a critique was undertaken in opposition to the dominance of overwhelmingly Euro-centric representations of contemporary Australian culture.

From this interactive regional exchange it was ultimately ascertained that 'there is no real struggle between East and West as far as a genuine global culture of appraisal and critique is concerned', and, significantly, it is particular global 'economic and political interests [that] are able to sustain this simple binary polemic, through government-institutional alliances dependent on packaging culture'. Thus, in this case, an autonomous artists' exchange exposes and refutes

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78 See Brett Jones, ed., *Space Traffic: Artist-Run Spaces, Beyond a Local Context.*

79 Westspace director, Brett Jones, ‘Report from 2nd ‘InBetween’ International Conference: Globalism and Alternative Spaces’.

80 Ibid.
a particular concept of contemporary 'global culture', fuelled essentially by governmental and privatised marketing agendas. In its place, it proposes an alternative, equally global, model founded on co-operation and critical affiliation.

Whilst most such global exchanges between independent ARIs still rely on physical exhibition sites in the form of not-for-profit galleries, others have focused on globalisation’s spatial fluidity in literal ways. A good example is the Hood Project, initiated in Los Angeles in 2000 as a loose collaboration between Swedish practitioner Per Huttner and Australian artist Jane Polkinghorne. For this project, artists were invited to contribute work to be ‘exhibited’ on the bonnet of a 1990 Chevrolet. The nature of the contribution remained open, and could include two or three-dimensional approaches, slogans or imagery. In this instance, and following a similarly fluid, though now critically inflected, trajectory as that suggested by globalisation processes, the notion of site specificity is shifted not simply from the gallery to the car-as-gallery, but potentially to the entire urban metropolis — in this instance the city of Los Angeles.

At the same time, this mobile ‘gallery’ was able to repeatedly ‘plug into’ the local exhibition circuit by simply driving to the openings of other ARIs and local art institutions. Work of this nature further transgresses the galleries’ traditional relationship to issues of class and race, as the car passes freely through rich and poor districts and between zones of different ethnic concentrations. Unlike similarly mobilised forms of contemporary advertising, the Hood Project deliberately encourages impromptu discourse with local individuals and communities; the work it exhibits is neither censored nor designed to promote a consensual agreement based on commercially instilled desire. Here, the art exhibited defies the fixed locational authority of globalisation’s favoured domains of cultural power: ‘spectacularised’ museums and commercial galleries.

In other instances, it is the very definition of the term ‘art’ that is mobilised. In such cases, art is conceived as an open engagement between a particular site and an audience, where what is ultimately produced is an unrepeateable social ‘event’ as opposed to a series of isolatable art

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81 From a conversation with co-ordinator Jane Polkinghorne, October 2004.
82 Here it easy to think of the numerous related ploys of contemporary advertisers, who utilise vehicles to traffic their messages throughout urban metropolises; from ads on buses and trains to free-floating wheeled trailers bearing graphic advertising messages attached to the rear end of motorcycles and motor scooters.
83 Interestingly, projects similar to the Hood Gallery, and also emphasising the physical mobility of the exhibition site, have appeared recently. These include Glovebox, occurring in 1999 in a car park in central Sydney. This project involved artists installing site-specific works in the glove compartments of other people’s cars. Over a period of six weeks, this art would be translated to multiple, continually changing contexts in tandem with the individual daily travelling patterns of the car owners. Another
objects. The 'multi.trudi' gallery in Frankfurt, Germany, is an instance of a contemporary independent ARI whose mobile 'object' of critique is precisely the localised reframing of the social.\textsuperscript{84} Multi.trudi began specifically in order to provide a space 'where people could meet in the evening, gather and exchange information without being confined to some restrictive concept of a gallery or [music] club'. At the same time, its co-ordinator, Stefan Beck, initiated multi.trudi so that he could pose the critical question of whether or not today, 'there's really a difference between a shopping mall, gallery or museum'.\textsuperscript{85}

An 'opening' at multi.trudi is thus conceived not as 'a fixed show [as in a gallery] but [as] a more flexible flow of responses between the creator and the visitors'.\textsuperscript{86} Likewise, 'there is no distinction between singular shows',\textsuperscript{87} and if there was any there certainly was no 'distinction between the “show” and the surrounding framework, [thus] transmuting the whole site into a constant flow of changes'.\textsuperscript{88} Such an object-resistant redefinition of the role of the independent cultural organisation, or 'gallery', is informed by an awareness of the incessantly invoked 'free flows' of globalisation rhetoric. In this instance, though, 'flows' are socialised and open, in deliberate contradiction of globalisation's closed circuit and private/commercial orientation.

Yet other spaces have employed tactics of a critical 'parasitism', determined to intervene at the dominant sites of globalisation's neo-liberal capitalism. For instance, in New Zealand, a founder and director of Auckland's independent artist initiative Rm 212, Dane Mitchell, presented a work there in 2000 called Risky Business. The work was composed of a collection of rubbish acquired over a month from the garbage bins of reputable commercial gallery Gow Langsford, and was seen by the gallery as potentially 'embarrassing for its client relations'.\textsuperscript{89}

Presented as simulated urban archaeology, in keeping with the anthropological

\textsuperscript{84} Also blurring the boundary between art and the real in the real social spaces of the global business city, of which Frankfurt is a prime example, are the activities of Phantombüro, also based in that city. One of its recent projects involved the construction of a threefold place of worship in a former Pakistani restaurant. Within this space, the organisation constructed religious sites representing a Christian church, an Islamic mosque and a Buddhist temple, side by side. However, rather than being mere models, these 'shrines' were intended for actual use by the devout of each faith who frequented this area. Such a gesture is also a response to the social space of globalisation being not inherently 'open' but instead a space of warring fundamentalisms, and attempts, somewhat ironically, to provide — as an antidote — a truly inclusive religious/social space within the commercialised context of the urban shopping district.

\textsuperscript{85} Stefan Beck, 'Artspace, offspace, any space? It's still rock 'n roll to me'.

\textsuperscript{86} Stefan Beck, 'Frankfurt ARIs'.

\textsuperscript{87} Stefan Beck, 'Artspace, offspace, any space? It's still rock 'n roll to me'.

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{89} Gwynneth Porter, 'Log Illustrated', p. 2.
'naturalism' of the global art museum,\textsuperscript{90} visitors were exposed, within the modest non-profit space Rm 212, to concrete evidence of the significant gulf separating Rm 212's activities from those of 'professional' commercial galleries. Indeed, Mitchell implies that such spaces are privileged primarily as a result of their closeness to the aura of economic hype affixed to centres of global commercial culture. This work also exposed the extent to which the commercial gallery functions as a small business behind its 'alternative' public façade. In this way, while basically seeking profits from commissions and sales, these galleries are able to suggest that they also fulfil a social role in 'educating' general audiences in contemporary art by 'expertly' showcasing chosen examples of it. In the end, this work highlights the degree of secrecy with which the contemporary 'business' of art is normally conducted, and how this is especially so in a global climate of competitive and protective self-interest.\textsuperscript{91}

Related to this is the 'economic decline' of particular geo-political locations, as a consequence of globalisation's intensified commercial competition. This virulent market competition conveniently renders once-thriving urban areas open to the control of multinational corporate investors. However, this has also opened them to the activities of autonomous artist organisations for social, rather than profiteering, purposes. Certainly this was true for Germany's independent Galerie Fruchtig, which in 2002 bought the deserted town Lobo, in the western corner of Texas, 24 kilometres from the Mexican border, with the intention of turning it into an alternative arts centre.\textsuperscript{92} Rather than situate itself self-consciously within one of globalisation's inflated economic and cultural centres, such as London, New York or Los Angeles, the independent ARI, in this instance, chose to align itself with the drifts of interstate border traffic.

Galerie Fruchtig, while inserting itself into the spectralised virtual field of 'global' culture from its remote location via the internet, at the same time established a discursive relationship with neighbouring communities. Here, the independent artist-run organisation deliberately situated itself in a global/social arena on twin fronts: the virtual and the actual. The artists involved in this project staged an open social event, a three-day party to celebrate, and 'just to

\textsuperscript{90} See Hal Foster, \textit{Design and Crime and Other Diatribes}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{91} In 2002, \textit{Risky Business} was accepted for exhibition by the Australian government-funded gallery '200 Gertrude St', in Melbourne. However, the project later had its support withdrawn by its host — after the artist had already spent considerable time and energy collecting detritus from the rubbish bins of nearby high-profile private art dealers. In the end, 200 Gertrude St decided that such a presentation was unsuitable for exhibition, considering it compromising to a gallery supported primarily by the government — despite the fact that 200 Gertrude St promotes itself as presenting contemporary 'risk and experimentation in the visual arts'. See the 200 Gertrude St gallery website, www.gertrude.org.au
\textsuperscript{92} See Sterry Butcher, 'Lobo's German owners throw host-day party', pp. 1, 9.
show people that we’re not here to take over, we’re not mean spirited and there’s no commercial interest here’. By engaging ‘abandoned’ territory in this way, the organisation implicitly denounced globalisation’s widespread practice of commercially de-colonising particular local sites and communities.

6: 2 (ii) The non-consensual culture of global artists’ collaborations

Aside from the activities of global independent artist-run organisations, specific collaborations between various globally dispersed artists have targeted visions of a contemporary ‘global culture’ based on the politics of untrammelled consensus. Contrary to the ‘enlightened’ image of globalisation pursued by its supporters in the industrialised West, the collaborative activities of these artist groups regularly involve the audience as participants in what is a highly controlled system of transnational cultural production and display. Furthermore, such collaborations often magnify the post-nation, post-colonial fantasies of a global ‘new world order’, attacking and critically exposing its frequent reliance on and reinstatement of the archaisms of racial and national stereotypes.

At other times, artists adopt a collaborative anonymity to confound the global art world’s need to constantly produce and market individual creative ‘personalities’. These collaborative acts are specifically directed towards actively re-socialising contemporary art, even at the level of the production of art objects. Not surprisingly, the universalising imperatives of globalisation have also enabled collaborations that transgress the defining dictates of individual statehood. Such transnational co-operation now uses repeated non-consensual acts to criticise globalisation’s covert, yet endemic, privatisation of the social spaces of the planet, including those of the globalised art world through explicitly emphasising the socio-political dimensions of contemporary art production. Such acts expose the power dynamics central to the globalising agenda as it seeks to colonise, primarily via commercial means, the terrain of world difference.

A good example of such activity is the artist collective Xurban, based mainly in Turkey, which draws together artists from Istanbul, Ankara and New York. Xurban specifically

93 Alexander Bardoff, quoted in Sterry Butcher, ‘Lobo’s German owners throw host-day party’.
94 Another example of such activity includes the 1999 Oblique project co-ordinated by Julaine Stephenson and staged in Otira, a remote town in the middle of New Zealand’s Southern Alps. This project temporarily united over 30 artists from New Zealand, Australia, Japan, Germany and the United States, alongside representatives from four separate New Zealand-based ARJs. Once a thriving railway town dependent on the transport of local natural resources, Otira recently slipped into economic near-oblivion when those core industries were displaced. The entire town was bought in 1998 by an Auckland family for a sum of NZD$70,000. From this background, the Oblique project hoped to establish a dialogue with the remaining residents and with the rest of the country, alerting New Zealanders to the existence of communities generally ignored due to their economic decentralisation and therefore supposed cultural irrelevance.
references Turkey’s externally enforced contemporary geo-political positioning, essentially determined by Western free market access to oil. To do so, it conflates the nature of such global politicking, founded on commodity access, with the globally inflated commodity status of the contemporary art object. Exposing the simultaneously heightened value of each — oil and art — Xurban practise what has been called ‘political minimalism’. Additionally, Xurban implies an awareness of the extent to which the designer slickness of high-tech Western urban environments is a by-product of the multinational petrochemical industry.

Xurban’s 2003 work, The Containment Contained, is a large, sectioned steel box that at first glance appears to be a contemporary work of minimalist sculpture (see Figure # 49). This ‘art’ object, however, is soon exposed, with the aid of accompanying photographic documentation, to be a fuel tank, custom designed to attach to the underside of the innumerable

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55 Xurban’s activities recognise Turkey’s siting as a conduit between East and West. Its current geo-political identity is a result of Turkey’s strategic mediation between the imperial interests of the U.S. ‘war on terrorism’ and its own identity as a predominantly Eastern Islamic nation. Thus the crude binarism apparent in the ‘with us or with the terrorists’ speech of United States President George W. Bush places Turkey, regardless of the officially pro-U.S. stance of its government, in a particularly schizoid position. This current positioning is likewise determined by Turkey’s allowing the United States access to the global super-commodity, oil, supplied largely by Iraq and Saudi Arabia but needing to be transported through Turkey.

56 Klaus Biesenbach, ‘Political minimalism’, p. 87.

57 The primary resources of the global petrochemical industry originate mainly in the Middle East, and are crucial to the contemporary production of many plastics, laminates and synthetic rubbers. The dominant designer spaces of the West’s expanded contemporary cultural field, inherently dependent on Middle Eastern means of production, are revealed and inverted in Xurban’s collective practice. The West’s totalising designer urban environments are shown now to be merely the other side of global territorial ambitions, configured as the interplay of tensely suspended commercial arrangements between separate nations, and an East/West geo-political interplay.
Turkish trucks that once illegally smuggled diesel fuel from Iraq.\textsuperscript{98} As a monolithic and seemingly inert art object, Xurban’s container had also literally travelled thousands of kilometres, repeatedly transgressing both national and global economic borders. As contemporary ‘art’, the object now revealed ‘an awareness of the fact that all along the globalised system of transfers, the goods of high value [such as oil] have an overwhelmingly higher priority, whereas people are restrained from international mobility as the subjects of a “containment”’.\textsuperscript{99} In this instance, the inertia of the Middle Eastern minimalist ‘designer’ object, apparently devoid of content, is exploded and replaced with a socio-political artefact exposing globalisation’s newly inscribed and increasingly coercive border conditions.

Elsewhere, another contemporary collaborative initiative, Poland’s Azorro, continues this critical preoccupation with global border issues. Azorro’s 2003 video, \textit{Pyxis systematis domestici quod video dictur.} executed for the exhibition \textit{New Polish Video Art} at the Museum Ludwig, Vienna, shows the five artists who make up the group journeying from Krakow, Poland to the Austrian capital, Vienna (see Figure # 50). They arrive just in time to hand the museum director an apparently blank tape.\textsuperscript{100} Throughout this piece, the artists converse solely in Latin, the once global language of the Holy Roman Empire\textsuperscript{101} and parallel in importance to English today.

In each phase of Azorro’s journey, the artists critically survey the effects of globalisation’s negation of the national histories of former Eastern bloc countries.\textsuperscript{102} These are often considered

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\textsuperscript{98} Since the beginning of the 2003 Iraq War, these vessels have been abandoned along the entire length of the highways that lead into Iraq. This activity constituted a widespread pre-war black market sub-economy — which covertly undermined Western and U. S. control of global oil flows.

\textsuperscript{99} See the project description for \textit{The Containment Contained}, at www.xurban.com.

\textsuperscript{100} Azorro’s video ends with the artists arriving at the Museum Ludwig, Vienna, where they are anxiously questioned by its director about what work they have brought for the show. They then hand him a videotape which, when inserted into the video recorder, shows only ‘white noise’. Of course this is a totally self-reflexive conceptual device, as the video they contribute is obviously the one we are watching.

\textsuperscript{101} The Holy Roman Empire marks the earliest point of the medieval period, and was initiated once world geo-political and cultural power was shifted away from Rome and the south to northern (essentially Germanic) centres.

\textsuperscript{102} On their journey, the artists come across a medieval villa, and ask a passing well-dressed woman what this auspicious historical building is. The woman replies, in Latin, that this apparently important historical site operates today as a brothel. Later, the artists come upon an elderly man working in a vineyard, and enquire about purchasing wine. He replies, also in Latin, that his wine is only available at stores in the city. As the group are routinely questioned when crossing the Czech border, their Latin responses are regarded with suspicious bewilderment and their cameraman is aggressively ordered to stop filming. Soon, Azorro pass a ubiquitous North American-style amusement park, seemingly transplanted directly from that country to a featureless roadside field in the Czech Republic. The artists decide to enter, eventually leaving with showbags printed in English, whose contents they then discuss philosophically as artefacts testifying to the highest universal order of contemporary social and political emancipation. (Of course all these interactions are subtitled).
only in terms of their recent, now utterly ‘defeated’, Communist opposition. This is especially the case for the contemporary global *imperium* of the United States, which now intervenes to capitalistically ‘redeem’ such nations’ prior ‘illusions’. Yet the contemporary West’s economic arrogance frequently belies ignorance of the significant pre-Soviet histories of Eastern European nations.\(^ {103} \)

In this work, Azorro suggests that globalisation is a voracious process of potential erasure of all remaining cultural and political differences.\(^ {104} \) The blank tape they contribute to the exhibition at the same time represents ‘global’ culture as a clean slate, rendered thus by the universal sign of the dollar and the empty circulation of commodities. Azorro’s participation in a global exhibition of ‘Polish’ art is therefore underscored by an acute, if humorous, critique of the nature of the collective consent by which formerly ‘peripheral’ art and cultures are today globally ‘legitimised’.

