The matter of mutual memory:

Collective memory and collaborative art practice

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This thesis, presented in 2017, is a partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Master of Fine Arts degree of The University of Western Australia, undertaken through the discipline of Visual Arts within the School of Design.
Author's declaration

I declare that this thesis, to best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material which has been accepted for any other qualification at any university and contains no material previously published and/or written by another author.

Signed:

Valdene Diprose
Abstract

Memory actively informs fundamental understandings of self and identity. It is the basis for an individual’s understanding of ‘being’ in space, place and time. And yet, the concept of memory does not feature strongly in contemporary art theory or discourse, other than in relation to artists who explicitly engage with memory as subject matter. Memory, however, is used overtly by artists in their practice to explicate their thinking. Every time artists work, they draw and build on their rich understandings of materials and processes to realise art ideas. While some artists explore personal memory in an autobiographical manner and create a dialogue between what is revealed publicly and what is kept secret, others interact with sites, recording traces of the materials and objects they encounter. Still others draw on collective memory to address injustice and inequality through socially engaged practices. Although artists use memory unconsciously as a tool, and many use it consciously as a mechanism for exploring a concept or an idea, few speak of it explicitly in relation to their work. The lack of current art literature on how artists articulate memory, particularly collective memory, suggests that the concept is not yet fully and clearly documented, especially in relation to collaborative art practice.

The thesis contends that theories of memory have an active and critical role in present, forward action. It suggests that memory should be more clearly foregrounded in the history, theory and practice of contemporary art, particularly given its broader discussion in general, cultural and academic discourse. The research coheres Henri Bergson’s concept of individual memory and Maurice Halbwachs’ conception of collective memory, to examine how spatial and temporal theories of memory can build clearer understandings of contemporary art, particularly in the realm of participatory and collaborative art.

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2 Ibid. The themes of Gibbon’s chapters on memory are outlined in this paragraph.
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Gabriel Motzkin’s unpublished lecture, Memory and the Philosophy of History (2012) has been very helpful, and I thank him for generously providing the transcript.² Appreciation also goes to Marcus Canning who kindly provided part of a transcript he spoke to at the Bureau of Ideas, Art in the City: Cool, Cliché or Clutter? forum held in Perth during October 2016.³

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¹ The interview transcripts can be found respectively in Appendices 1, 3 and 4 of this document.
² Gabriel Motzkin, “Memory and the Philosophy of History” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSKcNfcqdeQ: Stanford University, August 17, 2012).
³ Marcus Canning, “Form Follows Finance and the Public Banality” (paper presented at the Bureau of Ideas forum: Art in the City: Cool, Cliché or Clutter?, Belgian Beer Cafe, 347 Murray Street, Perth, 24 October 2016). An excerpt from Cannings’ paper can be found in Appendix 5.
Dedication

Thanks to my family for their shared stores that have fuelled an interest in collective memories. I particularly dedicate this writing to my late father and mother. My father, Colin Diprose was a consummate ‘yamer’ and he taught me to love stories, while my mother, Dorothy showed me, by example, the power and worth in listening.

Growing up on a farm inculcated a belief in the value of shared, collaborative work.
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1. Introduction

My interest in memory originated in my own studio practice, where I have sought to understand how art methodologies and thinking changes when an individual art practice with a focus on familiar objects, people and places shifts towards working collaboratively with individuals and communities in unfamiliar locations.¹

This research is primarily concerned with understanding how ideas about memory can extend beyond the studio and permeate into the wider discourse in contemporary art. The thesis argues the value of foregrounding memory theory, which has wide currency in general, cultural and academic discourse, and acknowledging its importance in the history, theory and practice of contemporary art.

Beginning with the assumption that memory underpins all action, particularly creative art practice, the research asks three key questions in relation to contemporary art: Where does the ‘meaning’ in an art practice reside? Who makes this meaning? And why is this meaning important? Essentially, it asks what ‘matters’, why it ‘matters’ and what is ‘mutually agreed to matter’. These broad questions are interrogated by looking specifically at two key areas of contemporary art practice: collaborative work – that is, the experience of active participatory processes; and site-specific work made around the concept of place.²

The thesis seeks answers to the above questions in three ways: through philosophy, art history and art analysis that respectively analyse: memory theories, site-specific work that marks the shift from modern to contemporary art, and recent collaborative, temporal-spatial work of other artists working within Australia.

Chapter two examines Henri Bergson’s theory of individual memory and Maurice Halbwachs’ thinking on collective memory. The discussion focuses on how perception and memory interact in conscious actions over space and time. The research resolves that there is value in considering both theories together because they supplement one another. Bergson articulates how individuals build

¹ This enquiry was the basis of studio work and was realised through the exegesis and exhibition components of the master's program.
temporal understandings around ‘memory images’, while Halbwachs’ interest is with the performative aspects of shared memory in social environments.

Art historian Miwon Kwon’s trajectory for site-specific art provides a loose structural framework for chapter three. The chapter begins with a short précis on Modernism before moving onto the evolution of contemporary art through a discussion of site-place, space and time. Art is considered as an entity that operates within the tensions of its own history and memory, while addressing broader societal and cultural issues and collective memories.

The final chapter discusses recent artworks produced in three Australian art programs which focus on collaborative and site-specific practice. Works are analysed to determine how memory understandings are realised in art practices that involve different types of collaborations and interventions with sites.