![Image of individuals in a vehicle]

Figure 50

Other artists’ collaborations have further critiqued the hegemonic model underlying globalisation’s undifferentiated economic emphases and its ideological transformation of nations previously considered beyond the reach of Western liberal democracy. Such critiques

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\(^{103}\) As for Poland, its early medieval adoption of the Latin alphabet — as opposed to the Cyrillic, which is used in most parts of Eastern Europe, and, most significantly, in Russia — distinguished it in many ways even then, as a ‘Western’ leaning culture. Obviously this fact is frequently ignored in relation to Poland’s current ‘Westernised’ identity as a once ‘backward’ nation ‘redeemed’ by globalisation’s economic interventions. Equally, its collective histories have largely been ignored by contemporary globalisation’s relentless ‘modernising’ and economically ‘redemptive’ paradigms.

\(^{104}\) Of course this is enacted under the very auspices of a global ‘multiculturalism’ espousing authenticity and difference as core values. On this note, contemporary Slovenian philosopher and political theorist Slavoj Žižek writes, ‘What the emphasis on multitude and diversity masks is, of course, the underlying monotony of today’s global life’: Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 68.
are turned against globalisation’s appropriation of racial and cultural difference, within the very Western centres responsible for producing those stereotypes. For instance, the collaborative performances of Cuban Americans Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Peña, which Fusco calls ‘reverse ethnography’, are designed to critically expose the post-colonial “Americanization” of Latin America and ... “Latinization” of the United States. Fusco and Gomez-Peña’s *Two Undiscovered Amerindians*, last performed in 1994, presented them as members of a recently discovered tribe, the ‘Guatiminuis’, from an island off the Gulf of Mexico, ‘a jovial and playful race, with a genuine affection for the debris of Western industrialised popular culture’, a race who, furthermore, ‘didn’t understand any Western language’. Another performance from 1995, *Mexarcane International: Ethnic Talent for Export*, appeared in numerous United States shopping malls, which represent the global era’s ‘new, privatised public space’. In this particular performance, Fusco acted as an employee of a multinational corporation conducting ‘market research to determine local consumer tastes for the exotic’. In *Rites of Passage* (1997), Fusco (without Gomez-Peña) collaborated with local art and theatre students. According to a logic of ‘social engineering’, they turned the supposedly ‘free’, apolitical space of the global contemporary art exhibition into a policed border territory. This was done...

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106 Ibid.
107 Two Undiscovered Amerindians was performed inside (but also publicly outside) well-recognised cultural institutions. Ibid.
108 Performing this work, the artist-collaborators were dressed in a combination of native, primitive and Western contemporary clothing, including brand name running shoes. ‘A substantial portion of the public’ believed this performance, as they did others by Fusco and Gomez-Peña: ibid.
109 During the day, the artists, as modern ‘primitives’, also routinely operated everyday Western technologies such as televisions and laptop computers. See ibid.
110 Guards participating in the performance explained this to audiences. See ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Responding to the results of this questionnaire, Fusco directed shoppers to Gomez-Peña in a glass box, performing, supposedly in reference to the answers they had given, what they most desired to see. The fact that there was no apparent correlation between the conducted market ‘research’ and Gomez-Peña’s actions induced confusion in the audience, who questioned themselves about the content of the responses they had proffered. See ibid.
113 This work was specifically staged for the second Johannesburg Biennale.
114 Ibid.
115 Fusco and her collaborators, dressed as South African police, ordered everyone entering the biennale to be issued official identity passes, a direct restaging of the passes legally forced on black South Africans under apartheid. Here the apparently equanimity of the global contemporary art network is also critiqued. The contemporary artists’ collaboration diverts attention from the status of the individual artist to the collective social field of the globalised art world. It inverts its simulated freedoms through parody, while subjecting them to methods of authoritarian control and self-control. At the same time the performance exposes the global art world’s entrenched discomfort when confronted directly with questions of real racial difference, questions which ‘a substantial number of intellectuals, artists and
in explicit recognition of the fact that 'in the era of globalisation, it is the people of the Third World whose documents are heavily scrutinized when they enter the privileged zones of Europe and North America'.

Indeed, for every country superficially embraced by the economic promises of globalisation, there are others which remain conspicuously locked out of its embrace. Palestine is a good example of such a state: in fact Palestine is currently a nation without a state, a 'stateless nation'.

Considerations of Palestine's ongoing statelessness were the subject of the collaboration of Palestinian Sandi Hilal and Italian Alessandro Petti. The artists' *Stateless Nation* (2003), exhibited at the 50th Venice Biennale, occupied garden areas between national pavilions 'in lieu of [having] a national pavilion' of its own. The project therefore functioned outside the officially sanctioned national pavilions, its conspicuous physical isolation forming an incisive geo-political statement.

Its critical intent was especially evident in the context of such a self-consciously 'global' exhibition as Venice, whose overall 'pumped-up national participation is attributable to the new world order [where the] global art world has come to mirror the global market economy'.

Hilal and Petti's work is part of a long-term multi-disciplinary research project consisting of four interrelated conceptual components: 'passports', 'the room of dreams', 'on the border' and 'the book'. *Stateless Nation* explicitly locates the pasts and possible futures of a cultural bureaucrats sought to deflect', preferring instead to discuss the 'moral implications' of such performances, according to 'positivist notions of “truth” and depoliticised, ahistorical notions of “civilization”': Coco Fusco, 'La generazione delle immagini: Facts and fiction'.

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116 Ibid.
117 Beth Elaine Wilson, "No Place" to Go.
118 Of course by even appearing in the institutionally sanctioned context of the Venice Biennale, Stateless Nation is also being embraced by the 'benevolent' 'open' network of contemporary 'global' art. Everywhere this network aims to bring 'inside' that which had previously been excluded or overlooked. At the same time, such a gesture confers upon the art 'redeemed' in this way an indisputable aura of contemporary relevance. This act of capture, via the indiscriminate liberal discourse of 'multiculturalism', threatens to diffuse the urgent specificity of critiques directed against the self-same global conditions, conditions which simultaneously enable both 'multiculturalism' itself and the political, social and economic degrading and isolating of particular nations. The documentary and counter-historical aspects of Hilal and Petti's collaboration, through the paradox of inclusion, utilise such a contradiction in ways that explicitly and critically contest the supposedly neutral, barrier-free domain of contemporary 'global' culture.

120 The 'passbooks' were hugely oversized, physically domineering replicas of passports that methodologically traced the gradual dissolution of Palestine from the end of World War I onwards. The 'room of dreams' was a series of video interviews undertaken with Palestinians civilians who responded to the question, 'what is your dream?' Far from being rhetorical and propagandistic, the collected replies undermine national and racial stereotypes through their diversity. 'On the border' was an installation that represented Jerusalem from the complex perspective of multiple observation points: daily life practices,
contemporary, fully actuated, free Palestinian state. By doing so, it challenges the supposed inclusiveness of globalisation from the perspective of a country that, far from being ready to uncritically embrace a ‘post-national’ identity, has consistently been denied the ‘luxury’ of nationhood.\footnote{121} Once again, the transnational collaboration of contemporary artists aims to socialise the global space of contemporary art production. Such collaborations employ broadly co-operative structures to counter the often highly prescriptive, commodity-orientated externalities of the consensually integrationist ‘global’ art scene.

6: 2 (iii) Networked opposition: Global artists’ interventions and culture-jamming — reversing the information flow

Digital high technologies are essential to globalisation’s transnational operations. Such technologies simultaneously drive the economic, ideological and cultural agendas of globalisation as a potential world-totalising system. But today’s global market, itself a mirror of a generalised global ‘control society’,\footnote{122} engages a capitalist system very different from that of the industrialised disciplinarist societies of the 19th and 20th centuries. That is because the global market today is dependent on an immaterial system of world economics that continually shifts and controls international debt and credit. The constant flows of virtual debt and credit are spectralised in the domain of banking, where virtual money, global shares and equities, are now worth more to investors than ‘real’ money.\footnote{123}

Overall, this global system, despite the freedoms of its spectral capitalism, ‘still keeps three quarters of humanity in extreme poverty’.\footnote{124} It is also the same system in which, predominantly, ‘marketing is … the instrument of control and producers the arrogant breed who are our masters’.\footnote{125} It is also the system in which ‘even art has moved away from closed sites and into the open circuits of banking’.\footnote{126} Meanwhile, the centrality of digital technologies to mental maps and satellite photos. Lastly, \textit{ Stateless Nation, ‘the book’}, posed the question ‘Who are the Palestinians?’ to a wide variety of Palestinian intellectuals, artists, doctors, sociologists, architects, poets and workers.

\footnote{121} Palestine is also the continuing subject of U.S. sanctions as a result of its support for organisations such as the popular Hamas, labelled ‘terrorist’ by the United States. For his part, Jean Baudrillard sees such terrorism as an attempt to ‘oppose to the full violence and to the full order a clearly superior model of extermination and virulence operating through emptiness, … to make the system collapse under an excess of reality’: Jean Baudrillard, \textit{In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities}, pp. 119–20.


\footnote{123} ‘Capitalism in its present form is no longer directed towards production … It’s directed towards metaproduction … What it seeks to sell is services, and what it seeks to buy, activities’: ibid. p. 320.

\footnote{124} Ibid.

\footnote{125} Ibid.

\footnote{126} Ibid.
globalisation processes establishes a vast global network simultaneously interconnected at innumerable points, where communication is instantaneous and the circulation of images, information and money is perpetual. Yet the apparent openness of this technological network, its potential accessibility to anyone, is predicated on a range of authoritarian surveillance options. From these it is possible to both ‘observe’ the activities of users of the global world wide web from multiple unseen perspectives and rigorously scrutinise the public spaces of ‘global’ cities, which have become the subjects of unending observation. Thus it has been claimed that ‘the networked near-future is just as likely to be the future of William Gibson’s ferocious Empires as ... of an ecstatic democracy’.

Against the jointly controlling and privatising aspects of globalisation’s celebrated manipulation of new technologies, networks of contemporary artists familiar with the social, political and technical implications of such technology have inverted its authoritarian uses. In doing so, they maximise particular core conditions of globalisation in an effort to establish globally distributed techno-democratic social spaces.

Aiming to establish a global model of interventionist net-based political activism, The Electronic Disturbance Theatre recognised the absence, particularly within Third World countries, of access to today’s supposedly ‘free’ technologies. The use of these technologies enables ‘advanced’ post-industrial nations, principally the U.S., to dominate and control the world’s markets, through institutions such as the WTO. The Electronic Disturbance Theatre, referring to its collective actions as ‘electronic civil disobedience’, specifically employed their knowledge of internet technology to side with the Zapatista rebels protesting in Chiapas, Mexico against the attempted wholesale implementation in that country of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In solidarity with the rebels, The Electronic Disturbance Theatre authored a piece of web-

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127 Such surveillance is frequently argued for in terms of its effectiveness in preventing crime on a global scale through collecting and classifying personal data. Like the global market, this ends in a closed circuit that operates ultimately as a law unto itself: dissenting social positions and political beliefs may now be identified instantaneously and the individuals or groups espousing them deemed troublemakers, or, more likely, potential ‘terrorists’ or ‘enemies of democracy’.

128 William Gibson is the author famous for his critically dystopian vision of a high-tech future in novels such as Neuromancer.


130 Christiane Paul, Digital Art, p. 207.

based software called FloodNet, which was freely available to geographically dispersed groups of internet activists. FloodNet targeted the websites of various individuals and organisations — most specifically, the president of Mexico and the U.S. Department of Defense.¹³³ Those sites, as the name FloodNet suggests, were then inundated with empty browser screens. The government and military sites attacked in this way were overwhelmed, as the virtual blockade of continuing official government and economic interactions temporarily collapsed their servers.¹³⁴ This kind of virtual protest links multiple physically distanced sites and individuals, while maintaining the anonymity of participants. Moreover, the very possibility and effectiveness of such virtual technological protest is predicated, although critically, on the same implosive circularity used in the administration and control of economic globalisation.

The endlessly cyclical nature of the virtualised global market has also been the target of other web-based collectives. For example, the global market is the target of the ‘Toywar’ that occurred in 1999 (see Figure # 51). In that year, etoy, an artists’ collective based in Switzerland, had a lawsuit filed against it by multi-billion dollar multinational toy manufacturer eToys. This was despite the fact that the Swiss artists’ collective had been using that name ‘etoy’ for at least three years prior to the creation of the U.S. based eToys corporation.¹³⁵ The latter accused the etoy artists’ collective of deliberately directing potential customers to its own website, thereby confounding them while diverting them from their intention to be online consumers.

¹³² The Zapatistas exposed Mexico’s intended free-trade agreement as highly exploitative in its complete disregard for the land rights of native Mexican Indians, the nation’s poorest inhabitants.
¹³³ The U.S. Department of Defense has aided the training of Mexican soldiers in Mexico giving the Mexican military a “higher profile (that) not only creates more corruption opportunities, (but) also risks more violations of human and civil rights. (And furthermore,) the United States shares some responsibility for these growing risks, since the Pentagon is expanding military aid to Mexico without any effective controls on its use”. Such U.S. trained Mexican soldiers, have been accused by “the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, (for) violat(ing) fundamental human rights” particularly against left-wing poverty stricken indigenous Mixtec Indians engaged in guerrilla acts against the Mexican government. See, Andrew Reding, ‘The Risk of Using the Army for Too Much’, Los Angeles Times Sunday Opinion Section, 9 August 1998. (unpag.).
¹³⁴ The Pentagon, after significant delays and confusion, finally created its own version of FloodNet, which was then used in precisely the same way: to counter the virtual attacks of The Electronic Disturbance Theatre.
¹³⁵ Christiane Paul, Digital Art, p. 209.
Regardless of the differences between the corporate use and the autonomous non-profit use of the name ‘etoy’, a Californian court finally succeeded in ordering the etoy artists’ collective to shut down its server. In response, the collective rallied an international team of lawyers and fellow artists’ groups to stage a dual protest via the global media and — most successfully — within the electronic terrain of the internet.\textsuperscript{136} Finally, and regardless of eToys’ substantial financial leverage, etoy forced the corporation to withdraw its lawsuit. Not only that, but the corporation eventually lost its right to the name ‘eToys’, which subsequently led to a loss of confidence from its shareholders and the company’s eventual collapse. The global artists’ collaborative proves here that it is capable, through virtual means, and by subverting the logic of the ‘immaterial services’\textsuperscript{137} said now to be on offer by global multinational corporations, to challenge, in real time, globalisation’s techno-capitalist network.

This networked use of new media for socio-critical ends is not confined to the virtual space of the internet: other globally active artists’ networks, such as the Austrian-based 0100101110101101.ORG, have publicly exposed the pervasive and invasive marketing strategies of global multinational corporations and their inherently inflated commodity claims via acts of infiltration and mimicry.

In late 2003, 0100101110101101.ORG staged a project called Nikeground: Rethinking

\textsuperscript{136} Here etoy commandeered the aid of 2000 ‘toy soldiers’, graphically configured on the etoy website to look like the figures of the famous European (now U.S. owned) Lego company. These were virtual stand-ins for actual activists connected to the internet from various places around the world. The virtual ‘web soldiers’ supporting etoy’s creative autonomy bid on the global stock exchange against the stocks of the eToys corporation.

Space, in Vienna’s historic Karlsplatz. The project had its own website and attendant publicity campaign involving the distribution, within the city, of vast numbers of advertising pamphlets. Nikeground, consisted physically of a slickly constructed Nike ‘Infobox’ (see Figure # 52). Information available at this site explained the ‘revolutionary’ Nikeground campaign, in which it was proclaimed that ‘Nike is introducing its legendary brand into squares, streets, parks and boulevards: Nikesquare, Nikestreet, Piazzanike, Plazanike or Nikestrasse will appear in major world capitals over the coming year!’ As part of this transformation of the urban centres of the globalised world, Karlsplatz was to be renamed ‘Nikeplatz’. The proposal immediately provoked outrage amongst Vienna’s inhabitants.

Nike International’s subsequent lawsuit against Nikeground’s creative sponsor, Public Netbase, ultimately failed. What is surprising is that it did so in exact contradiction of the global commercial standards set by NAFTA. In the end, Vienna’s local central court defended the artist collective’s creative liberty to ‘freely manipulate the symbols of everyday life’.

Ultimately, 0100101110101101.ORG’s Nikeground: Rethinking Space seriously questions ‘how far transnationals should be allowed to dominate the semiotic systems of everyday life’, and the general symbolic domination of public space by private interests which is expressly

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139 The Nike ‘Infobox’ was ‘a slick, demountable, walk-in container, two semi-transparent floors, dynamic shapes and a red plastic cover’: Public Netbase, ‘Nike buys streets and squares: Guerrilla marketing or collective hallucination?’.
140 Ibid.
141 The city’s newspapers, television and radio stations, and the city council of Vienna, were bombarded with outraged complaints. The action also generated worldwide press coverage.
142 Public Netbase is a Vienna-based not-for-profit new technology-focused artists’ collective.
143 Nike International, after realising that if it lost this case it would incur significant costs and generate considerable negative publicity. It was also argued that if Nike International had won its lawsuit it would have proven (in an embarrassingly aggressive fashion) that contemporary global cultural production was only possible through private economic means, so Nike withdrew its case. See Public Netbase, ‘Nike Square: Art intervention in urban space — excitement and controversy around a project of “0100101110101101.ORG”’.
144 The legal action failed because it was posted from Nike International, whose headquarters are in the United States, and not from Nike Austria. Thus Vienna’s central court and the legal standards of the City of Vienna took jurisdictional precedence over international commercial law, which strongly promotes global ‘free trade’.
145 0100101110101101.ORG’s strategic and socially orientated use of the ‘symbols of everyday life’ is diametrically opposed to the celebratory ‘post-Pop’ embrace of the same commercial imagery by other contemporary artists, who instead celebrate a ‘global art scene’ in uncontested union with the core populist entertainment and marketing values central to economic globalisation generally. See Public Netbase, ‘Nike Square: Art intervention in urban space — excitement and controversy around a project of “0100101110101101.ORG”’.
146 Curiously, like etoy, it did this by adopting the very same marketing tactics as global multinational corporations, in this case effectively producing a ‘collective hallucination’. See Public Netbase, ‘Nike
encouraged by globalisation processes.

![Figure 52](image)

The S-77CCR Consortium collective is also responding to issues of diminished public space and increased use of technological surveillance. The collective has taken control of high technologies that are utilised today mainly by governments for aerial surveillance of protest rallies and other socially and politically dissenting activities, aiming to make the public aware of such controlling uses of these technologies. The collective, supported by the Vienna-based Public Netbase, in 2004 set up Projekt Atol/Pact Systems, which aims to ultimately place "tactical urban counter-surveillance systems in the hands of a critical civil society." At the same time, the group deploys this technology subversively by making use of yet another paradox of globalisation’s virtual markets — the fact that it may be legally purchased by anyone anywhere in the world.

Airborne surveillance technology of this kind today allows security and riot police to successfully block mass protest actions by anticipating the movement of crowds and thus containing and intimidating them more easily. Responding to this, the S-77CCR Consortium adds, "the increasing privatisation of security in this all-pervading omni-directional new style of

withdraws case against art project: Nikeground: Rethinking space heralds new forms of intervention in public space".

147 In fact, the S-77CCR Consortium’s intention to make knowledge and use of such technology public and accessible resulted from the Austrian Christian–conservative government’s successful deployment of it in obtaining information for the purposes of intimidating mass crowds assembled in Vienna in 2000 — the crowds were protesting the government’s alignment with the ultra-right wing nationalist party of Jörg Haider. See Public Netbase, ‘Right-wing government targets Public Netbase’.


149 Brian Holmes, ‘Top-down surveillance for grassroots initiatives’.

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confrontation asks for solutions towards transparency and a balance of power. The group proposes the practice of ‘hyper-mobile swarming’, in which surveillance technology is used to intercept police communications and view their actions from an unseen distance. This counter-surveillance allows civil protesters to disperse and regroup in full awareness of the intentions of security forces, in a spirit of continuous group mobility and multi-directional action. Through such means, the S-77CCR Consortium encourages, as do many of the other collectives mentioned, directly or indirectly, forms of ‘direct democracy’. S-77CCR Consortium does this by technologically inciting mass occupations of globalisation’s privileged corporate and (often now) privatised ‘public’ spaces.

6:3 Challenging the new totality: Critical heterogeneities
reconfiguring socio-political terrains for the global practice of contemporary art

Despite the contemporary art world’s growing embrace of globalisation’s econometric and commercial paradigms, the transformation this has exercised over it has in fact generated only points of critical contestation, both within and beyond its institutionalised parameters. Because globalisation’s sphere of influence and control is theoretically unlimited, as it intends to embrace the world in its totality and in all its systems, its considerable limits have become evermore glaringly obvious — in the increasing distance between the rich and the poor, the included and excluded, the centre and the margins.

However, the credo of neo-liberal commercialism that ideologically drives globalisation’s ‘new world order’ represents merely a virtual or simulated order, and everywhere it creates growing pockets of disorder and chaos. It is from globalisation’s many disguised points of rupture and contradiction that criticism within contemporary art also re-emerges vigorously. Accordingly, and unlike the classic ideological face-off between the avant-garde and its declared bourgeois enemies, or the mannered critical textualities of the post-modern ‘neo’ avant-garde, the chaotically intertwined sites of global contemporary art production have made it clear that:

ideological forms of protest and opposition are being replaced by practices of infiltration that are far harder to identify. In this context the work of art is no longer an object (an integrated super-commodity) or a dematerialised process (the analysis of a system which it is not subject) but a fluctuating circulation of parasitic

150 Ibid.
151 Brian Holmes, ‘Swarming to the heavens’.
152 This tactic of ‘swarming’ parallels the circulatory aspects of the globalised system of transnational flows, but in a negative and deliberately chaotic form.
information.\footnote{Olivier Zahn, quoted in Hugh Honour and John Fleming, eds, \textit{A World History of Art} (6th edition), p. 918.}

Under globalisation, the genuine difficulty in directly exposing the ‘enemy’, in art or elsewhere, a fact cruelly compensated for by the reductionism of contemporary global politics, has similarly made it possible for many artists to utilise the global art world and its markets as a springboard for and target of renewed critical activity. What this renewed proliferation of critical activity under globalisation definitely does not represent, however, is a ‘simple multiplicity’ or generalised pluralism, a global art world in which ‘anything goes’, including virulent criticism.

Indeed, critical activity in contemporary art functions in a highly specific manner: it not only exposes the significant transformation of the international context of contemporary art production under globalisation, but also turns such awareness against the system itself in particularly strategic ways. At the same time, and unlike much ‘neo’ avant-garde critique, this work increasingly uses illegal or semi-legal means as an integral part of its methodologies. In doing so, varieties of contemporary critical work also reveal the way in which the global system of contemporary culture is intrinsically linked to the increasingly authoritarian definitions of international law — or, in the case of the contemporary U.S., Britain and Australia, to the disregard of the law.\footnote{In this sense, it is telling to consider the joint entry of each of these nations, as members of the ‘coalition of the willing’, into the 2001 war against Iraq, despite the fact that it has since been proven that there was no intelligence linking the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein to ‘weapons of mass destruction’, and therefore no legal justification for the war. Those weapons were the reason the United States, Britain and Australia claimed for their military intervention into the affairs of a sovereign nation. ‘The United Nations’ top two weapons experts said Sunday that the invasion of Iraq a year ago was not justified by the evidence in hand at the time’: ‘Iraq war wasn’t justified, UN weapons experts say’, \textit{CNN}, March 22 2004.}

These definitions are now written so that they reflect the prevailing reductionist, ‘anti-terrorist’ rhetoric central to contemporary Western liberal democracy. This present form of democracy is, in turn, founded on the corporate interests of global multinationals and globalised markets. The combined operations of these, although dramatically dispersed and transmutational under globalisation, nevertheless remain fixed within an overall economy of repetitious and accelerated circulation.

The critical contemporary art practices and methodologies inadvertently generated by globalisation processes do not, however, represent an absolute ‘outside’ to the globalised art market’s protective interior.\footnote{The contemporary global ‘control society’ that results, and that relies heavily on social surveillance, is therefore also a mirror-form of an internalised market where all goods, including contemporary cultural and art ‘goods’, must be locatable by and accountable to the privatising dictates of the market, and} Indeed, to think in such terms is to imagine a unified and
completed ‘counter-empire’ to globalisation’s empire as a fixed modernist-style opposition, a rationale to which the universalising and progressivist mentality of globalisation is itself intimately attached. In fact, it is the refusal of these contemporary critical art strategies to coalesce as predictable and repeatable methodologies that is their strength. The ‘counter-empire’ they make up, then, is one of a multitude of discontinuous ‘molecular’ critical gestures. Indeed, in their deliberate discontinuity, these critical contemporary art practices function under global conditions, in parallel with the tactically dispersive oppositional activities of ‘anti-globalisation’ protests. In these, lack of centralisation is perceived as a fundamental strength, and social agitation is undertaken according to a deliberate logic of unpredictability, of ‘delayed arrival(s) and non-synchronous rhythms’.

Overall, this multiplying space of individual and collective critique within the field of contemporary art confirms a concerted underlying aim to formulate an alternative global socio-cultural space. Such a space would broadly oppose globalisation’s dominant privatised markets, including the ‘art’ marketed self-consciously as ‘global’. This proposal aims, via manifold returnable to it. This would explain how at every level, even the most critically engaged oppositional art practices — as well as those founded on the renewed conceptual politics of dematerialisation, from which no-thing is produced, such as the work of Christian Phillip Müller, for example — are still retrievable as documentation that then appears in the global cultural behemoths that are international biennales of contemporary art. Likewise, the ‘unattractive’ and abject methodologies employed by other artists (such as Oleg Kulik), which accurately anticipate and reflect the excessively diffuse ethics of a global market economy, have been installed at the centre of the globalised art world and venerated for their subversive content. Still, it could be argued that artists such as Kulik, recognising the massive appropriation skills of economic globalisation, returns to the system an uncomfortable, even embarrassingly debased version of globalisation’s core art/entertainment ethos while fully recognising the global system’s ‘fantasisation of human conduct’. In fact, performance work like Kulik’s, or even Thomas Hirschhorn’s ‘shabby’ installations, enact the excrecence of the global system of monopoly capitalism and its domination of the international art market, while emphasising that such ‘unpleasant’ and ‘un-aesthetic’ creative strategies, according to the same logic of global market circulation, may be repeated infinitely, ad nauseam. See Armand Mattelart, ‘The new totality’, in Peter Weibel and Timothy Druckrey, eds, NetCondition, p. 266.

The concept of ‘molecular revolutions’ is central to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. They argue that genuine political and social transformation occurs, and may occur most positively, at the level of the microscopic and multiplicitous. Such a concept undermines previous revolutionary politics founded in a belief in macroscopic social transformation arrived at through the rigorous application of a guiding ideology. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘The molecular unconscious’ in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, pp. 311–24.

Elsewhere, Jean Baudrillard has referred to the current reinvigoration of oppositional practices in the global environment as ‘A fractal war of all cells, all singularities, revolving in the form of antibodies’: Jean Baudrillard, The Spirit of Terrorism, p. 12.


It could, however, be argued that the contemporary critical practices cited here merely function metaphorically, as static and negative illustrations of the controlling market effects of economic globalisation that do not in any way change that system. Such an argument is questionable, though,
means — through the activities of not-for-profit artist spaces, transnational artists’ collaborations and technologically networked artist’s interventions — to renew a social objective in art, prefiguring cultural participation in a contemporary global ‘commons’.

Significantly, each of these endeavours frequently also resists being easily accessible to the contemporary global art market.\textsuperscript{160} In fact, it is the core economic contradictions and domination of the global ‘free’ market economy, its spectralisation as well as its enthusiastic embrace by a now globalised contemporary art world, that inadvertently generate ever-escalating possibilities for cultural opposition, opposition that is within it yet against its centralising and privatising agendas.\textsuperscript{161}

\textsuperscript{160}This is irrespective of whether or not the (by-)’products’ of such collectivised practices appear on that market in secondary form — as photographic documentation, for instance.

\textsuperscript{161}Once again, a good example of the non-metaphoric aspects of global critical art practice is etoy, which functions both ‘inside’ and against the globalised market, which now trades predominantly in virtual services and commodities. Etoy uses precisely those virtual means to protect its intellectual property while subverting the virtualised global market by waging a virulently competitive transnational ‘Toywar’. It generates such competition in simulation of global corporate activity and from within the pre-existing corporate terrain whose dominance is encouraged by economic globalisation. Similarly, etoy establishes competition regardless of the fact that, as a conceptual art site and unlike its ‘real’ business rival, it has nothing to sell except its image as a purely virtual global commodity. Additionally, because its aim is not profit, but social and critical, it is able to harness the implosive and self-sustaining logic of the globalised economic system to generate ‘real’ effects by collapsing its profit-seeking opponent. By exposing the ‘empty virtual values’ of the global market economy, etoy, as one of the many examples of contemporary critical production mentioned here, also successfully commandeers one of the core, seemingly uncontrollable, contradictions of the world economy: its necessary virtualisation as the only means by which it can become global in the first place. This spectralising of the global market simultaneously renders it increasingly vulnerable to multiple infiltrations.
Conclusion

Re-offering the ‘gift’ of art in the struggle for a global critical culture

Despite globalisation’s considerable capacity to appropriate dissent, critical subversions of its core agendas arise in contemporary culture with increasing vigour and frequency. Ironically, the sheer extent of globalisation’s de-territorialisation of worldwide cultural difference simultaneously provokes manifold critical and contesting re-territorialisations. Such magnified critical potential in contemporary culture appears because globalisation, as a totalising system, ‘universally’ applicable to the widest imaginable multitude of geopolitical situations, repeatedly fails; it cannot successfully control the vast totality to which it aspires.

Therefore, out of the growing chaos that the supposed rationalism of globalisation itself produces, an equally growing ‘multitude’ of opposing and resistant practices also appear. These are specific outbreaks of critical activity that cannot easily be assimilated into the econometric paradigms of globalisation. The enforced application of globalisation, rather than foreclosing possibilities for actively critical opposition within contemporary culture, actually accelerates and multiplies them. According to current evidence of critical diversity in contemporary art, the cultural ‘truth’ of globalisation, instead of being the global triumph of neo-liberal ‘Americanisation’, appears to be the oppositional terrains it opens for challenges to its hegemony.

Such challenges run contrary to globalisation’s binary logic of deadlocked fundamentalisms; of a capitalist, positivist, consensus-seeking Western liberal democracy on one hand and acts of radical negativity, of which ‘Islamic’ terrorism is the most obvious, on the other. Refusing such reductive positioning, many alternative forms of cultural critique also

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1 See Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder.
2 See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Multitude.
3 This notion of globalisation as a form of world ‘Americanization’ is a complex one as London-based art critic and theorist Julian Stallabrass points out: ‘the particular local concerns of the US art world had to fall away as it moved to take on global dominance. In a further stage that dominance is sublimated, so that it no longer requires that art be American, only that it be made according to the US-enforced model of global neo-liberalism’: Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, p. 186.
4 It is even more true today that ‘the slightest criticism, the slightest radical negativity is stifled by the virtual consensus on all values based on negotiation and reconciliation’: Jean Baudrillard, Screened Out, p. 34.
refuse avant-garde, ‘neo’ avant-garde or even generically ‘post-modern’ modes of criticality, all of which have become overly fixed and historicised as well as thoroughly commodified.

i) Institutionalising a consensus on contemporary ‘global culture’

Overall, globalisation’s emphasis on neo-liberal economics as a ‘naturally’ applicable world system introduces an ‘experiential’ paradigm into contemporary art production. This emphasis is also apparent in contemporary designs for the global sites of art’s consumption. Thus on dual levels, contemporary art under globalisation is conceived and exhibited according to the site-less logic of a universal transcendent ‘no-place’, which has simultaneously become ‘every-place’.

As a result, ‘global art’ now intermingles freely with all manifestations of contemporary culture, which in actuality means it partakes primarily of the commercial and corporate culture privileged by globalisation’s blanketing ‘demagogy of a mass culture’. It is not surprising, then, that such ‘liberation’ from the critical practice of art begins to produce many examples of contemporary art that visibly reiterate the conventions of global advertising. Significantly, the historical genesis of such advertising is intimately linked to the positivist language of technological progress:

> In the nineteenth century … [this] was called ‘the great movement’ … [Its] heroising of progress was a phenomenon related to the beginnings of both advertisement and the need for publicity.

Globalisation’s promotion of the superiority of Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal economics requires a similar heroising mechanism. In contemporary culture, this has been located in advertising, which has succeeded in recruiting contemporary art as a means for magnifying the visual sophistication of its commercial and consensual ideology. As a result, the massive technical and economic resources of multinational corporate advertisers seduce contemporary cultural producers with the possibilities of spectacular visibility in globalisation’s inflated world markets.

Globalisation’s promotion of an ambient hegemonic cultural milieu reiterates the success of its underlying neo-liberal ideology, with its central upholding of an individualist subject-as-consumer. In the same way, neo-liberal globalisation has effectively made economics the

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7 Ibid.