This thesis’ principal contribution lies in explicating how spatial and temporal theories of memory can be constituted to make meaningful contributions to the action and dialogue of contemporary art.
2. Memory in time and space

Written Western thought on memory begins with the treatises by Plato and Aristotle on the operation of individual memory. This concept of individual memory was a continuing preoccupation of Western philosophical thought until the mid-twentieth century, when Maurice Halbwachs began to consider the notion of collective memory.

Plato’s famous analogy of the brain being akin to a block of wax imprinted with memories still resonates today with the long held belief that memory is a discrete archive that sits within the individual and involves three distinct processes: encoding, storage and retrieval. Within this paradigm, memory is visualised as a trace – an “imprint-on-a substrate”. Besides the wax tablet and writing pad metaphors involving inscription, analogies have also been made to the library, the warehouse, and more recently, the computer which reinforce the concept that memory belongs to a particular place, and has a spatial dimension. Literary theorist, John Frow links the two dominant metaphors of inscription/deposit and storage, saying they are suggestive of memory traces that “are considered to be discrete objects stored in particular locations in the mind space.”

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3 Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). 9. Using Socrates as the mouthpiece, Plato wrote: “Now I want you to suppose, for the sake of argument, that we have in our souls a block of wax larger in one person, smaller in another, and of pure wax in one case, dirtier in another; in some men rather hard, in others rather soft, while in some it is of just the proper consistency … We may look upon it, then, as a gift of Memory [Mnemosyne], the mother of the Muses. We make impressions upon this of everything we wish to remember [mnemoneusai] among the things we have seen or heard or thought of ourselves; we hold the wax under our perceptions and thoughts and take a stamp from them, in the way in which we take the imprints [marks, semeia] of signet rings. Whatever is impressed upon the wax we remember and know so long as the image [eidolon] remains in the wax; whatever is obliterated or cannot be impressed, we forget [epilelesthai] and do not know.” Theaetetus 191c-d) Refer also to: James Burton, “Bergson's Non-Archival Theory of Memory,” Memory Studies 1, no. 3 (2008), Accessed 24 April, 2016, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1750698008093797. 322.

4 “Bergson's Non-Archival Theory of Memory”. 322. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 12-15. Ricoeur writes of the difficulties the notion of the imprint has imposed onto the theory of memory, particularly the assumption that all memory is automatically retrievable at will, and doubt over the veracity of the first trace, once others memories are added to the original memory over time.


6 Frow. 225-6. Frow draws on Henry Roediger’s research about the spatial associations of memory, and observes that it is through these two major metaphors that “European culture has conceptualised memory over the past two and a half millennia”. Refer also to: Henry L Roediger, "Memory Metaphors in Cognitive Psychology," Memory & Cognition 8, no. 3 (1980), http://dx.doi.org/10.3758/BF03197611. Roediger identifies the spatial metaphors used by clinical psychologists in the twentieth century up to 1980, and makes the observation that memory is presumed to be a type of object within that space.
spontaneous manner in which we clearly recall past episodic events in a holistic manner also lends support to this hypothesis. 7

Individual memory has likewise been irrevocably tied to the notion of time since Aristotle famously wrote “all memory is of the past”. 8 By situating memory in the past, Aristotle distanced it from the future which he believed was subject to “opinion and expectation”, and the present which he considered to be experienced as “sensation”. 9 As a measure of distance, Aristotle suggests remembrance can only occur if there is a temporal movement away from an actual event. He clearly situates memory in a temporal, linear continuum, by visualising time as the movement-change between a series of successive ‘nows’ in an external cosmic realm. This concept of universal time, sitting outside of the individual, and existing as a constant for relating and measuring change, is now generally accepted as a self-evident truth.10

Seven centuries later, the Christian Church Father Augustine of Hippo (354-430) wrote of similar temporal divisions as Aristotle, yet he clearly relates all three time frames through the immediacy of the ‘now’ in individual action and thought. For Augustine, memory is a personal, private reflective experience with links to an internalised idea of time. He rejects Aristotle’s externalised notion of universal time based on cosmic movement and change, believing individuals “measure time as it passes”. Temporal divisions are viewed as “three intentions of the present – the present of the past or memory, the present of the future or expectations and the present of the present or attention”.11 In Augustine’s schema, time still appears to move linearly, along a continuum from the past, through the present and into the future.12 However, within his construct of ‘passing’, Augustine is “not primarily opposed to public and commemorative time, but [only] to the [cosmic] time of the world”.13

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9 Ibid.
11 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 101.
12 Ibid.,102.
13 Ibid.,101.
2.1 Memory and identity

Personal memory has been equated with self and identity since philosopher, John Locke’s An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690). Although René Descartes had already linked consciousness to identity with his famous statement, “I think therefore I am”, it is Locke who first contemplates identity and self as being constructed on inbuilt memories people have of their past. Locke argues that a person with no memory, identity or understanding of self can only actualise ‘being’ in single, isolated moments of consciousness. With his definition of a person, Locke suggests that memory provides the self-awareness that unique perceptions endure over time.