8 See Julian Stallabrass, *Art Incorporated*.

9 ‘[T]he consumer, the one who, in his or her virtuality opposite the commodity, is ostensibly identical to any other in his or her abstract humanity as buying power. Man as shopping. As man (or woman), the consumer is the same as everyone else insofar as he or she looks at the same window display (that he or
dominant contemporary world discourse. Therefore, the contemporary self-consciously ‘global’ situation to which many artists tailor their works may be described as ‘the age of the world market’. Such a vision of global contemporary culture accords precisely with the view that:

[1] The logic of capitalist globalisation is that of commodification, [and] its outcome is to disaggregate the world into parcels of exclusive private property.\(^{11}\)

Indeed, globalisation’s ability to promote its neo-liberal agenda is rendered additionally palatable by way of its strategic parcelling of Other cultures. These it bundles into neat commodifiable packages which are used, paradoxically, to promote difference as a singular ‘universal’ value; difference itself becomes a secondary expression of the global market. Thus globalisation ‘benevolently’ purveys, everywhere, multiple ‘exotic’ cultural goods for increased worldwide consumption. This process is conveniently propagated via the generalising language of global ‘multiculturalism’.\(^{12}\)

The contemporary promotion of ‘global art’, therefore, rather than being inherently inclusive and open, coincides precisely with neo-liberal globalisation’s core underlying proposition: that is, the conjunction of Western liberal democracy and neo-liberal economics is the contemporary world’s only true and justly applicable system.\(^{13}\)

ii) ‘No-time’ like the present: ‘Contemporary’ ‘global art’ and Western liberal democracy — completing the ‘world-picture’ in the age of the world market

In the same way, ‘contemporary’ art — that is, art perceived to bear a privileged relationship to the present — is capable of using its proximity to the visible ascendancy of neo-liberal

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8 This is a reference to 20th century German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s, ‘The age of the world-picture’, in which he negatively theorised humankind’s reduction of the world to its image, especially following the advent of manned space flight. See Martin Heidegger, ‘The age of the world-picture’, in Martin Heidegger The Question Concerning Technology, pp. 115–45.


11 Alex Callinicos, An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto, p. 129.

12 The Western liberal notion of ‘multiculturalism’ is regularly accepted at face value merely as the positive reflection of principles of universal respect for the rights of others in a globalising world. However, as an invention of the West, the term ‘multiculturalism’ might also be used, and is used, especially under globalisation, as a means of annulling or neutralising true difference, particularly if it is antagonistic to Western values. Such a process is constantly enacted through world markets, where ‘multiplicity produces homogeneity, as all must undergo the sanctioning of the marketplace’. See Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, p. 70.

13 See Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man.
globalisation to propose a transparent ‘anthropology of the image’\textsuperscript{14} This means that the ‘image’ of the ‘contemporary’ under globalisation is believed ‘naturally’ to already contain everything preceding it. Therefore, under globalisation, the notion of history, as defined by ongoing political and social struggle, and as evident in critically oppositional cultures, is suggested to have ended absolutely.\textsuperscript{15}

It is not surprising then that the ‘ tiresome anachronism’\textsuperscript{16} of this particular positivist discourse ‘ comes across in the body of today’s most phenomenal culture: what one hears, reads, and sees, what is most mediated in Western capitals’.\textsuperscript{17} Of course, despite the regressive absolutism of such discourse, repeatedly supported by the Western media, history and contemporary representations of it do not simply vanish; they appear instead as pure affect, as an eternally present spectacle.\textsuperscript{18} This illusory vision of contemporary globalisation as a type of universally ‘enlightened’ ultra-modernity is clearly described by Alain Joxe:

The idea … that America is not the Empire but at most a form that represents it[self as t]he Empire … has now reached a global level and accepts no limits or fixed boundaries … [It is] … de-territorialisation on the widest scale.\textsuperscript{19}

‘De-territorialisation on the widest scale’: this is what neo-liberal globalisation is. In fact, the history-less present promoted by neo-liberal globalisation represents history as inert, as befits an image of global society reduced to, because predominantly defined by, the endless circularity of the capitalistic exchange of our static democracies.\textsuperscript{20} Consequently, the system must also attempt to repackage historically informed and invigorated forms of cultural resistance as parcels of heterogenic difference available for passive consumption. This is especially the case in the apparent absence of a viably ‘alive’, visibly unified oppositional political body. However, the degree to which globalisation aims to promote a ‘new world order’ in contemporary art as

\textsuperscript{14} Hal Foster, Design and Crime and Other Diatribes, pp. 90–103.
\textsuperscript{15} Karl Marx had already long anticipated this tendency when he wrote, ‘the un-political man, necessarily appears as the natural man’: Marx, quoted in Walter Benjamin, One Way Street and Other Writings, p. 287.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} A good example of this in contemporary art is the work of highly vaunted multimedia artist Matthew Barney. In Barney’s work, references to history simply ‘appear’ in a randomised mix of trans-historical styles and expressive pastiches. See Chapter 2 — The empire and its allies: ‘Enlightened’ populism and globalisation’s new Western consensus’, 2:1 Case study: Matthew Barney’s empire.
\textsuperscript{19} Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{20} ‘Our democracy is the stasis and Le Pen (the ultra-Right French nationalist candidate who won significant voter support in French elections of late 1990’s) is the metastasis’: Jean Baudrillard, Screened Out, pp. 34, 207.
well merely confirms the limits of its prescriptive logo-centricity. Again, this is especially obvious as points of global resistance to this ‘new world order’ continue to visibly multiply.

By the same token, the temptation to propose the contemporary critical practice of art as merely a negative mirror image, a unitary ‘counter-empire’, to the ‘positively’ totalising system of neo-liberal globalisation, is also fundamentally flawed. To do so would simply be to reiterate precisely the same non-choice offered by contemporary Western liberal democracy. Today, such a system asks us to choose between one or other false absolutes, one or other fundamentalisms. This is mirrored by a global political scenario affirming the same ‘with us or against us’ mentality that ideologically propels post-September 11 ‘post-politics’.

What is being offered through such false oppositions is in fact no choice at all; it is merely pressure to accept the dictates of a form of democracy ‘reduced to establishing juridical moral rules, norms, or representations, within an inevitable totalising horizon’. This horizon aims to annihilate the practice of genuinely oppositional thinking.

Meanwhile, globalisation’s celebration of its processes of hybridisation and cross-cultural pollination, to the extent that such exchanges are presented as invariably positive, camouflages that the fact that often ‘the true function of [these] displacement[s] and subversions is precisely to make the traditional story [of empire, for example] relevant to our “post-modern” age’.

Likewise, globalisation’s self-satisfied ‘emphasis on multitude and diversity’ may be seen, at times, as a convenient mask for ‘the underlying monotony of today’s global life’. Similarly, as theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue in Empire:

> When we begin to consider the ideologies of corporate capital and the world market, it certainly appears that the postmodernist and post-colonialist theorists who advocate a politics of difference, fluidity, and hybridity in order to challenge the binarities and essentialism of modern sovereignty have been outflanked by the strategies of power. Power has evacuated the bastion they are attacking and has circled around to the rear to join them in the assault in the name of difference.

[The] thought of plurality and multiplicity, … confusedly or unconsciously, indicate[s] the passage toward the constitution of Empire.

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24 Ibid., p. 68.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 143.
The crisis of contemporary cultural opposition: the empire of globalisation as an ‘open site of conflict’

Following this proclamation of the massive appropriationary power of the contemporary ‘empire of globalisation’, a renewed critical militancy may be proposed that figures ‘globalisation’ not as series of multiple irreducible differences, but as an ‘open site of conflict’. Certainly, under globalisation, critical militancy visibly arises within the field of contemporary art. It is certainly apparent, for example, in the aggressively performative works of the Russian artists Oleg Kulik and Alexander Brener.

Indeed, militancy in contemporary art often explicitly tests the legal limits of current definitions of ‘legitimate’ cultural production. In this way, such artists question the neo-liberal machinations of globalisation, which legitimise particular types of contemporary cultural production while de-legitimising others. They also indicate that the compartmentalisation of difference within the system of neo-liberal globalisation is a convenient way of simply using the disappearance of one barrier to mask the appearance elsewhere of another. That is, such artists contest the positivist image of the consolidating ‘global art world’ as barrier-free, enlightened, egalitarian and accepting all difference, all action and all possibility, by revealing it to be the exact opposite.

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28 Ibid., p. 404.
29 Such militancy is clearly present in the performative practice of Russian Alexander Brener. Indeed, Brener’s practice is predicated on an explicit refusal of the false and partial inclusivity of the dominant pro-globalisation discourse of ‘difference-as-sameness’, with its feigned indiscriminate sensitivity towards the other. A 1995 ‘artwork’ by Brener, which he performed uninvited at the international biennale-style exhibition Interpol in Stockholm, Sweden, involved him destroying the work of another represented artist, Chinese-American practitioner Gu Wenda. Framing this action conceptually, Brener, whose gesture could otherwise simply be brushed aside as chauvinistic, and an aggressive publicity stunt, testified to his perception of the globalised art world’s random tendency to favour, at any one time, the cultural productions of particular international locations, suggesting in this instance, the phenomenal global currency of contemporary art associated with China. Thus Brener also raised issues concerning the direct economic imperatives that allow — if not determine — such strategic favouring: he suggested the non-coincidence of the global popularity of Chinese contemporary art with the rapidly expanding Chinese economy. See Julian Stallabrass, Art Incorporated, pp. 55–56.
31 The Interpol exhibition was not ‘classically curated’; instead, ‘the artists were supposed to formulate the exhibition as a collective through communication and interaction between their works’. Consequently Brener justified his action because he and the other Russian artists ‘were all shocked to see that an enormous work by Gu Wenda took up the central alley of the [gallery] space, with no attention [allowed] to any other artist presented there’, and furthermore, ‘this work by definition broke the rules of the game established by three years of prior communication’. For his act, Brener ‘was accused of being a fascist by the group of artists and by the organizers of the exhibition, and a very primitive and nonchalant letter was sent to all important addresses of contemporary art institutions, claiming that he and all Russian artists present were fascists’: ‘The letter of support’, Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK) website, http://www.ljudmila.org/embassy/brener.htm.
Furthermore, contemporary critically militant works drive the practice of critique in contemporary art closer and closer to the limits of international law. In doing so, they also emphasise, ironically or not, the fact that the globalising world is also an ‘open site’ for a ‘clash of fundamentalisms’. Curiously, contemporary critical art predicated on ‘global culture’ s radical negation may also seem analogous, on a micro-level, to the acts of terrorists, who are ‘playing the fatal game of negativity’. 

Nevertheless, although contemporary cultural militancy raises issues highly critical of the false-inclusiveness of the contemporary neo-liberalised global art world, these acts could just as easily be read as an outright refusal of difference, and therefore, on occasion, as blatantly racist. Consequently, one of the main problems of overtly militant critique in contemporary art, where artists carry out ‘terroristic’ acts, is that it risks culturally reiterating the paternalistically offered liberal-democratic ‘non-choice’ between pre-existing global fundamentalisms of morally predetermined ‘good’ and ‘bad’ deeds.

Still, as an ‘open site of conflict’, globalisation is exposed as vulnerable to attack. In fact, as a ‘new world order’ it contributes to its own vulnerability by everywhere producing and multiplying chaos, a fact it continually seeks to mask. Globalisation’s illusion of the ‘world as a whole’, of its markets and institutions being naturally self-regulating and centralised, conceals the obverse reality — a failed global system that cannot regulate the immensity of the terrain it aims to control.

iv) From neo-liberal ‘globalisation’ to the multiple terrains of appositional globalisation/s

As a result of this paradox, barriers — physical and metaphorical — multiply under globalisation, in express contradiction of its rhetoric of transnational freedom, openness and inclusion; and multiple alternate sites appear as ‘cracks in the empire’.

Proceeding from an awareness of the multiplying and chaotic inconsistencies and contradictions of today’s global capitalism, the pressure exerted by its neo-liberal apologists to see the ‘world as whole’ — and positively, as a ‘new world order’ — may be seriously resisted. Such resistance is possible because globalisation’s absolutism is in reactive ‘conformity with a model that borrows from the State apparatus, and which defines for it goals and paths, conduits,

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34 Once again, Alexander Brener’s destruction of Gu Wenda’s work could be read in this way.
35 See Tariq Ali, ‘Cracks in the empire’.

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channels, organs [suggesting] ... an image of thought spanning all thought’. 36 Thus we should ‘summon up the courage to abandon “democracy” as the Master-Signifier of this chain’. 37

The ‘democracy’ we should abandon is the democracy of the capitalist status quo that rules today through establishing norms, 38 rather than by proposing possibilities. This global democracy is Western liberal democracy, as a singular system. In fact, given the illusory and virtualised nature of its unified image of globalisation, it is possible to contest the controlling singularity of Western liberal democracy at a multitude of levels. From these may be inferred multiple terrains of appositional globalisations, all capable of being made critically manifest within contemporary culture. Contrary to Hardt and Negri’s fatalistic suggestion of the irreversible deference of all difference to the hegemonic influence of globalisation and ‘its homogenizing solvent power’, 39 ‘we can see heterogenous forces springing up all over, forces which are not only different, but antagonistic and irreducible’. 40

In fact, what its critics conveniently refer to as the ‘anti-globalisation’ movement is actually an anti-systemic 41 ‘movement of movements’ 42 that encompasses but refuses to totalise a multitude of overlapping but independent and differentiated social, cultural and political interests. It is ‘a “disparate” that itself, “holds together”’. 43 Its deliberate disunity is resistant because:

The movements organised within ... do not proceed by oppositions [because] ... One of the basic characteristics of the network form is that no two nodes face each other in contradiction; rather, they are always triangulated by a third, and then a fourth, and then by an indefinite number of others in the web ... The flow of the movement transform[s] the traditional fixed positions; networks impose their force through a kind of irresistible undertow. 44

In the same way, this multiplicity of overlapping resistant positions re-conceptualises the mass

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37 Slavoj Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real, p. 78.
38 Alain Joxe, The Empire of Disorder, p. 81.
39 Jean Baudrillard, Screened Out, pp. 159.
40 Ibid.
mobilised protests of the 1960’s. Not merely serving as a nostalgic model, such protests instead evince a strengthened historical relationship to recent large-scale ‘anti-globalisation’ protests, such as those of Seattle, Prague, Calgary, Genoa and Melbourne. In contrast to previous models of centralised opposition, the solidarity of the ‘anti-globalisation’ ‘movement of movements’ strategically invokes multiple complex tactics to confound both the confining rationalism of neo-liberal economic globalisation and traditional authoritarian or Party-based resistance to capitalism.

The anti-centrist model of anti-capitalist ‘anti-globalisation’ actions contributes to a much broader cultural phenomenon: an enlarging global ‘counter-empire’ of open networks and potentially inexhaustible ‘molecular revolutions and specificities’. Indeed, a counter-cultural ‘empire’ embracing unassimilable particularities is ideally practised at a global grass-roots level — for instance, within the context of dedicated independent artist-run initiatives (ARIs). Through such initiatives, that is, those daring to turn away from corporate business or strictly ‘professionalised’ institutional models, ‘genuine solidarity [would be] ... built upon through a process of testing and questioning, through a real overlap of affinities and interests’.

Therefore, contemporary cultural practitioners who oppose the ideologies and effects of neo-liberal globalisation need not be forced to imagine an oppositional network of false and absolute inclusion in which those opposed to it feel it necessary to collectively emphasise their sameness.

Resisting the pressure to conform to an oppositional counter-totality would allow localised and interrogative site-specific practices to re-emerge. Ideally, these would maximise their intertwining with similarly affiliated, globally dispersed networks of artist-determined and autonomously critical cultural organisations. Together, the simultaneity of such global critical activity, by groups ignoring the pressure to operate as though their differences were equivalences, would undermine globalisation’s constant neo-liberal assertion that ‘there is no alternative’ to ‘a market which is behind nothing but in everything’.

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45 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, ‘May ’68 did not happen’, in Kris Kraus and Sylvère Lotringer eds, _Haïred of Capitalism, A Reader._
46 Large-scale protests against the economic and social policies of the WTO and the G8 were staged in Seattle, United States (1999), the Czech capital, Prague (2000), Genoa, Italy (2001), Calgary, Canada (2002) and Melbourne, Australia (2003).
48 Ibid., p. 244.
49 This phrase became ubiquitous during the Reagan/Thatcher era, an era which also witnessed the ascendency of global neo-liberalism and created a climate dominated by accelerated privatisation and huge multinational corporations. Originally coined by British Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the phrase ‘there is no alternative’ came to be referred to in Britain by its acronym, TINA. See Jean Baudrillard, _Screened Out,_ p. 156. Related to this concept of there being ‘no alternative’ to the neo-liberal status quo, it was also ‘the explicit aim of the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher...
In response, an alternative to the present institution of the ‘global art world’ could be critically conceived according to the economics of multiple horizontal — that is, non-hierarchical — exchanges: between ARIs and other independent cultural collectives, for instance. In such cases, the economically determined institutional authority of the privatised and semi-privatised ‘control spaces’\(^51\) of global commercial galleries and ‘official’ ‘new museums of contemporary art’ could conceivably be challenged with decentralisation (to an undeniable, if necessarily partial, degree).