Person stands for ... a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems ... essential to it.15

Locke writes about the usefulness of memory as a recognition tool. Not only does the mechanism of memory allow for recognition of places, things, and other people through their sameness, it also critically enables “an awareness of self-sameness over time”.16 He establishes that it is through memory that we come to connect self (the physical person who is me), consciousness (my awareness) and identity (traits that are unique to me, that I recognise in me).17 This unity is achieved through the memory of past actions that allow for the “anchoring [of] a sense of individual continuity over time”.18 Although Locke ascribes to Plato’s spatial language of memory words such as “storehouse” and “place”, he considers memory to be a function, rather than an archive.19

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17 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 102-3.
He writes:

... our Ideas are said to be our Memories, when indeed, they are actually no where, but only there is an ability in the Mind, when it will, to revive them again; and as it were paint them anew on it self, though some with more, some with less difficulty; some more lively, and others more obscurely. 20

Here Locke acknowledges that ideas of self and memories are not fixed and they alter over time. Essentially this means:

one didn’t have to stake one’s identity on the claim that a particular person must always be able to persuade others - and oneself as well - that one has remained the same person by being characteristic of oneself, and, hence, recognizable. 21

As literary and cultural theorist Frances Ferguson suggests, Locke’s thinking has two important implications that flow into conscious behaviour in everyday life. 22 Firstly, it frees individuals from the repetitive actions and thinking that requires them to constantly reassert their identity to themselves and others. Secondly, it allows for memory to change and shift whenever it interacts with perceptions in conscious action. These attributes of memory are commonly understood as foundational truths in contemporary understandings of memory. Locke’s thinking, for example, underpins later theories of memory by Henri Bergson and Maurice Halbwachs.

2.2 Personal memory

While earlier authors proposed that the act of remembering is essentially a private, meditative activity, the philosopher Henri Bergson sees it as an experience that is outward looking and active, rather than hidden and contemplative in its action. 23 In his seminal text Matter and Memory (1896), Bergson coheres memory and perception in the act of consciousness, stating that “with the immediate and present data of our senses we mingle a thousand details out of our past experience”. 24 Memory is thus conceived as an active, proximate...

20 John Locke, "From an Essay Concerning Human Understanding," ibid (Edinburgh University Press). 75-6. (original italics)
21 Ferguson, "Romantic Memory." 509-10.
22 Ibid. Refer also to: Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 102-9.
24 Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2004). 24. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 26-31. Ricoeur sees this effort as “a conquest of temporal distance” and goes on to discusses Bergson’s notion of effort, alongside other thinkers who use ‘search’ (Aristotle) and ‘work’ (Freud) to describe the action of memory.
experience that involves ‘effort’. Bergson rejects linear divisions of time and fixed, archival memory with his view that individual memory is spontaneously and continually in active dialogue with what is being perceived in the world.

Much significance lies in Bergson’s notion of ‘pure memory’ – which is essentially what Bergson sees as the ‘ultimate truth’, bound up in matter. As an integral part of all matter, it sits both within and beyond the body as unattained knowledge-understanding, something that we are continually striving to achieve and understand. This striving-interaction is an active and forward thinking action – full of possibilities and imaginings. It begins with perception and sensory input, and then proceeds to making comparisons and deductions. It “co-ordinate[s] one impression with another” for future-oriented action.

Bergson’s notion of the present is thus bound up in the immediacy of “what is being made” when the individual (as matter), actively engages with the matter of the world that is at hand. With this, the present can be visualised simply as

![Diagram 1: Bergson's planes of matter, adapted from "Memory and Matter", Fig. 3, p184.](image)

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26 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 170. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 154. One of the ultimate truths acknowledged by Bergson is that “in pure memory the evoked event comes with its date”. Since the event must have existed previously, remembering provides a link to universal time.

27 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 45.

28 Ibid. 193. (original italics)
continuous, reciprocal and synergetic action between two planes of matter, with
the living body at the centre (diagram 1, p7).

In Bergson’s schema of an active, outward looking memory, the individual is
posed as an integral part of the matter of the world, rather than a separate
being. Bergson describes the interaction as a “point or probe that is moving
through matter, and which is itself, part of the very matter through which it
moves”:30

... we may speak of the body as an ever advancing boundary between
the future and the past, as a pointed end, which our past is continually
driving forward into our future. Whereas my body taken at a single
moment, is but a conductor interposed between the objects which
influence it and those on which it acts, it is, on the other hand, when
replaced in the flux of time, always situated at the very point where my
past expires in a deed.31

Bergson coheres this forward perceptive action simultaneously with action to the
past, knowing the individual draws on understandings of past experiences, habits
and knowledge to perceive and make sense of things outside of oneself.
Perceived sensory input thus works in a dynamic interaction with personal
memory. This action can also be visualised as continuous circular action with
perceptions oscillating between the present and past while being projected
towards imagining a future (diagram 1, p7).

Within the scope of pure memory, Bergson suggests individuals remember through
two personal memory types: ‘habit’ or ‘procedural’ memory; and
‘representational’ or ‘episodic’ memory.32 These are not discrete forms of
memory; rather, they operate in constant dialogue with one another, in continual
movement towards consciousness.33

29 Ibid.,12. For Bergson, the body, is an object “destined to move other objects, is then, a centre of action ...”
5. In turn, “the objects which surround ... [the] body reflect its possible action upon them”. 7. (original italics)
30 Simon O’Sullivan, “A Diagram of the Finite-Infinite Relation: Towards a Bergsonian Production of Subjectivity,” in
Bergson and the Art of Immanence: Painting, Photography, Film, ed. John O Maoilearca and Charlotte De Mille
31 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 88, 170. See also pages 179-80 for pure memory. Bergson writes: “But pure
memory, in which each unique moment of the past survives, is essentially detached from life.” It manifests itself
in the realisation of memory-images. Pure memory can thus be seen as a pool of potential memory sitting within
Mullarkey’s contention that with the inclusion of ‘pure’ memory, Bergson’s theory of memory is tripartite, not
32 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 89. Chapter 2, pages 86-105 deals specifically with the two memory types.
Bergson sees habit memory, the first type, as belonging to the mind-body as a holistic entity, and responsible for the automatic responses the body makes without thought. This memory is acquired through repetitive action that involves “first a decomposition and then a recomposition”\(^{34}\) of whole actions. The memory mechanism is triggered by an event in the present that sets in motion a closed system of automatic movements that occur in the same order and time. Although habits – like learning to walk and draw – are initially linked to specific times and events, with repetition, the events become blended into general occurrence so they become more like representations than memories of past events. Moreover, since the learned memory is habitual it becomes an automatic action that is performed without conscious thought. In this way, it no longer “represents the past”, but becomes something “lived and acted”\(^{35}\) in the present. It thus, “acts our past experience, but does not call up its image”.\(^{36}\)