Such a suggestion should not, however, be mistaken as a blueprint for a naïve utopian ‘solution’ to the considerable impact of globalisation on the contemporary art world, to be achieved via the total negation of any future role for such ‘official’ cultural spaces. It is an attempt, one to be tested expressly though globally practising alternative grass-roots affiliations, to redress a situation where the contemporary artist has been transformed primarily into an expert administrator seeking ‘professional’\(^52\) consensus with today’s globalised ‘culture industry’.\(^53\)

As long as they proclaim the total absence of viable opposition, including possible opposition to a strictly neo-liberalised ‘global culture’, globalisation processes do not require self-reflection nor self-criticism to continue to flourish and expand; they require only proliferating and accessible markets. This particularly virulent and hegemonic global capitalism is exactly what the multiple terrains of oppositional globalisations, including critically oppositional cultural practices, must contest if they are to seriously challenge the de-politicisation and de-socialisation of contemporary ‘global life’.

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51 See Gilles Deleuze, ‘Postscript on control societies’ in Ursula Froshe, Thomas Y. Levin and Peter Weibel eds, CTRL: Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother.
52 On this note, Jean Baudrillard is especially scathing, stating that today, ‘cultural power ... has become the most conventional and professional form there is’: Jean Baudrillard, Screened Out, p. 190.
v) *The market does not think: The future of critical culture and the necessity for an active practice of critique in contemporary art under globalisation*

Nevertheless, as far as it aims to give shape to a truly ‘global life’ and ‘global culture’, neo-liberal globalisation is still ‘an essentially American-led process’, based on a pseudo-naturalised world economic system. It requires that subjects everywhere accept its core economic functioning, because ‘any constraint on free competition would interfere with the natural efficiency of [its] market mechanisms’, which supposedly automatically tend ‘toward an equilibrium of supply and demand’.

As a result, the globally successful artist often tends to work ‘naturally’ in alignment with the power centres of contemporary ‘global culture’, which are controlled by neo-liberal interests and buoyed by multinational investment. And even if such artists claim a ‘critical’ motivation, their reasoning it is often akin to ‘civil rights groups that still proclaim their opposition to the State, governments, parliaments and political parties, while searching for “partnerships” with multinational corporations’. That is, the freedom to ‘criticise’, and the apparent natural freedoms of the otherwise ‘apolitical’ artist, are regularly based on private market-influenced demands for increased professional visibility.

If the image (and symbolic effects) of the contemporary global art market continue to be supported by artists whose only ambition is to become successful, who seek only to supply commodities to the commodity market and who accept globalisation’s illusion of total inclusion, the resulting hybridisation will always favour the practice of art as one generating — and, more radically, today generated by — global flows of capital. Not surprisingly, and ‘strictly correlative to the de-politicisation of our societies’, particularly in the West, where the allure of global markets goes increasingly unchallenged, the question of ‘what there is to do, which


56 Ibid.


59 Ibid.

means to think\textsuperscript{61} is increasingly being answered according to the logic of what there is to own, what remains to be privatised, that which has already been thought.

Alternatively, critique as the practice of active thought is founded in a necessary challenge to the dominance of established norms: its challenge is not so much to re-think but to continue to think. Like a truly participatory democracy, critique is a process. Therefore the active process of critique, as well as the active practice of contemporary art as critique, requires a degree of non-consensual de-alignment, a refusal or unplugging-from\textsuperscript{62} the world as it presently exists, as it appears falsely under globalisation as ‘whole’ or completed, particularly since ‘the “market” is the name of a world which is not a world’.\textsuperscript{63}

It is the practice of critique in the field of contemporary art that through continual contestation, points to the future-possible, indeed to the suggestion that ‘Another World Is Possible’.\textsuperscript{64} It is through the practice of art as critique that it participates actively in what is to come, as ‘every epoch dreams the one to follow’.\textsuperscript{65} The nature of the ‘epoch to follow’ depends as much on the contemporary practice of art, a discourse that ideally ‘imagines’ and is productive rather than merely representational, as on a passive reflection of the current states of politics, ethics or economic circumstances. The active practice of cultural critique, as refusal and deliberate dis-alignment, participates then in the genuine practice of politics, in which something is always at stake, where some-thing is actively risked to oppose the capitalistically determined status quo.

From this background, other artists assert the necessity for a politics of contemporary cultural practice. Such cultural politics are necessarily underscored by risk — the risk of failure and rejection by the prevailing ‘global culture’. As the contemporary Swiss-born installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn states:

I do not believe that the process of making art can exist without taking a critical position. An artist does not make a work of art so that it works or succeeds. To not agree with the system takes courage. Artists are disobedient — this is the first step towards Utopia. An artist can create a Utopia. The Utopia is based on disagreement with the predominant and pre-existing consensus.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{62} See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.
\textsuperscript{63} Alain Badiou, Infinite Thought, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{64} A frequently reiterated slogan connected to the conveniently labelled ‘anti-capitalist’, ‘anti-globalisation’ movement is ‘Another World Is Possible’.
\textsuperscript{65} See Walter Benjamin, quoted in Hal Foster, The Return of the Real, p. 207.
\textsuperscript{66} Thomas Hirschhorn, quoted in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Thomas Hirschhorn: Layout sculptures and display diagrams", in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Alison M. Gingeras and Carlos Basualdo, eds, Thomas Hirschhorn, p. 57.
From such a viewpoint, one broadly affiliated with other oppositional, culturally and politically resistant manifestations of the ‘anti-globalisation’ ‘multitude’ of interconnected movements, regardless of whether or not they engage utopian propositions, it is possible to see as well that:

Hope in the future is not confined to the past, [which] the rise of anti-capitalist protest movements has shown. [Furthermore,] these movements are unthinkable in conventional post-modern theory, and it is most inconvenient that they exist. They have well-developed forms of cultural expression, which are not much seen in art galleries. 67

The unsurprising fact that the culture of ‘anti-capitalist’ ‘anti-globalisation’ movements is ‘not much seen in art galleries’ may attest again to the sheer capacity of ‘legitimate’ contemporary cultural institutions to appropriate and enfold potentially resistant cultural forms. Thus it becomes possible for an established New York gallery director presenting an exhibition of ‘interventionist’ art, to write:

The organised disruption of the World Trade Organization’s 1999 meeting in Seattle always mystified me. Resorting to civil disobedience over the ambivalent concept of ‘globalism’ [globalisation], breaking store front glass in response to the workings of the international capital market, and wreaking havoc over the ubiquity of multinational corporate brands made as much sense to me as protesting the existence of the jet stream, or the laws of thermodynamics. Yet the depth of conviction of the protest movement was unmistakable. I could watch it on TV as it played from Switzerland to Mexico. 68

What is even more revealing in this particular ‘official’ appropriation of ‘alternative’ art is the director’s assumption that globalism or globalisation is inherently ‘ambivalent’. That is, the director conveniently assumes that the process of globalisation is devoid of ideological content. Additionally, his comparison of the global market and globally ubiquitous corporate brands with the law of thermodynamics perfectly illustrates the extent to which contemporary global cultural institutions have accepted and embraced, at face value, neo-liberalism’s basic model of a naturalised self-regulating transnational market. And accordingly, through acts of institutional framing, they desire to consensually mould a culture to it.

In cases such as this, attention is diverted from an emphasis on the urgent socio-critical content of the actually exhibited work. Likewise, the ‘anti-capitalist’, ‘anti-globalisation’ protest movements to which some such art is affiliated are treated as a mere spectacle to be watched passively on television in the comfort and safety of one’s home. ‘Interventionist art’ becomes

67 Julian Stallabrass, “Cashing-In” at the Whitechapel Gallery, London’, p. 44.
68 Joseph Thompson, The Interventionists catalogue, p. 10.
then but a sideshow to 'serious' and 'important' contemporary 'global art', deemed thus because of its visibility in mainstream global markets.

vi) Contemporary cultural critique as resistance: Resisting the global shift from post-modern to 'post-art'

Given such rampant institutional appropriation of contemporary critical practices under globalisation, artists seeking to challenge the 'neo-liberalisation' of the international art world might respond like French theorist, Paul Virilio, who writes, 'Faced with this exacerbation of capitalism, I see no other alternative for the time being but resistance.'

What would this 'resistance to capitalism', highly apparent in the conveniently labelled 'anti-globalisation' 'movement of movements', mean when applied to the contemporary art world? How would it be possible to realistically sustain such a critique within contemporary cultural production: how would one create contemporary art as a system generally productive of 'things' deliberately resisting incorporation into the global economy?

Regardless of the difficulties and paradoxes raised by such questions, they are necessary, because enfolded into the 'serious' econometric spaces of the global art market is evidence of the more general fact that under globalisation, 'commercialisation has absorbed and penetrated the field of social relations, daily practice and consciousness, [to become] the lodestone of ideological life'.

The capitalist logic of this transformation would explain the return of traditionalist and economically dependable aesthetic practices — the celebrated 'return to painting' or to reductive pseudo-minimalist Abstractionism, for example. It would also account for the accelerated production within 'global art' of both meticulously hand-crafted pieces and slick, industrially designed and easily transportable art objects.

Certainly this is readily apparent in quasi-peripheral nations like Australia, where contemporary art production increasingly curries favour with the centres of global financial capital, such as those in the United States. Therefore, in Australia, 'sensible' and economically

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69 Paul Virilio, Politics of the Very Worst, p. 89.
71 Julian Stallabrass, 'Cashing-In' at the Whitechapel Gallery, London', p. 44.
72 In Australia one can mention the 'meteoric' rise of young artists (such as Ricky Swallow) who produce highly finished and labour-intensive objects that relate also to model making and props production. See Chapter 5 — The view from here: Contemporary Australian art aiming for globalisation's reinstated centre, 5: 2 (i) Inbuilt obsolescence: Australian art's institutional valorisation of 'global' youth culture.
viable art forms have ascended to institutional prominence. In this area, the rationalist pursuit of expressly 'non-experimental' art, implicitly reflecting a strictly 'professional' view of 'global culture', also reflects the insistently restrictive neo-liberal, neo-conservative economic and social policies of contemporary governments. They do this by implying the impossibility of challenging, at any level, the intertwined dominance of prevailing political and cultural norms.

This has never been truer than under the present paradigms of globalisation, despite the fact that as we have seen, today 'the anti-capitalist struggle is getting stronger' and individual and collectively critical and genuinely 'interventionist' art practices are increasing. On the other hand, the success of contemporary artists' consensually subscribing to globalisation's 'aura' of economics arises simultaneously from a situation where, tellingly, it is increasingly 'hard to decipher the difference between "criticism" and marketing'. This is the same rationale that has meant the supposed global defeat of the political and cultural Left, and the end of 'all discussion of capitalism as a historically determined social system'.

An extreme reading of this global transformation of the perceived role of contemporary 'global art' results not in the continued production of post-modern art, or even 'post-'post-modern art, but in something more like post-art. This term should be read in the same way as the current popularisation of the term 'post-politics', which refers not to a simple absence of politics on the world stage, but to the active and strategic de-politicisation of contemporary civic society. 'Post-art', consequently, would refer to the increasing institutionalisation of the

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73 This results partly because there is no significant parallel market in Australia for, say, the collection of large-scale interdisciplinary or installation art. With this in mind, and with regard to a politicised 'gift' economy in contemporary art, the continued creation of non-object installation-based practices in local contexts poses a critical challenge to the system, which cannot rationalise the continued production of this type of work, dependent as it is on the socio-political specificities of site and context.

74 Slavoj Žižek, _Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle_, p. 98.

75 Piotr Uklanski, 'A conversation between Maurizio Cattelan and Piotr Uklanski', p. 93.


77 The term 'post-art', originally coined in a positive sense by one of the instigators of the 1960's 'happenings' in the U.S., Alan Kaprow, has also been used in a recent book by North American cultural theorist Donald Kuspit that is highly critical of the current role of contemporary art under globalisation (see Donald Kuspit, _The End of Art_). Nevertheless, Kuspit denies the value of contemporary global art, on the grounds that such art is too frequently deliberately immaterialist and conceptually derivative of the example of Marcel Duchamp. This type of contemporary conceptualism, it is argued, has finally robbed art of its aesthetic, its sensual, and its higher 'transcendental' social meanings. Thus Kuspit's argument runs absolutely contrary to the position forwarded in this thesis. Still, the term 'post-art' is nevertheless highly suggestive of the extent to which modes of art production have been radically altered by globalisation.

78 The term 'post-politics' is intimately connected to the neo-liberal vision of globalisation in which politics proper, necessarily reliant on opposition and antagonism, is replaced by a 'self-regulating'
contemporary practice of art as a populist, though highly coveted and specialised, adjunct to the thoroughly commercialised worldwide media-entertainment industry.

To resist and divert such culturally reductive emphases, one of the principal roles of genuinely engaged contemporary global critical culture, or cultures, would be to oppose neo-liberal globalisation's wholesale bias towards the eco-nomos,79 which today is triumphant.80 The multiplicity of critically active contemporary art cultures must, therefore, be capable of challenging, at numerous points and many geo-political sites, their attempted seduction by globalisation's circulatory markets. Such critical practices would resist the ever-widening influence of neo-liberalism's pervasive global representations, foremost of which is the 'general property of money [that] neutralizes, disincarnates, [and] deprives of ... difference'81 — just as, under globalisation, 'every social bond is threatened by money'.82

The vision of the contemporary world that such an outlook reveals demands resisting, because in it, globalisation, the 'main utopia today, is [basically] the utopia of global capitalist liberal democracy itself'.83 As ought be evident by this stage, this particular 'democratic' utopia, based on accelerated private consumption and the fetishisation of media fame, is no utopia at all: it is utopian only in its rhetorical positioning of the globe as 'no-place'84 for any alternative models of genuinely collective socio-cultural possibility.

Thus the cross-pollinating resistant particularities in contemporary art that are emerging today must continue to resist contemporary 'global culture's' insistence on denying its inevitable, and at times compromising, intertwining with the specific social, political and economic conditions that shape it. Contemporary criticality in art must heed, in multiple ways, the notion that 'all art is political, but ... only becomes active when it thinks beyond the market,

market model which renders political conflict redundant. See, for example, Slavoj Žižek, Welcome to the Desert of the Real, pp.132–33.

79 'The "eco" in economy refers to the Greek root, oikos, the household, estate, estate or domain. Nomos, pl. nomoi is a norm, in the sense both of custom and of law. In 5th Century Athenian thought nomos is contrasted with physis (nature); the latter represents underlying reality and the former denotes the patterns by which men try to shape this. In this sense nomos is normally translated as convention. It also refers to the 'new order', or extant hegemony. Therefore the eco-nomos, is the rule, or the set of rules, for managing the domain.' On the other hand, 'the eco-logos is the underlying principle, the spirit, the reason for it all.' Therefore, under today's globalisation, the nomos, the 'rule', dominates the logos, the 'spirit'. See Susan George, Another World is Possible 'IF', ..., p. 30.

80 Ibid., p. 32.


82 Jean Baudrillard, Screened Out, p. 147.


84 Etymologically, utopia means 'no place' or 'nowhere', from the Greek ou meaning 'not' and topos meaning 'place'.
and when we accept that it is not a separate sphere, transcending society".85

vii) Adding to the resistant multitude: Opposing the critical spectre of the ‘gift’ to globalisation’s totalising ‘eco-nomos’

Ultimately, because it is largely virtualised and representational, globalisation’s myth of itself as a self-fulfilling world system reignites multiple suppressed spectres86 of oppositional critical discourses. It follows, then, that the return of these unintegrated critical manifestations in contemporary culture will resist complete incorporation into an ‘unstoppable’, ideologically promoted global culture industry. If contemporary art is increasingly made a consensual mirror of a deeply reactionary depoliticised global present, particularly in the West, it must alternatively propose the (im)possible: it must oppose the empty utopia of global capitalism that configures the world as the same even its difference, another kind of utopia, one ‘that has nothing to do with ideal dreaming about ideal society in total abstraction from real life’,87 but in which ‘the “utopian” gesture is the gesture which changes the co-ordinates of the possible’.88

Significantly, ‘one of the strategies of utopia today resides in the aesthetic dimension’.89 Yet this ‘aesthetic’ dimension is only utopian: it problematises the merely rationalist economy of neo-liberal ‘common sense’, and questions the identity of contemporary art as the largely corporatised and media success-driven practice that much contemporary ‘global politics’ has equally become. If there is to be a concerted challenge to the effects of this dominating vision of globalisation in contemporary art, as elsewhere, it must also challenge the entrenched hierarchies of a privileged system of commerce by attempting:

- to move towards selective, but ever-widening, de-commodification .... we should create structures, operating in the market, whose objective is performance and survival rather than profit.90

Doing this, with the terrain of actively resistant multiplicities in mind, would mean re-engaging with the spectre of the gift within contemporary art:91 practising contemporary art as part of a

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85 Lars Bang Larsen, ‘What the world needs now …’, p. 87.
88 Ibid., p. 123.
89 Ibid., p. 124.
widespread multitudinous ‘unassimilable excess’\textsuperscript{92} of divergent non-profit practices, united only in their opposition to the economic totality of globalisation.\textsuperscript{93} In fact, culturally, the challenge posed to the global system of neo-liberal economics by the concerted deployment of such multiple critical practices lies in their deliberate (dis-)unity. Together they make up an irreducible remainder of complexly affiliated, but singular, non self-same acts. These are undertaken diversely on a global scale in opposition to the rigid rationalism of the neo-liberal profit mentality.

We should not, though, mistake this idea of contemporary art’s multiplicitious excess for the promotion of a regressive and simplistic pluralism of aesthetic styles. Instead, practising the gift of contemporary art in globalising conditions demands divergently confronting dominant global economic and ideological systems where capitalistic exchanges always appear to make rational ‘sense’, even if they patently do not. Contrary to art’s impending total integration by such economically rationalist logic is its strategic practice as precisely ‘more’ or ‘less’ than whatever is so oppressively demanded by today’s global market culture. That is, rather than passively aim to court globalisation’s neo-liberal markets, contemporary art produced in ways that confound the logocentricity of those markets, being practiced deliberately despite their apparent uselessness to them, may serve an especially critical function.

vii) ‘More’ or ‘less’ global: Practising critical strategies above and below ‘global culture’s’ bottom line

Practising contemporary art as part of global network of interrelated and interacting gift economies serves a critical purpose. On the one hand, it means deliberately practising contemporary art in excess of the possibility of its ‘reasonable’ assimilation into either local or transnational markets.\textsuperscript{94} As a practitioner, this might also mean rigorously connecting with unpopular or unfashionable ‘discontinued’ modes of contemporary art production. For example, an artist might deliberately pursue ambitious installation practices in full knowledge of the total absence of a local market for such work, and often also regardless of whether or not there is a receptive culture willing to defend it. Such art would function critically in excess of the rigidly commodifying and conservative cultural conditions of a localised vision of ‘global culture’.

\textsuperscript{92} Slavoj Žižek, \textit{Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle}, p. 133.

\textsuperscript{93} To ‘defy the system by [offering it] a gift to which it cannot respond except by its own death and its own collapse’: Jean Baudrillard, \textit{The Spirit of Terrorism}, p. 17.

\textsuperscript{94} Of course this also depends on the nature and scale of the local economy. Thus it is far more difficult to practise art in excess in a sizeable economy that is also liberally disposed to contemporary art, such as New York or Berlin.

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On the other hand, critically resistant contemporary art practices under globalising conditions might deliberately produce art on a wholly not-for-profit basis, and therefore deliberately 'as if for nothing', in face of a global market whose value today is literally everything. Part of such a strategy would involve critically reconnecting with de-materialist 'anti-object' practices, practices that appear to produce nothing in themselves\(^95\) (that is, nothing of obvious exchange value to the market). A deliberately strategic contemporary re-engagement with de-materialising practices of this sort could foreseeably function in a critically oppositional way to the global economic climate of accelerated consumption. At the same time, the renewal of temporal, immaterial and de-materialist practices in contemporary art, rather than merely mirroring the 'immaterial goods'\(^96\) on which the virtualised conditions of neo-liberal capitalism depend, potentially renders such art increasingly difficult to consistently 'brand', and therefore market, as a product of 'global culture'. And this is regardless of whether or not its results can be put to use as 'patronizingly tolerated counter-images'.\(^97\)

Proposing these interconnected critical strategies of a contemporary art, practised 'above' and 'below' the economic bottom line of neo-liberalism's econometrically encased 'global culture', would nevertheless mean avoiding a mere historicised repetition of past related tactics. Indeed, such strategies should instead aid in posing a much wider contemporary question: 'What would happen if an economy other than the professional capitalism of the art world were pursued'?\(^98\)

Following from this, what would happen if contemporary art were deliberately practised in spite of, and therefore impossibly, unreasonably in opposition to, globalisation's expanded and symbolically inflated world markets? Posing such questions further implies the production of contemporary art not from reactionary positions of blind obstinacy, but as part of an interconnected network of critical strategies simultaneously exposing pro-globalisation rhetoric for what it is: an invention of corporations ideologically pursuing socio-politically conservative agendas in contemporary culture. Such strategies would oppose the system of 'world' economies applied to 'world' culture and contributing to an imminent 'new world order'.

Together, this strategic excessive 'more-' or 'less-ness' of the practice of contemporary art would challenge the foundations of neo-liberal globalisation's continued controlling and

\(^95\) See, for example, Chapter 6 — Unforeseen effects: The paradox of global culture — globalisation generating critical heterogeneties.
\(^96\) See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire.
\(^97\) Ibid.
administrative definition of global social space as merely endlessly returnable to its markets. To re-offer the gift of art under such globally endemic conditions is to decide to oppose the market model of contemporary ‘global culture’. This means refusing the market’s ‘reasonable’ demands, and the rewards it supposedly offers, by doing ‘something else’;99 offering art as a gift, because now more than ever, what counts:

Is what the one gives to the other, over and above the market, above market, bargaining, thanking, commerce and commodity ...100

Proposing such a gesture as a strategic oppositional exercise in which the ethics and politics of the gift is paramount should not be mistaken for mere ‘Romantic’ ‘heroism’ or self-denial. Rather, as an active principle, such a gesture asserts a contemporary renewal, not of ‘political art’, which can all too readily be received in the global art world as a contemporary ‘genre’ in its own right, but of a ‘politics of art’. The nature of this politics necessarily takes on the creative risk of assuming contrary and oppositional positions to those of the hegemonic model of ‘global culture’. This means offering art as part of a global counter-economy, a possible ‘counter-empire’ of horizontal gift exchanges sensitive to the local particularities of place, process and history.101 Ultimately this would also favour, in resistance to globalisation’s fixated targeting of increasingly non-differentiated consumers, the artist as a social producer. Similarly, the productive social role of the contemporary artist would politically extend to his or her engagement with, or instigation of, locally functioning but globally affiliated critical cultural networks. Collectively, these could theoretically make up much broader ‘inter-continental networks of resistance’.102

To envisage such contra-practices and the multiplicity of strategic interventions they engender challenging the prevailing cultural effects of global neo-liberalism is to further envisage the contemporary practice of art as part of a much wider emancipatory socio-critical ‘anti-globalisation’ project. Unlike the ‘enlightening’ rhetoric of pro-globalisation discourse, though, such a wider project would simultaneously recognise ‘very clearly the powerful merits of alternative discourses’ and remain fully aware of the uncertain limits of art’s ‘actual’

101 Lars Bang Larsen, ‘What the world needs now ...’, p. 87.
emancipatory potential. Indeed, proposing the contemporary practice of art as a disparate and un-containable multiplicity of globally active ‘anti-capitalist’ and critically resistant positions also means deliberately refusing to ‘close the gap’ between art and the market. The resulting culture, resisting simply serving the existing global market by consensually supplying commodities to it, would choose instead to ‘practise utopia’ in an everyday context. One of the functions of this critically aware ‘utopianism’ would be to give face ‘to the elusive concept of gifts used in a strategy of radical disapproval’.

Strategically practising the gift of art, in a global climate oppressed by the dominating neo-liberal eco-nomos, would also reactivate the practice of contemporary art as a transnational critical project. Its critical and emancipatory potential necessarily draws from the historical example of politically Left oppositional socio-cultural heritages, but unlike many prior emancipatory cultures of this sort, empathic contemporary critical practices would avoid drawing up conclusive demands for the transparent and self-fulfilling transformation of world politics and culture. This is because that sort of view of criticality represents another false totality, a final utopian ‘solution’ to the ‘problems of human existence’, to be achieved via the invention of a singularly united global critical culture. This totality is just as fictitious as that of present-day globalisation and its ideologically encoded ‘global culture’. And it is only when attempting absolutely to oppose these totalities to one another, as though they were equivalents, that contemporary critical and dissenting practices seem to have failed. At the same time, this juxtaposition disguises their very real effective practice in the present.

Refusing to concede the ultimate historical ‘failure’ of socio-political cultures means, today, offering contemporary art as a gift, in excess of, or less than, the instrumental econometric requirements of a contemporary ‘global culture’. Proposing such a strategy through re-conjuring the critical spectre of the gift means simultaneously strategising a contemporary, transnational critical culture orientated against neo-liberalism’s vision of ‘completing’ a dominant ‘world’ culture in the hegemonic image of global capital.

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103 Bernard Williams, *Truth and Truthfulness*, quoted in Slavoj Žižek, *Iraq: The Borrowed Kettle*, p. 120.
104 Ibid., p. 179.
105 Ted Purves, ed., *What We Want Is Free: Generosity and Exchange in Recent Art*, p. 11.
106 ‘Historical materialism does not regard the work of the past to be over and done with’: Walter Benjamin, *One Way Street and Other Writings*, p-360.
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Appendix A

Responses of Contemporary Australian Artists:

Section 1: Responses in relation to the artist's work, 'Border Protection Assistance - Am I Ever Gonna See Your face Again? (Proposed Monument for the Torres Strait)' (2002). See Chapter 5:5 (i) Parochialism Perverted: Countering the re-appearance of a regressive Australian nationalism

a) In works like your 'Border Protection Assistance - Am I ever Gonna See Your face Again? Proposed Monument for the Torres Strait', and many others, you deliberately invoke a kind of 'ocker' Australian parochialism. Why, what purpose do you see this specific cultural reference serving?

I have always believed that the artist's role/responsibility is to serve the specifics of the time and place that they are working in. In using local symbols/metaphors a local approach to a global situation can be tabulated, a discussion in regional dialect/vernacular where the issues can be dissected and communicated in the idiom of the time and place. Take a statement/idea and translate it into Australian, make it directly and specifically relevant to Australia. I have had a deep and longstanding interest in the development, deployment and practice of Australian vernacular and Australian humour, and would argue that the accepting bleakness, negative visions and aggressive/confrontational nature of both are a result of the condition of existence that colonial Australia provided.

b) How do you think the 'critical scene' of contemporary art has changed in Australia and internationally over, say the last 5-10 years? Do you think the changing local and global political environment has had much of an effect on the Australian contemporary art scene? In what ways?

Political content has become a fashionable aspect of contemporary cultural production, consider the nature and thematic of Dan Cameron's Istanbul Biennial or the 2002 Documenta, and as cultural production has been co-opted to form the base of another fashion type industry it is currently the new black. Conversely there has also been a rise of neo-conservative modes of practice, which I cannot help but attribute to the political conservatism that has gripped Australia since the decision in March 1996 that (Prime minister) Keating's vision was not what Australia wanted/needed. These forms of practice seem to attract the reddest dots whilst there is absolutely nothing that you can say about the work other than, how did they do that.

c) Do you think direct social criticism in contemporary art can still be effective, and if so how? What makes contemporary work with a critical agenda 'successful'?

I think that any form of social criticism in cultural production functions as a historical footnote rather than hoping to achieve any direct and immediate change. Then it serves to demonstrate the breadth and scope of ideas and opinions that were actually being expressed at that time. As the contemporary audience for such activities is usually restricted to the artists and their peers, if the work is deemed by that peer-reviewed audience to be effective and successful, than it is effective and successful. This generally means a discussion is generated about the work and it gains a volition that an unsuccessful work will not have.
d) How do you reconcile a critical motivation with the presentation of art in commercial or institutional frameworks, here I’m thinking of your solo show at Sarah Cottier (Sydney based commercial gallery 1993-2003), ‘Errors of Judgement.’ Do you think a commercial framing inadvertently compromises the critical content of the work or its intentions?

The title for that show was supposed to also refer to my state of mind regarding that particular decision to work with that gallery, as my decision was economic, an economic migrant perhaps, based on the access to an international audience that was offered through the art fairs they participated in, and I had a feeling that it would not materialise, a feeling that proved correct when they shut shop. Exhibiting in commercial or institutional spaces serves to validate your practice for a collecting and critical audience who do not have the ability to ascribe value to anything unless someone else has indicated that it is valuable for them. It also provides a large space with documentation for no cost to the artists other than the work production, which would occur at any rate. I don’t think that I could agree that it is a compromise of the critical content any more than paying rent to an ARI or accepting an artists fee from a government funded space works is a compromise of intention. I would perhaps argue that to present such an exhibition in such a context is more effective as it is a direct and active subversion of most expectations.

Section 2: Questionnaire:
The Critical Impact of Globalisation on Contemporary Australian Art

1) What is your understanding of globalisation? Does the concept have any relevance to the way you think about your work?

The reality of globalisation came home when watching coverage of the deterioration of Yugoslavia in 1991, watching youths riot in Bosnia dressed in the same Adidas clothes that I wear. To quote Paul Kelly (contemporary Australian singer-songwriter whose work specifically refers to an ‘Australian condition’), ‘every fucking city looks the same’. I see globalisation as essentially economic colonialism, North American primarily, which is far more cost effective for the coloniser than socio/political colonialism. Interestingly the resentment of the colonial power seems to be greater in this situation. Globalisation serves to reinforce and remind me that I am an Australian and as such I have Australian stories that need to be told.

2) Do you consider yourself as working in a cultural situation that is primarily locally or globally defined?

Being a nation of 20 million people, geographically removed from the majority of the planet, and dependent on trade to exist means that Australia is continuously attempting to define itself on a global level. I take the axiom think globally act locally and attempt to apply that to my practice.

3) Do you consider yourself an Australian artist and if so what does this mean to you?

I do consider myself an Australian artist which for me means that I am a cultural producer living and working in Australia attempting to serve the specifics of the time and place, attempting to think globally act locally and respond empathically and critically to the specific manifestations of the human condition as they occur here. I hope that this will serve as a footnote to the future that not everyone was content at/with this time.
4) Are your ideas generated from local issues, ideas, sights, social networks, allegiances etc? To what extent is your work influenced by other cultural artefacts, like reproductions or works by other artists?

I have an active interest in all forms of cultural production and information dissemination. My ideas generally result from an attempt to locate a cultural instance within the landscape of contemporary occurrences of my local situation I have always believed that any art work should have a historical reference to place and locate it within the context of intent and a contemporary reference to locate it within its time of production. As such I will always have a multiple layer of referencing in any one work, which allows me scope to meld references as disparate as the performances of (United States performance and installation artist Vito) Accocci to contemporary local press coverage of Mark Latham’s (ex Australian Labour Party leader), ‘man boobs’ into the one work.

My art practice examines the Australian condition, attempting to address the general through the specific. This can occur through the removal, dislocation and re-contextualisation of the spectacular materiality of our mutated lifestyle accoutrements with all their invested associations and identifiers in Australia, by altering or disabling their intended functions and the enhancement of the potential metaphorical application of these constituent aspects of contemporary life to the histories and practices of art we have inherited imported and appropriated in Australia.

It is a minimally distillative practice and has always been dependent upon utilising the medium most appropriate for the concept, be it painting, drawing, sculpture, installation or performance. This is based on an ongoing examination of the formal specifications and historical dictates of the medium; its strengths and weaknesses, through the distillation of the medium into its constituent parts and their subsequent reconstruction in what could be termed everyday situations.

5) Do you think contemporary culture can function in a socially critical way today, globally or locally? If so how? If not, why not?

I think that any form of social criticism in cultural production functions as a historical footnote rather than hoping to achieve any direct and immediate change. Then it serves to demonstrate the breadth and scope of ideas and opinions that were actually being expressed at that time.

6) Do you think art produced in Australia today has a significant impact internationally? Do local cultural circumstances have anything to do with the way it is perceived? Do you think Australian artists exhibiting overseas are viewed any differently from artists from North America or Europe?

No, I do not think that Australian practice has a significant impact internationally due to the lack of critical culture in Australia where people spend too much time looking at overseas magazines and produce work based on what they have seen as being sanctioned and made fashionable overseas. This same work is lauded and praised in Australia precisely because of its inherent familiarity, post modern déjà vu, ‘haven’t I seen you somewhere before’, without ever actually undergoing any scrutiny, especially on its derivations, a la Monica Tichacek, (Sydney based contemporary media and installation artist who worked in 2002 as an assistant to Matthew Barney), and simultaneously limited in that this can never to exported from Australia. No more coal to Newcastle. Trying to interest a German curator on a two-day stop over in Sydney on their
way to the outback in an Australian interpretation of (Joseph) Beuys or (Gerhard) Richter (two prominent German artist of the 20 years), or showing your Australian 'Matthew Barney' videos (Monica Tichacek) is ridiculous and the constant stumbling block that Australian artists seem to place before themselves. Conversely, there are Euro/American attitudes and ideas of what Australia is, on what Australian non indigenous artists are (an opinion that may be formed by the derivative work that is foisted on them by the Australia Council [the National arts funding body]) and that immediately precludes their ability to comprehend the ramifications of our cultural production because they are unaware and generally uninterested in what specifics inform our local situation, beyond the clichés that are used to sell Australia to the rest of the world that are irrelevant and embarrassing to an Australian.

7) Do you think opportunities for contemporary artists are evenly distributed around the world?

No, opportunities exist either where there is a larger population and the larger amounts of money that this generates or where there is an inherent understanding of the importance of contemporary practice.

8) Do you regard the contemporary art scene today as having any particular cultural centre or centres? If so where are they and why are they central?