The second type, ‘representational’ memory, involves the recollection of incidents tied to specific dates, times and locations that appear as memory-images.\(^{37}\) This process involves recognition that is deeply rooted in sensory based perceptive action. As Bergson explains, “to call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream”.\(^{38}\) This memory consciously finds connections between what is being perceived and past events. Instantaneous, involuntary recognition occurs when connections are made spontaneously, as with Marcel Proust’s madeleine cake, and music automatically recognised.\(^{39}\) In these instances, sensory perceptions, stimulated by a look, texture, smell, taste or a sound, trigger emotional familiarity so rapidly, that the unconscious brain makes recognition before the conscious brain has considered the incoming stimuli. When this does not occur, recognition involves consideration and deduction in a process that consciously draws upon an individual’s knowledge and prior understandings. Connections may be made

\(^{34}\) Bergson, Matter and Memory. 89-90. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 58, 63. Because Bergson visions this memory type as ‘acted’ rather than ‘represented’, Ricoeur suggests it includes memorisation, that “according to some texts is exercised, cultivated, trained, [and] sculptured”.

\(^{35}\) Bergson, Matter and Memory. 93. [original italics]

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 195.


\(^{38}\) Bergson, Matter and Memory. 94.

quickly, or may involve lengthy time periods, as the individual revisits particular events, situations or problems.

Bergson uses the motif of an inverted cone to represent, and explain how the different types of memory function (diagram 2). Pure memory is found in the upturned base (A-B), and in the plane of matter (P), where it sits in both locations as a kind of potential memory. Habit memory, belonging to movement and the senses is situated in the apex of the cone (S) where it interfaces and mediates between the matter of pure memory and an individual’s conscious understandings and memories of the world. Both the apex (S) and the plane of matter (P) are in continual movement as the individual is involved in perceiving, remembering and memorising (diagram 3). The past-present of experience guides sensory perception, while almost simultaneously, the sensory organs project sensations (as potential memory) into becoming present and active in consciousness.

The interaction (S) (diagrams 2 and 3) is shown as a compressed moment in time that coheres the past and future together in the present. As such, past and future can be seen to be operating almost simultaneously, in the current moment.

However, the idea that past and future time operate near simultaneously in present time is at odds with our perception that memories are somehow behind us – they are no longer present. Succession – movement in time – becomes a

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40 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 196-7.
41 Ibid., 197.
problem since perception of the past, present and future effectively occurs simultaneously. 42 This disjunction can be rationalised through considering temporality to be a personal, experiential and internal notion of time that is experienced within external, universal time. 43 Bergson’s construct of time, can then be seen as a phenomenology of temporality, not a metaphysical explanation of universal time. 44 Within temporality, Bergson reconciles the ‘pastness’ of the past in his cone (diagram 4) by positioning it as a virtual whole towards the base of the cone (A-B). The past (as potential memory) has not ceased to exist; it has merely ceased being useful in the action of the present moment. 45 The useful past is brought into the apex of the cone with conscious, continuous intercessions of habit and episodic memory. With this thinking, the “past is co-extensive with the present, [but] survives in a pure, albeit unconscious state”. 46 In this way, Bergson gives elasticity to temporality, and allows for the

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42 Hoy, The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality. 129-30. Hoy suggests that “taken as a metaphysical thesis ... either time is successive or simultaneous”. The paradox extends to a further conundrum of “explaining how there can be no change without time, but how time itself does not change”.

43 Ibid., xiv-xvii. 128. Hoy’s introduction is useful in outlining the conundrums in internal and external time.

44 Ibid., 130. Temporality refers to inner, personal time. Hoy’s explanation is particularly useful since he compared Bergson’s synchronistic construct of time to Husserl’s diachronic reading. The two do not contradict one another if they are considered as different aspects of phenomenological experience.

45 O’Sullivan, "A Diagram of the Finite-Infinite Relation: Towards a Bergsonian Production of Subjectivity." 165.

46 Ibid.
personal perception of fixed ‘pastness’, as well as the experience of uneven temporal divisions such as, ‘fast’ (immersive) and ‘slow’ (boring, waiting) time.\textsuperscript{47}

Current research in cognitive science validates Bergson’s conclusions about temporality and the cohered material character of personal memory.\textsuperscript{48} Although electrical impulses and neural pathways have superseded Bergson’s cone and his two forms of memory have devolved into many more fragmented, specialised memory types, science affirms the fundamental ideas underpinning Bergson’s memory philosophy.\textsuperscript{49}

Medical imaging, for example, provides irrefutable proof that the processes of perception, recall and potential memorisation occur almost simultaneously, giving support to Bergson’s fundamental idea that the temporal distances between past, present and future are cohered together in consciousness, because all actions involve memory and perception.\textsuperscript{50}

Bergson does not give memory function a unique status in the brain, proposing instead, that memory is integrated in all aspects of the body. He argues the brain’s chief function is to facilitate and establish connections:

the brain is no more than a kind of central telephone exchange ... it appears ... to be an instrument of analysis in regard to movement received, and an instrument of selection in regard to the movement executed.\textsuperscript{51}

Science’s understandings about embodied intelligence also endorse Bergson’s belief that the mind-body operates as a composite entity, with memory having a

\textsuperscript{47} Hoy, The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality. xii-xvii. In discussion Hoy refers to the term ‘temporal’ to distinguish inner, personal time from universal time. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 112. Ricoeur suggests that Bergson’s problem of a unitary flow of time is resolved “in the sense that the incessant transformation of “now” into “no longer” and of “not yet” into “now”, is equivalent to the constitution of a single flow”. In this way, the “no longer nows” achieve a pastness for the past.

\textsuperscript{48} Burton, Bergson’s Non-Archival Theory of Memory . 323. Burton suggests Bergson’s memory theories are still “waiting for a full appreciation of its potential significance for fields in which memory is a central category”. Refer also to: O’Sullivan, “A Diagram of the Finite-Infinite Relation: Towards a Bergsonian Production of Subjectivity.” 165-178. Rita Carter, Mapping the Mind (Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010). Written by a science journalist, for the layperson, explains the processes within the human brain. Chapters five and seven, “A World of One’s Own” and “States of Mind” are particularly useful in describing current scientific understandings of memory.

\textsuperscript{49} Carter, Mapping the Mind. Chapters 5, 7.


\textsuperscript{51} Bergson, Matter and Memory. 19-20.
spatial presence in the ‘whole’ individual. The importance of the body is thus elevated in consciousness. In Bergson’s scheme:

our body, with the sensations it receives on the one hand and the movements which it is capable of executing on the other ... fixes our mind, and gives it ballast and poise. The activity of the mind goes far beyond the mass of accumulated memories, as this mass of memories is itself infinitely more than the sensations and movements of the present hour; but these sensations and movements condition what we might term our attention to life.

This thinking accommodates the ideas of mindfulness and phenomenology as ways of knowing how we are present in the world. It involves the whole matter of the body being open and focused to the sensory possibilities of the matter within the world. For Bergson, this is an instinctive, intuitive approach that focuses our attention to life. In this attention, Bergson believes, it is the adaption of the body, rather than the mind that is essential to “render perception more intense”. When Bergson revisits his thesis and links memory, through conscious action with our attention to life, he states, “my present is, in its essence, sensori-motor”.

Yet with this acknowledgement, Bergson fails to endorse the spatial implications of a material body interacting with the material outside of it, in the physical world. Although he makes an oblique reference to this ‘outside’ space with the words, “having extension in space my body experiences sensations and at the same time executes movements,” he considers that the essential, ‘real’ action occurs in internal body processes. With the statement, “my body is a centre of action, the place where the impressions received choose intelligently the path they will follow to transform themselves into movements accomplished,” Bergson posits activity and movement as emanating from an internal hub.

52 Guy Claxton, Intelligence in the Flesh: Why Your Mind Needs Your Body Much More Than It Thinks (New Haven, United States: Yale University Press, 2015). Bergson, Matter and Memory. 232. Bergson states, “All the facts and all the analogies are in favour of a theory which regards the brain as only an intermediary between sensation and movement.”

53 Bergson. 226. (original italics)

54 O’Sullivan, “A Diagram of the Finite-Infinite Relation: Towards a Bergsonian Production of Subjectivity.” 166.

55 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 120.

56 Ibid. 177. This statement may lead to a deduction that Bergson is intensely unscientific in his approach to the world, but Bergson in fact used then current psychological understandings to formulate his thinking. Evidence of this can be seen in Chapter 2 of Matter and Memory. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy Jeffrey K Olick, “Introduction,” in The Collective Memory Reader, ed. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy Jeffrey K Olick (New York Oxford University Press, 2011). 17. Olick suggests that Bergson was concerned, like Proust and Freud, with the “rationalization and unifying force of science”.

57 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 177.

58 Ibid., 178.
Bergson’s temporal theory can be seen to undermine commonly held myths about personal memory. He discounts enduring notions of intractable archival memory and the fixed divisions of universal time (that originate respectively in Platonism and Aristotelian thought). With his propositions of non-linear inner time, different memory types and a synergistic whole mind-body he advocates a phenomenological approach to memory.

2.3 Collective memory

As a pupil of Bergson, philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs was initially influenced by his teacher’s psychological theory of personal memory. Later however, under sociology founder Emile Durkheim, he connected memory to groups interacting in social contexts, and with the transmission of culture. To counter Bergson’s ideas, Halbwachs proposed a new discrete theory of collective memory that foregrounded everyday interactions, and suggested the possibility of ordinary individuals as unique interacting beings. When Halbwachs’ text Social Frameworks of Memory (1925) was published, it argued that “… it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize and localize their memories”. At that time, Halbwachs’ ideas were in their infancy and he provoked heated debate by asserting every individual memory is constituted in group identity:


60 Coser, “Introduction.” 3-13, 21-34. Refer also to Douglas, “Introduction,” 1-19. Halbwachs, a former student of Bergson, had defected to the new discipline of sociology founded by Émile Durkheim. Halbwachs was a key figure in sociology between the two World Wars and produced two works on collective memory. The Social Frameworks of Memory written in the 1930s only became widely available when it was translated into English and printed as, On Collective Memory in 1992. The second work, The Collective Memory (1950), was unfinished at the time of Halbach’s death in a World War II concentration camp, and was published posthumously. Kerwin Lee Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse,” Representations 69, no. Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering, Winter, 2000. 127. While the term, “collective memory” appears to have been coined by Hugo von Hofmannsthali in 1902, its first scholarly use is attributed to Maurice Halbwachs with his work, The Social Frameworks of Memory 1925 where he argued “that memory is a specifically social phenomenon.” Refer also to: Amos Funkenstein, “Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness,” History and Memory 1, no. 1 (1989). 9.