New York/United States will remain a centre due to the concentration of philanthropic money there. Berlin/Europe will remain a European centre as it is an excellent city for artists to live and work in, attracting interesting artists from all round Europe which generates exciting and interesting work, this will inevitably change as the gentrification of Berlin continues. For the future, culturally as well as politically China will be a centre.

9) Do you think the contemporary art scene in Australia is especially influenced by the culture of Britain or the United States? If not, are there other special cultural influences from other countries?

I think that Frieze (generalist contemporary culture) magazine has a lot to answer for in the last ten years in Australia. As Anglophonic Australians we have absorbed cultural influence from both Britain and the United States, contemporary art has dithered between the two, a constant and ongoing fascination with the US and a recurrent rejection/return to British culture. Personally North Western European art is highly influential.

Appendix B

Responses of Contemporary Australian Artists:

Section 1: Responses in relation to the artist's work, 'Frank' (2003). 
See Chapter 5:5 (ii) The 'Enemy' Within: Exposing the Spectre of Global Fear

a) What were the origins of the thinking behind your work 'Frank' ie. Where did it come from?

The work came from the Marineland show, which Sydney artist, Phillippa Veitch curated. I was thinking of the flooding of marines (in a military sense) and the object of their desire ie. a figure who resembled Osama Bin Laden with a large penis – signifying the interplay of fear and power. I liked the idea that the work intervenes.
b) What sort of responses, if any, did you get from audiences etc.? What sort of response did you hope or think you’d get?

Responses ranged from it being a ‘gay’ work – because of the huge penis I guess…. to shock - as he was hidden next to a doorway in a stupid hiding position. I didn’t know what to expect in terms of responses, I don’t try and guess. I like ‘stupid’ work and he was not quite Osama Bin Laden but more connected with the fear generated by representations of Osama.

c) Were there any attempts to censor the work?

There was a warning placed at Tin Sheds (the gallery in Sydney affiliated with the University of Sydney where it was shown in 2003) that the work may be offensive – who knows why – maybe the dick thing again? Anyway ‘public liabilities’ were mentioned. In one particular gallery in New Zealand, the gallery tried to place him as an ad in a magazine but the publisher ‘forgot’ to print it. I imagine this really means they censored it.

d) Do you consider it a political work, and if not why not?

Yes and no. What’s not political anyway? Of the time I would say more so as it fitted the current ambience and described basic human conditions of fear – I also hope it was humorous.

e) Was it a response to a perceived climate of criticality here, or lack of one?

No.

Section 2: Questionnaire:
The Critical Impact of Globalisation on Contemporary Australian Art

1) What is your understanding of globalisation? Does the concept have any relevance to the way you think about your work?

Globalisation as I understand it, is a market force and phenomenon. Via media I think we are swamped with data from around the world constantly. I don’t think this is necessarily a bad thing. Media has a way of legitimising anything, which means something mediated has a greater significance/currency than it’s original. This is obvious maybe, but its also mechanically interesting. Art history is a global dialogue and as such, I could say it has an influence on my work.

2) Do you consider yourself as working in a cultural situation that is primarily locally or globally defined?

One always responds and belongs to a local context though the information received and addressed maybe of a global nature, and may in the end, address a global context. One’s psychology is necessarily local.
3) Do you consider yourself an Australian artist and if so what does this mean to you?

Yes, as I was born here. It means not many people will be interested in my work or contemporary art in general.

4) Are your ideas generated from local issues, ideas, sights, social networks, allegiances etc? To what extent do other cultural artifacts, reproductions or works by other artists influence your work?

Art history is important to me as it builds a context. Contemporary art is important to be aware of, it helps to gauge thinking about certain issues, what is valued and why. Ken Done (a contemporary Australian graphic artist popular with tourists for his colourful painted designs depicting Sydney, especially its harbour and foreshore) does specifically local work and I’m told does very well from it. John Olsen too (a well known Australian abstractionist whose work emerged during the ‘sixties and ‘seventies.) I guess the myth of landscape is an Australian iconography which many artists use. Landscape as an idea is still interesting although the way it’s generally used is not.

5) Do you think contemporary culture can function in a socially critical way today, globally or locally? If so, how? If not, why not?

Do you mean trains running on time etc? Is that political? Is that socially critical? Dissent here is mostly regarded as ‘whingeing.’

6) Do you think art produced in Australia today has a significant impact internationally? Do local cultural circumstances have anything to do with the way it is perceived? Do you think Australian artists exhibiting overseas are viewed any differently from artists from North America or Europe?

Internationally, Australian artists are looked to show their ‘Australian-ness,’ they have plenty of video, conceptual and painterly art forms in the United States and Europe already and this work does look quite similar. Maybe if you had a lot of skill they might like it – obvious manual ‘skill’ is what the market demands right now.

7) Do you think opportunities for contemporary artists are evenly distributed around the world?

No. Art markets for better or worse do provide an opportunity to exhibit and content to be taken seriously whereas here, in Australia it’s a joke – people might think, ‘yeah sure you’re an artist but what else do you do?’ I don’t know how it is in South Africa or Brazil, maybe it’s the same. For example world biennales circulate the same looking work by different people, maybe this means it’s globalised?

8) Do you regard the contemporary art scene today as having any particular cultural centre or centres? If so where are they and why are they central?

Here? Internationally? Market centres always generate the most publicity for art so contemporary art would seem to be a market driven industry – a self-generating centre. The more money a city or country has means therefore more interest it has in contemporary art.
9) Do you think the contemporary art scene in Australia is especially influenced by the
culture of Britain or the United States? If not, are there other special cultural influences from
other countries?

The United States and Britain have a big media network plus they are English speaking, so if
you are going to look for dominant influences chances are they'll come from there, and so yes,
they do have an influence. Distance means we look at a lot of English-speaking publications.

Appendix C

Responses of Contemporary Australian Artists:
The Sydney Art Seen Society (SASS) Media Campaign 2004-2005
Co-convenors Gail Hastings and Lisa Kelly

Part A: The Campaign

VISUAL ARTISTS say NO TO NOTHING but YES TO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

National campaign 26.07.2004 – (ongoing until we hear a reply)
We ask that the Federal Government's reneged $3 million of the Myer inquiry’s recommended
$9 million per annum goes to properly acknowledging visual artists through payment of a
mandatory fee of no less than $2,000 for publicly funded exhibitions.

1,622 signatures on the following petition were delivered to the HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES on MONDAY, 29 NOVEMBER 2004
THE STARVING VISUAL ARTIST - put the cliche to rest - PETITION
TO THE HONOURABLE THE SPEAKER AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES ASSEMBLED IN PARLIAMENT:
The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

Visual artists' contribution to our contemporary culture is vital. This creative 'knowledge
economy' is fuelled by a 'visual currency' critically generated by visual artists to result in not
only works of art, but an extensive energy made apparent through numerous other mediums. Yet
visual artists are increasingly denied the sustenance needed to maintain this;

Visual artists' income over the past 15 years has decreased, in real terms, while the income of
other occupations has increased.* In 2000-01 the median income for visual artists was $18,500
(before tax, minus expenses), with poverty drawn at $14,750 (after tax).** Female visual artists -
making up 60% of all visual artists - earned only 64% of that earned by male visual artists, an
income well below the poverty line. This situation is dire, unworkable and worsening;

By standardising the artists' fee*** for public gallery exhibitions, nationally, a much needed
foundation will be laid for an environment of proper acknowledgement to develop and, within it,
a sustainable income for visual artists to take place.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:
1. Establish a nationally standardised artists' fee for public gallery exhibitions based on a
payment schedule of no less than $2,000 per exhibition, with a pro rata payment no less than
$500 per artist for group exhibitions;
2. Ensure adequate provisions are made available to public art galleries for this payment schedule upon application;
3. Disqualify funding applications from public art galleries that do not comply with this payment schedule.

* Statistics pertaining to visual artists have been sourced from D Throsby, V Hollister, 'Don't give up your day job: an economic study of professional artists in Australia', the Australia Council, Sydney, 2003. (n.b. Median, professional visual artists’ income is $22,900 (table 34), median expenses incurred in art practice is $4,400 (table 38).)


The Sydney Art Seen Society has formed in urgent redress of the current decline of standards in the professional environment of contemporary visual art in Sydney, where the production of visual culture is being more and more determined by art-institutional programmes, rather than these programmes being determined by the art.

By facilitating a meeting place for artists to discuss, debate and discern solutions to the prevalent issues hindering progressive visual art here at present, the Sydney Art Seen Society aims to stimulate the development of a more vigorous and potent contemporary visual culture in Sydney, based on the vital and critical practice of visual artists.

Gail Hastings and Lisa Kelly for SASS
http://sydneyartseen.blog-city.com

Part B: Response to the Australian Federal Budget 2004

In short, the Government chose not to acknowledge visual artists by making available the necessary funds in this 2005-06 Federal Budget for the payment of an Acknowledgement Fee. This is very sad.

What we artists have achieved, however, despite this greatly disappointing setback is the solid premise upon which an Acknowledgement Fee will deservedly be given in the future.

This achievement includes having brought to mind that we are in great need of a culture of contemporary art in Australia, a culture which, even in seeking this acknowledgement fee, we have brought to presence ever so marginally. This is an achievement, and those who have worked on this campaign please feel it thoroughly, for this is critical work to have got underway.

For much contemporary art is made in Australia, daily. There are thousands of young and emerging artists oozing out of art schools every year, to make and exhibit artworks from the proceeds of forever increasing funding and marketing attention in this area. And yet there is no culture of contemporary art here in Australia to make the output of these emerging artists meaningful. Meaningful not only to a broader Australian audience, but to the artists, themselves (meaning is dependent upon the relation of one thing to another and cannot come about in a vacuum). This is the problem the acknowledgement fee was formulated to address in its many functions.
Sure you get a grant, you bust your gut to make the work against all odds, all the time intoxicated with expectation and exhilaration at exhibiting your work in fantasy of the engagement it will achieve. You put it up, the opening hour arrives. It passes. And then, three weeks later, you take your work down and wonder 'Did anyone see that? Did anyone notice?' (even though the gallery was full with people at the opening). You write your report to the Australia Council: 'Yes, it was great, everyone loved my work, you should most definitely give me a grant next time around as I used the money most effectively'; all the while your penned words can't quite rub out the sick feeling in the pit of your stomach that irritatingly reminds you that this is not how it is meant to be, this is not what drove you through those stressful hours of discipline training at art college. Surely there is something missing, surely art doesn't live on hype alone but something true, something real something that comes from the engagement of others. And so you wonder what the point is of all this art made every day, in every form, in every style, that comes and goes to come and go again and again, exactly the same, trapped in some sough of nightmarish merry-go-round without memory, without history, permanently on repeat for lack of being recognised the first time around. Surely we have the wit to overcome this, though obviously not this time.

A 'culture' of contemporary art is a history. It is what we need. Acknowledgement and the knowledge that stems from it is the basis of such a memory from which a conversation, resplendent in aesthetic vernacular, can take place and include within its building parts one's work and its specific contribution in relation to others'.

Today however, this place was not made by our Government. To say this is very sad as I did before is not to say enough. It is a waste.

But the premise for an Artists' Acknowledgement Fee that we have so far managed to establish, and the culture that it will bring into being, has at least come knocking on the door. All we need is a progressive arts minister to let it in and let it take its productive place. Tomorrow will bring this about for sure.

As well, we await the Opposition's right of reply to the Government's Budget (this Thursday).

Wednesday, 11 May 2005

Gail Hastings for SASS
http://sydneyartseen.blog-city.com

Part C: Australian Art and Locality

Repertoire! – Is that spelt s-p-o-n-s-o-r-s-h-i-p?

Not that, please. Tell us anything else – or almost anything – but not that. Yet Miriam Cosic (arts editor, 'The Australian' newspaper), while persistent, did at least have the good grace to soften a somewhat staggering anecdotal aside in her article, 'Beauty and meaning will never show on the bottom line' (The Australian, 22 April, 2005), by containing it within parentheses. But still it managed to leak from its bracketed confinement to speak louder than its surrounding text on the subject of government arts funding. The aside pertains to a living, walking example of an arts administrator who, competently donned in the spiel of art-funding attire while at lunch with Miriam Cosic one day, 'went blank when I mentioned repertoire, and only sparked up again when talk turned to sponsorship'. Cosic's aside almost acts as the article's allegory: If one is going to dress to fit the party of neo-conservative values – stand around the punchbowl and
besmirch the self-evident social benefits that Art shares with 'health and education' – then don't complain if the dips handed about aren't quite sustaining. Either accept the result and starve; or don't accept the terms of the invitation by donning its spiel to dress the part.

'Repertoire, you ask, repertoire – um, ah – don't you mean sponsorship ... ?' What clearer sign does one need of economic cultural-rationalism having run amok – not unlike a stage show gone wrong: the venue booked, the public waiting, but no repertoire, no works of art. Never mind, as long as one can write the hype and provide an authoritative record of 'no double dipping' and 'improved efficiency dividends' (and all in time for lunch with an arts editor), then the government and sponsors will be happy even though no living, breathing record of the works of art exist as an experience in any living, breathing local audience. An experience, one might remember, not only explicitly expressed in conversations directly after, but implicitly carried as sensorial memory embedded in thoughts and feelings to reverberate through generations of conversations, occasions for understanding and meaning-making to come.

For this is how culture works. Its intellectual and aesthetic achievements grow and propagate to reach those far beyond its germinating source, in numerous transformations. A stunning reminder of which is the emergence of modern art criticism through the writing of Denis Diderot (1713-1784), the French enlightenment philosopher and editor-in-chief of the 'Encyclopédie', who developed his art criticism writing Salon reviews for the newsletter 'Correspondance littéraire' – a hand-written manuscript that never exceeded a subscription of thirty. Yes, thirty. And yet how can one possibly 'count' the influence of Diderot's engagement with art then, today?

Diderot's art criticism, incidentally, was written as a conversation with an invisible interlocutor. Fitting, perhaps, given culture is the conversation between us since the Enlightenment. Culture is a nation's social communion – its medium for understanding: the arts are a measure of a nation's emotional and innovative intelligence. 'Dumbing down' Australia, the growing result of our federal government's arts policies, is hardly enriching for the majority in comparison. The saved economic dividends calculated on an art administrator's report – which disappears from light into a manilla folder to be filed, somewhere, dead and permanently buried no matter the stamps of budgetary approval it celebrates – neglects the social dividends of a culture with countless 'users', who carry it into everyday light through their conversations and actions far into the future. If this is so why, then, hasn't contemporary art a positive value in Australia?

In an article earlier published in The Australian, the journalist Rosemary Neil writes that Katherine Brisbane, a co-founder of performing arts think tank Currency House, 'believes the crisis stems from arts companies and the Australia Council buying the notion that culture is an industry. "As more money has been required, the big [arts] companies have fallen further and further into the hands of the sponsors, and the sponsors dictate - in the nicest possible way - the terms on which they will give money." Yet one can't help but think that whether our culture is identified as an industry, a sector, or a hula-hoop twirled about the hips of a denied, empty

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1 Carol Blum, *Diderot: The Virtue of a Philosopher*, The Viking Press, New York, 1974, p. 41. Baron Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique* (1753-1773) – an almost clandestine Parisian newsletter or 'secret manuscript' that disseminated the views of the enlightenment philosophers – whose influence on the intellectual life of Europe was incalculable, and this despite a circulation never exceeding thirty'.

centre— the problem Katherine Brisbane speaks of will remain: the lack of value our Government gives to art in Australia and, as a consequence, the lack of principles put in place to guide sponsors to respect, and choose to encourage, art’s intrinsic independence and value.

For perhaps unlike other art disciplines in Australia, visual arts has entwined within its history an interdependency of elements that have functioned, since the First World War, as an industry. The authors of the essay 'The Necessity of Australian Art' (1988), Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, write that at that time: 'there was a large number of artists producing with a definite sense of a local audience and in an environment in which their work was widely appreciated, in which sales might be regular enough to consider art as a career, in which dealers were promoting and selling mainly local work and state galleries and institutions purchasing and even commissioning work, in which local art was supported and written about by critics and commentators, and magazines and books on Australian art were being published with some regularity. Thus, by the early decades of the twentieth century there had developed the quite complex network of social and economic relationships which constituted an industry based on the production and consumption of art, and which was conceived by some as integral with industry and commerce in a wider sense.'

Crucial to the emergence of this industry seems the 'definite sense of a local audience', driven by a need to perceive a relationship between itself and Australia. As the authors point out, this connection was made visible through landscape paintings, around which our early industry evolved. Coincided an art industry by William Moore in his 1934 'The Story of Australian Art', the artistic reference of this early industry was Australia. This bubble of isolation, however, has well and truly popped, since.

Today, not only is an understanding of much of our contemporary art dependent upon reference to an art history and artistic attitudes emergent from places outside Australia, but also the comings and goings of our artists who exhibit outside of Australia are increasing. Yet, given the current 'dumbing down' of Australia driven, it seems, by this question of 'a local audience'—where the government seems determined to measure efficiency dividends based on audience numbers— a worthy question does linger as to whether the reference point of much of our contemporary art has drifted too far outside to have carried a local audience with it?