We can understand each memory as it occurs in individual thought only if we locate each within the thought of the corresponding group ... the framework of collective memory confines and binds our most intimate remembrances of each other ... we cannot consider them [individual memories] except from the outside - that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others ... 63

By removing agency from the individual, and advocating a social framework for all memory, Halbwachs focuses on its realisation though the concept of groups operating in a spatial framework, influenced by their physical surroundings: 64

What makes recent memories hang together is not that they are continuous in time: it is rather that they are a part of a totality of thoughts common to a group ... with whom we have had a relation on the preceding day or days. 65

Although Halbwachs does not consider memory as fixed and archival, stating, “the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present,” 66 he believes its operation through the social framework of groups is more reliable because it is mediated by others. 67

In his final text, The Collective Memory (1950), Halbwachs tempers his thinking, conceding it is individuals who formulate and recall memories, but maintains all memory has a social, cultural dimension because individuals always remember in a collective context. 68 He differentiates the two memory types, describing personal memory as internal and autobiographical, with links to personality, and collective memory as external, social and historical. 69

Halbwachs equates collective memory with group understandings that develop from individuals belonging simultaneously to several groups. At one level, he sees these groups as family and community organisations; and on another level, they are broader cultural groups that define the nationality, religion, race, gender, and society that individuals are born into. Individuals hold partial memories from each group they belong to. Halbwachs sees these group memories as intertwined


64 The Collective Memory, trans. Frances J. Ditter Jr. and Vida Yazdi Ditter, 1st ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1980). This is the phrasing used as the sub-heading for chapter 4. 128.

65 Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory. 52.

66 Ibid., 40.

67 Ibid., 39.

68 The Collective Memory, 23, 48. Halbwachs's argues that even when individuals are alone, they understand their natural environment through the filter of a social context.

with the personal memory of individuals and operating in the life-span of the individual and/or the group, but he suggests that “every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time.”

Although Halbwachs argues vehemently against Bergson’s notion of inner time he places very little value on time for his theory:

Time is real only insofar as it has content - that is, insofar as it offers events as material for thought. It is limited and relative, but it is plainly real. Moreover, it is large and substantial enough to offer the individual consciousness a framework within which to arrange and retrieve its remembrances.

In this final work, Halbwachs begins to consider memory forms. He distinguishes lived experiences from collective ideas based on historical understandings that are garnered through conversations and reading. He considers the latter to be borrowed, imagined memories, rather than lived social-group memories that can be considered as “wholly mine and in me”.

Although shared memories are mediated, Halbwachs perceives them as having two important differences from history. He sees them as a “current of continuous thought” that only retains memories that are practical and useful. He believes many understandings are specific to communities and groups. From this, he deduces that while collective ideas originate in shared communications about the past, they are articulated as knowledge of signs and symbols that are understood in particular ways by the groups and communities situated within a society.

Halbwachs’ theory has been much debated since its revival in the late twentieth century. It is criticised for its lack of clear, rigorous explanation into how

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70 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory. 84. Refer also to: 51.
71 Ibid., 127. Chapter four of The Collective Memory is largely an argument against inner time.
72 Ibid., 52.
74 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory. 139-143.
collective memories are formed; its links to cultural traditions; its overlay with history; and above all, for the difficulty in how it can be quantified. Collective memory’ has been used interchangeably with terms such as ‘popular consciousness’, ‘social memory’, ‘collective remembrance’ and ‘popular history making’, as researchers have striven to give Halbwachs’ ideas greater definition and direction.

Historian Amos Funkenstein links collective memory to historical consciousness and helps explicate its breadth in considering it as cultural memory:

Collective memory ... can be characterized as a system of clear signs, symbols, and practices: times of memory, names of places, monuments and victory arches, museums and texts, customs and manners, stereotype images (incorporated, for instance, in manners of expression), and even language itself ... The individual's memory - that is, the act of remembering - is the realization of these symbols, analogous to "speech"; [and] no act of remembering is like any other.

Funkenstein recognises a wide possibility for places, objects, and actions to hold cultural meaning, and simultaneously affirms the importance of speech and conversation. He endorses Halbwachs' conclusion, that “consciousness and memory can only be realized by an individual who acts, is aware, and remembers” and the mental act of remembering is “absolutely and completely personal” because a shared event is never remembered in exactly the same way.

Cultural and memory theorist Jan Assmann provides further clarification by differentiating ‘communicative’ or ‘everyday’ memory from ‘cultural’ memory. He suggests communicative memory involves everyday conversations that are

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77 Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, "Collective Memory: What Is It?" History and Memory 8, no. 1 (1996). 30-50, particularly 35. Gedi and Elam were key detractors of Halbwachs' thinking when it was first revived, seeing it as a novel term used as a substitute for 'myths' relating to collective and social stereotypes. Gedi and Elam ridicule Halbwachs' earliest idea that such memories could exist as a "separate, distinct, single organism with a mind, or a will, or a memory of its own". In mitigation, it must be acknowledged that Halbwachs was still developing his theory when he met with an untimely death. It is also difficult to quantify memory that is spontaneous, haphazard and unstructured.

78 Kansteiner, "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies." 181. See also Zelizer, "Reading the Past against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies." 214-235.

79 Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness." 7.

80 Ibid., 6.

81 Ibid.

82 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory. 59. Halbwachs acknowledges that thinking about collective memory always "presupposes the prior and autonomous existence of the personal memory". Funkenstein, "Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness." 6, 10.

largely unstructured, informal and unplanned. It is through these repeated conversations that individuals construct memory that is mediated socially in groups. While these memories do not have longevity, and at best may only exist for three or four generations, it is through this communication and the connections to group entities that objectivised cultural memory is created. This results in what Assmann describes as the "concretion of identity" around fixed points that he calls "figures of memory - texts, images, monuments, buildings, works of art, and rites etc.". Although cultural communication may originate in the distant past, and be ceremonial and formal, it is like everyday communication because it provides the group with "consciousness of unity and specificity". The "formative and normative impulses" that derive from this knowledge thus enable "the group to reproduce its identity".

Assmann suggests cultural memory is characterised by its distance from the everyday and is:

the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity ... Cultural memory works by reconstructing, that is, it always relates its knowledge to an actual or contemporary situation.

The following tables, produced by Assmann provide an overview of the current key frameworks for collective memory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Memory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner (neuromental)</td>
<td>Inner, subjective time</td>
<td>Inner self</td>
<td>Individual memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Social time</td>
<td>Social self, person as a carrier of social roles</td>
<td>Communicative memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>Historical, mythological, cultural time</td>
<td>Cultural identity</td>
<td>Cultural memory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Adapted from Jan Assmann’s "Communicative and Cultural Memory", p109

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84 Ibid. 128-9.
85 Ibid., 128.
86 Ibid., 128-9.
87 Ibid., 130.
Philosopher Gabriel Motzkin emphasises the conversational, social nature of collective memory when he differentiates collective memory from history. While he sees history as presenting an orderly reconstruction of events that develop in time, he suggests memory, both collective and personal, is more spontaneous and haphazard, in enacting events or moods without ordering time. For Motzkin, what distinguishes collective memory from history and personal memory is its performative, communicative nature in dealing with cultural elements of society:

[Collective memory] is social rather than personal, and it substitutes performance or acting out for images. What makes collective memory distinctive is its relation to the past. It neither tries to make present a long-gone past, like memory, nor does it try to find out what it was really like in the past, like history. It rather tries to keep a past living in the present by reenacting it. This is the secret of its attraction, since of all of these modes, it is collective memory that makes it possible for us to relive the past. There is, however, another way to view collective memory: namely as a kind of latent storage of accumulated expressions, opinions, and stories that survive by being passed on orally between generations.

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89 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 184. Ricoeur likewise suggests it is temporal difference that separates collective memory most markedly from historical concerns of “constructed time, made of structured and qualified durations”.

However, while the concept of collective memory is now more developed than in Halbwachs’ thinking, it is still criticised for its imprecision. Key aspersions levelled are that it is subjective and inaccurate when compared to history, which is seen as being more rational and objective. However, Motzkin suggests:

The distinction between reality and facticity is significant because it is often ignored. The reality of how something was is rarely given by the fact that it was. Memory rarely gives us either reality or facticity. When, however, it is a choice between reality and facticity, memory will tend to opt for how it was, for atmosphere, over fact.

Given the abundance of twenty-first century texts on collective memory, it is evident that there has been a clear shift regarding the function and operative site of memory. The emphasis is no longer on historical fact, but on a pluralistic approach which focuses upon the shared memories of ordinary individuals, and upon actions, objects, and places within culture and society. While Halbwachs’ thinking provides the basis of a cultural-structural framework that has subsequently been expanded and elaborated on in the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann, it is also clear that many of its initial problems still persist.

## 2.4 Spatial memory and place

For Bergson, “spatial reference obscures the essential subjective experience [of personal memory],” and so the spatial qualities that delineate place are of minor importance:

A place could be absolutely distinguished from another place only by its quality or by its relation to the totality of space: so that space would become, by this hypothesis, either composed of heterogeneous parts or finite. But to finite space we should give another space as boundary...

This presents Bergson with an unanswerable conundrum, and he chooses not to deal with the hindrance of, “holding every place to be relative, or from believing some motion to be absolute”. Instead, he takes “refuge in the metaphysical sense of the word,” considering inner conscious ‘effort’ or ‘work’ to be

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91 Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” The American Historical Review 102, no. 5. 1389.
93 Douglas, “Introduction.” 1. This is an assertion Douglas makes in her introduction to Halbwachs' The Collective Memory. She spends a deal of time discussing Bergson's thinking because Halbwachs' theory was devised in direct opposition to Bergson's thinking.
94 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 256.
95 Ibid. In this statement, Bergson of course, equates space as being delineated by movement. He resorts to natural science to argue this problem.
96 Ibid., 257.
movement. Although he writes of interactions with the matter of the world, he only configures his theory in the inner workings of the mind-body.

In The Collective Memory, Halbwachs confirms that ‘space’ in his theory has both real mathematical dimensions and geographic locations, and it exists beyond the body. Halbwachs links space, individuals, and groups through identity, proposing that “the region of space permanently surrounding us reflects, not merely distinguishes us from, everyone else”. He also alludes to objects around us having special meaning and suggests “place and group have each received the imprint of the other.” However, beyond this, the fourth chapter of his final book lapses into description and it is clear that his thinking is largely unresolved.