Based on a concern to develop ‘a framework within which the idea of a regional tradition might be reclaimed, thus re-establishing a more complex and richer sense of a cultural dialectic which has informed art practices and shaped our understanding’, the authors of ‘The Necessity of Australian Art’ explain that, '[a] massive restructuring of Australian art occurred during the decades from the 1950s to the 1970s, through the development of different institutional, academic, market and artistic practices whose values carried attitudes in which dependency [on

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3 A denied, empty centre: a repressed Aboriginal heritage (we have not yet as a nation said 'sorry') and within this environment we continue to bash rather than duly be abashed by.

4 Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation*, Power Publications, Sydney, 1988, p.13. Ian Burn (1939-93), artist and writer; artists Nigel Lendon and Vicki Varvarossos were instrumental in securing a mandatory artists fee in 1983, Nigel Lendon is presently the Deputy Director, School of Art at the National Institute of the Arts, Australian National University; Charles Merewether is the Artistic Director and Curator for the 2006 Sydney Biennale; and Ann Stephen is the Curator of Social History at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.

5 Ibid, p. 14. '... Moore remains unique in that he detailed the elements of an industry, and the extent to which his account was itself both a part of and a product of that industry is self-evident in the text.'

6 Ibid, p. 145.
art outside Australia] was a given'. Which has them ask: 'Is it, then, possible to develop an interpretation which could produce an understanding of the conditions of artistic practice in this country which is not posited in terms of Australia's inevitable dependence on cultures elsewhere?'

This question still requires addressing today, nearly twenty years after it was posed. It stems from a need to re-engage a local audience in contemporary art given, perhaps, a present failure to do so, a failure this federal government seems only to exacerbate through its arts funding policies where dividends formulae are based on audience counts rather than principles and potential. This short-sightedness is making Australia increasingly unable to create an environment for a local audience to perceive its relationship to our art; a relationship that is there, but which can hardly be spoken, let alone debated, as we haven't a framework within which to do so. This, then, is the problem today – the language with which to speak about our art that has not been coined elsewhere. An example of this is negative criticism I recently witnessed of a particular aesthetic proposition that was put forward. Upon asking the critic why they derided the proposition in an art magazine as 'wrong', the critic replied they were entirely justified to do so given the work does not match what is in the (international) art history canon, and so therefore it is wrong (although they neglected to explain this rational behind their criticism in the article). In this manner we are presently witnessing a time of sad disgrace where much Australian contemporary art is unable to be discussed because Australia hasn't a 'cultural dialectic' specific to artistic occurrences here (that haven't surfaced in 'the canon', yet). Our present blindness, then, to our own art – and the resulting outcome of a government erroneously feeling justified to count audience numbers – is not caused by the illegitimacy of our culture being identified as an industry, but because the fundamental groundwork upon which this industry needs to rest is, at present, missing. Without it, what hope have we to recognise innovation in our art practice – to see, debate, and thereby acknowledge it; to make art history rather than follow it?

Acknowledgement is a principle that is fundamental to laying this groundwork in Australia. It is a principle however that, once in place, has to be continually attended to so as to maintain its relevancy, its function, its potential. It is upon this groundwork of acknowledgement that a breed of art administrators will re-emerge with their feet firmly planted within the necessity of aesthetic arguments here; and who – donned in the vernacular of a reverberating contemporary art and not the spiel of art funding – will have a vocabulary with which to discuss 'repertoire' with Miriam Cosic over lunch next time the phone rings.

Tuesday, 3 May 2005

Gail Hastings for SASS
http://sydneyartseen.blog-city.com

Appendix D

Responses of Contemporary Australian Artists:
Michael Goldberg, from a recorded interview, September 9, 2005.

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7 Ibid, p. 139.
8 This is not to say that the work criticised contained any mythical Australian character – a point which the authors of The Necessity of Australian Art are at pains to stress; that 'cultural specificity' is not 'an expression located in terms of some mythical, 'real Australian' forms' (ibid, p 141).
9 An example of this would be those galleries presently committed to this campaign.
Section 1: Responses in relation to the artist’s work, ‘catchingafallingknife.com’
See Chapter 5.5 (iv) Global Market Free-for-all; Critically Refiguring Globalisation’s Virtual Market as Contemporary Art.

a) In your work, ‘catchingafallingknife.com’ you deliberately intervened in the virtual space of the global market. Do you see this gesture as primarily having a particular socio-critical intent, or were you more fascinated by the aesthetic abstractionism of ‘virtualised capitalism’?

Both. Absolutely both. My primary interest in it doing the project stemmed from my personal interest in the stock market, I'd been a player in the stock market myself, I'd been caught in the whole pre-2000 dot.com speculation bubble. And as I went through it and did more research into how people gamble their money on virtual markets, I discovered particular aesthetic aspects in the techniques I used, like the use of Fibonacci (mathematical/philosophic numbering system), and a whole range of things, which will presumably get you better results. I got totally fascinated with those, so the piece originally came out of those. When I started to put the piece together and spoke to Nick Tsoutas (then director of Sydney’s contemporary art centre, Artspace) about how it was going to look he put me on to (the theorist) Geert Lovink who suggested it becoming more of a social commentary on globalism. I found people were much more interest in the Newscorp/globalism aspects of it than the aesthetic side. What people don’t realise is that to play the stock market properly it’s a slow arduous process of waiting from the right moment to strike.

b) Do you believe that the types of globalised markets operating today, offer increased benefits or opportunities to contemporary artists other than purely from a potential profit-seeking point of view?

As systems in themselves and quite obscure arcane systems in themselves, I think they do. Mine is not the only project I know of that deals with stock market issues. There was a group of artists in Holland who knew nothing about markets, but got as a group got a certain amount of money together themselves, and they went out and picked at random a stock they were going to follow for that day. They lost all their money within two days! There was that type of desperate throwing of the chips on the table and there were others who have taken the aesthetic of trading and the aesthetic of the stockroom floor and made art works about that. There’s one artist who made a video with a choreographed sequence or dance of traders throwing their papers up in the air at the end of a day’s trading but there was no outcome, it was just looking at the phenomenon almost as though looking at a bullfight.

c) Do you think current obsessions with global and virtual markets and with economic rhetoric in general, particularly in the contemporary media, in newspapers and on Television news, has a negative impact on the production of contemporary art as a possibly socio-critical exercise?

I wouldn’t know why it would have a negative effect on art. On thing is that the frenzy about virtual markets has passed now I mean once, the dot.com bubble burst (the dot.com phenomena issued in a period of rampant financial speculation on the internet connected with the establishment of numerous and varied on line businesses, many of which soon collapsed). For myself I don’t think I would make another stock market project, it’s almost as if I expressed what I needed to express for the time at that time in relation to the ‘virtual’ dot.com market, now that’s its gone my interest has moved on.
As far as the prevalence of economic language is concerned, if you are on the outside of that it is a practical issue of getting expert advice. After the whole dot.com frenzy, the other frenzy, which is coming now, is the superannuation frenzy. I mean there’s always a fear about economic downfall or the impact on individuals, and with the deregulation of superannuation there are all these ads appearing on TV now about whom to get. But overall practicing as artists we are outside that sort of language. Then again there’s almost something comforting about financial reports you might see on the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Commission), where you can watch the Heng Seng or other markets and see whether the numbers are up or down, up or down. And there’s a certain kind of comfort in that, you just don’t want to hear the market crash, and you probably won’t hear that. So, there is still stuff there for artists to work with. They will always be different aspects to such markets that artists can use.

d) The title of your work, ‘catching a falling knife’ suggests a high quotient of risk posed to those operating from home as financial, ‘day traders.’ Do you see such risks posed by the advent of ‘casino capitalism’ as applicable to the way artists are able to practice globally today? Are artist today at risk of the effects of the global market, for example, do such markets ultimately restrict the production and reception of contemporary art?

I don’t think the effects of such markets will ever limit art, plus critique through art will not be limited, it will just take different forms. So for instance, in the Disobedience exhibition (held in September 2005 at Sydney’s Ivan Dougherty gallery and including work by Goldberg) the forms artists are exploring are prevalent now in Europe, but not necessarily here. In Europe artist are coming back to a neo-Marxist vision of the creative collective, and as groups their art will look at various social phenomena and comment on them within certain economic paradigms as well that spiral around what they are questioning. But such work functions on both a national and global level. So, limitations can only ever be self-imposed. I think the effects of neo-liberal markets are offset by the fact that there are so many facets that artists are working within today. So for instance, the most recent issue of Artlink (an Australian contemporary art magazine) looks at the phenomena of un-collectable artists working with social issues, artists who cannot sell their work, or whose work is not in a form to be sold, which is the complete opposite of a rag like the Australian Art Collector, whose function is specifically to influence the market. I think wherever you are going to get different productive facets you’re going to get artists willing to climb in and fill the void.

e) How important was it for you in this work, to choose to trade in shares of the Newscorp, corporation, owned as its by Australia’s media-magnate Rupert Murdoch? What did this decision signify to you in the overall context of ‘catchingafallingknife.com,’ and as a contemporary artist practicing in an Australian situation?

Newscorp was absolutely the perfect company to trade in some ways, because of its global media connections, as well as (its Australian director) Rupert Murdoch’s connection to Australia. People would recognise its name, people would acknowledge it because they read Murdoch’s papers every day.
Section 2: Questionnaire:  
The Critical Impact of Globalisation on Contemporary Australian Art

1) What is your understanding of globalisation? Does the concept have any relevance to the way you think about your work?

Globalisation has relevance to the way I think about my work because after concerns about the colonial impact of Empire here in Australia particularly (which Goldberg’s previous art has dealt with explicitly), the next segue seems to be globalism. In fact, it seems at present to be a concept pertinent for us as contemporary artists to sail the theory of our work in. But personally it doesn’t concern me as much as perhaps those people who choose to write about my work. And their writing educates me in terms of how they relate my work to issues of globalism. What do I understand of it? My understanding of it is what the cliche is; spread the means, the results and outcomes of production from one centre through the periphery to the world, a process, which also causes many economic and social ripples.

2) Do you consider yourself as working in a cultural situation that is primarily locally or globally defined?

My work is globally defined. Although when you look at my work in the exhibition Disobedience, it seems orientated locally which it is, yet it results directly from global circumstances; it takes the general and makes it personal. If you are making statements, which seem to be critical of globalism as an artist it has to involve a very personal intimate experience of it. If you don’t you shouldn’t be making art about it, you should be out there with the anti-globalisation protestors. Mine is always a personal take and that comes very much out of my experience as an artist working in South Africa (Goldberg was born in South Africa), in the apartheid era. The work I was making at the time used the kind of language of the apartheid era but it was also about what was happening to me with regards apartheid. My criticism of what is happening now and even then, is that artists like Kendell Geers (highly- South African media and installation artist well known for dealing with political issues), and many other artists like him, is that in the post-apartheid era they are making huge international careers out of using the language of that time, only it has nothing to do with them. They are using this language of the oppressed as a selling point even though it’s not their oppression. I mean, it’s a fine line and in terms of the global market, the nitty gritty comment you want to make is not necessarily what the market wants, the market wants the aesthetic that is seducing. For artist today, it’s easy to go down that route.

3) Do you consider yourself an Australian artist and if so what does this mean to you?

Australian as opposed to….? Yes, I do see myself as an Australian artist in that I am responding to a contemporary Australian scenario, but again such concerns move beyond this consideration because the borders have broken down, we know that. So even though I’m talking about Australia, about me here and now, I’m also really talking about somewhere else as well. Really, my definition of myself as an Australian artist has more to do with where I am practicing right now. At the same time, I am also an artist who used to be known as a ‘South African’ artist.

4) Are your ideas generated from local issues, ideas, sights, social networks, allegiances etc? To what extent is your work influenced by other cultural artefacts, like reproductions or works by other artists?
My work is not so much influenced by reproductions of the works of other artists anymore. It used to be, but then I found since my time in Australia where I arrived in 1988, each situation I have been in as an artist I was responding to specifically such that I found myself less connected to the examples of others, even though there is an aesthetic that runs through my work, I guess there are certain things you never lose. It has always interested me more though that the aesthetic you are using seems to come out of somewhere you're not quite sure of.

5) Do you think contemporary culture can function in a socially critical way today, globally or locally? If so how? If not, why not?

Yeah, oh sure! I mean the age-old question comes up as to whether it is effective or not. I mean, I think art is very limited in its effect. And I think in looking at art, it's always been limited in its effect. I don't think anyone looking at Francisco Goya's (Spanish artist 1746-1828) *Disasters of War* (1810-1820) series of etchings at that time, had their lives changed forever. But how can I say that? I mean maybe they were. But for us now, particularly as the media has become so much stronger and all reaching, art has even less power to transform the individual. As an artist, you do what you do because you are compelled to do it, and you don’t know what kind of effect it is going to have, and you don’t expect any effect.

6) Do you think art produced in Australia today has a significant impact internationally? Do local cultural circumstances have anything to do with the way it is perceived? Do you think Australian artists exhibiting overseas are viewed any differently from artists from North America or Europe?

Do you mean if Australian artists are noticed at all? I don’t know, I really can’t say, I don’t know what people think of Ricky Swallow (highly successful Australian sculptor and Australia’s 2005 representative at the Venice Biennale. See, Chapter 5: The View from Here; Contemporary Australian Art Targeting Globalisation’s Reinstituted Centre, 5:2 (i) Inbuilt obsolescence: Australian art’s institutional valorisation of ‘global’ youth culture) when they walk into the Venice Biennale, what can they possibly think and should we worry what they think? What can you do about it?

I mean in terms of the once antipodean situation for Australian artists and how that has been displaced now, two artists spring to my mind, one is Nigel Helyer (British born, Australian based contemporary sound and technology artist), now there’s no way people think of him as an ‘Australian artist’, he doesn’t talk like an Australian artist, and I’m sure that he travels on a British passport, but he’s been in Australia long enough to be considered an Australian artist, yet his work is not seen as that. And Stelarc (media, technology based artist whose practice engages issues of virtuality and cybernetics), I’m sure he’s not seen as an Australian artist, he’s seen as an international artist. I think at some point that label disappears. As for an artist like Tracey Moffatt, (extremely successful photo-media artist of Aboriginal heritage based in New York), I think she’s on the verge of totally losing her ‘Australian-ness,’ if it hasn’t happened already, I’m sure its promoted in a very subtle way overseas, her last exhibition certainly was very much positioned outside issues of her Australian identity.

I think the very successful Australian artists are not seen as such, but I’m not sure if you can be a hugely successful international artist from South Africa if you lose the sense of your being South African, or American for that matter, I think you keep that. There’s something about working
from an Australian situation, the distance or whatever you want to call it, which means that for many artists such national identification is easy to shed.

7) Do you think opportunities for contemporary artists are evenly distributed around the world?

No. I think the way that those doors open is by artists going overseas and spending sufficient time there for people to get used to them, and this might provide an international opening. If you go on sorties overseas for short periods of time you get nowhere, you actually have to go somewhere and make some sort of commitment to the land that you want to colonise or have power over.

8) Do you regard the contemporary art scene today as having any particular cultural centre or centres? If so where are they and why are they central?

If they are centres, they are shifting. When the Centre was the United States and New York, it then that bounced over to the United Kingdom and then to the United States again, and now it's in Europe. But I think if a centre is anywhere today, it's comprised of an agglomeration of nations in Europe; like Germany, Italy, certain Scandinavian countries, as well places like Japan although less so, and other areas that we didn't really expect. And it seems now to be moving east, Russia, Taiwan and China are discovering their voices and they are booming across big-time and so they are seen as contemporary art currencies. South Africa is still relying mainly on the currency of William Kentridge's reputation (South African graphic and film artist highly critical of the apartheid system). Also if it's someone's job like Okwui Ewezor's for example (Nigerian born contemporary art curator and curator in 2002, of Documenta 11 in Kassel, Germany. He is known for his politicised attitude to curating artists from regions once considered peripheral to contemporary art; Africa, Asia and Latin America), to put their finger on the pulse of contemporary global art and to define what is central, then essentially you've also got to be well liked and not too difficult. You can't afford to be too difficult.

9) Do you think the contemporary art scene in Australia is especially influenced by the culture of Britain or the United States? If not, are there other special cultural influences from other countries?

I think the influences on Australian art now have become far less recognisable because of the giving up of New York as the centre of the global art world. And I'm not going to say it happened with September 11, because I think it happened before then, and maybe it happened coincidentally, or maybe world history simply happens in such a way. If there are influences, I think they emit rather from all those north European transmitters we have been talking about. I think if you want to mention a dominant influence it would have to be an amalgam that might also correspond with a global point of view, it makes sense. Therefore, influences in contemporary Australian art are generally far more difficult to recognise. I mean before you could always rely on certain zones and certain historical precedents connected with them, and you can't do that anymore. And as a result, I think we are entering some interesting and anxious psychological territory.