When French historian Pierre Nora brought the notion of collective memory to the fore again in the 1980s, his focus was on the spatial ideas suggested by Halbwachs. Like Halbwachs, Nora is concerned about the continuing decline of cultural memory. When Nora writes of our need to “speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” he laments how “hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organise their past”. Nora suggests the values of traditional pre-modern societies and social groups are remembered collectively, and are thus transmitted smoothly into the present before transitioning into the future. To mitigate against forgetting, Nora worked with other French historians to put Halbwachs’ ideas into practice. The historians identified lieux de mémoire – places and objects that resonate in the collective consciousness of the French people and serve as sites of memory.

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97 Halbwachs, The Collective Memory. 129.
98 Ibid., 130.
99 Ibid. Chapter 4, “Space and the Collective Memory” is devoted almost entirely to descriptive passages explaining how space is used for different purposes such as religion, commerce, family life and the law.
100 Klein, “On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse.” 127. Klein suggests Nora’s work was one of two seminal literary events that heralded in a scholarly boom around memory. Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi and Daniel Levy Jeffrey K. Olick, ed. The Collective Memory Reader (New York, USA: Oxford University Press 2011). 437. Olick likewise accord it a similar status.
102 Ibid., 7-8.
103 Ibid., 19. Nora saw the lieux as “mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Mobius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile.”
Nora describes lieux de mémoire as:

... simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, they are lieux in three senses of the word material, symbolic, and functional.\(^{104}\)

Within these categories, Nora lists eclectic examples, including, the Liberation parade down the Champs-Elysees, Cezanne’s, Mont Sainte-Victoire (1902) and Le Tour de la France par deux enfants (1877), a travel-geography book that was used in schools for over seventy years.\(^{105}\) While the objects and their meanings, differ between people, and alter over time, they are nonetheless accorded this significance because people value them and strive to remember them.\(^{106}\)

Although this methodology has been criticised, Nora’s work gives a new importance to everyday place-objects in memory and history.\(^{107}\) Not only are they seen as cultural sites of memory and accorded a status reserved previously for historical monuments and ceremonial events, but they actualise an authentic link between communicative and cultural memory that helps cohere the temporal separations in collective memory.\(^{108}\)

2.5 Propositions for memory and art

To conclude, it is important to consider the conjunction of Bergson’s and Halbwachs’ theories, and how they connect to art. Bergson’s younger contemporary, Walter Benjamin assessed Bergson’s internal, psychological theory of consciousness in his analysis of Marcel Proust’s, Remembrance of Things Past (1913–1927), and found it deficient in terms of spatiality, stating, “where there is experience in the strictest sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past”.\(^{109}\) Benjamin’s statement links to philosopher Paul Ricoeur’s conjecture that inner time is also able to

\(^{104}\) Ibid., 18-19.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 19-23.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 19-20.

\(^{107}\) Frow, “Toute La Mémoire Du Monde: Repetition and Forgetting.” 222-3. Frow describes Nora’s approach as, “nostalgic and auratic”.

\(^{108}\) Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Mémoire.” 23.

accommodate public and commemorative time.\textsuperscript{110} There is a simple observable logic in considering the two as operating together. Halbwachs can thus be seen to compensate for Bergson’s scant consideration of real bodily action in the physical world which naturally accounts for materials - ideas, objects and places - of collective experience. In a similar way, Bergson’s detailed theory of memory operations recompenses Halbwachs shortfall in explaining how memory operations work.

Halbwachs’ thinking can be seen as flawed through his lack of attention to the temporal. As historian Allan Megill notes, Halbwachs believes that memory comes from group understandings that are already formed.\textsuperscript{111} With numerous statements such as, “... there exists a collective memory and a framework for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection,”\textsuperscript{112} Halbwachs goes against the grain of Locke’s supposition (and Bergson’s assumption) that self and identity emanate from memory. Using examples, Halbwachs suggests children do not remember childhood, because their identity through groups is not established.\textsuperscript{113} Bergson however, counters this justification, reasoning that children exhibit spontaneous memory that is not yet fixed to concepts into a past.\textsuperscript{114} If Halbwachs’ theory then “holds that memory is determined by an identity (collective or individual) that is already well established,”\textsuperscript{115} Megill suggests the flaw is in reconciling the claims to particular identities that paradoxically can only be substantiated by memory and history.\textsuperscript{116}

It can be seen that Bergson preferences temporal understandings at the expense of the spatial, while Halbwachs neglects the esoteric temporal for the straightforward reality of the spatial. Bergson interrogates inner, psychological, temporal and spatial understandings, whereas Halbwachs focuses on the outer, universal, group and societal perceptions of time and space. Although these theories are diametrically opposed in their oppositional qualities (inner versus

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{110} Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 101. Refer also to the prior discussion in section 2.1.
\item \textsuperscript{112} Halbwachs, Maurice Halbwachs: On Collective Memory. 38.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Halbwachs, The Collective Memory 35. 41.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Bergson, Matter and Memory. 198-9.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Megill, Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice. 45-7.
\end{itemize}
Art and memory are strongly interconnected in art practice. When making art, individual artists operate in the Bergsonian “attention to life” schema that involves active and experiential interplays with “image objects”. Since imagery is integral to both the formation of memories and the process of remembering, it follows that all art production provides some form of sensory experience that embodies memories, filtered and mediated by the artist and the viewer. This complex process not only draws on individual memory but also on the collective, social and cultural memories held by the artist and by the viewer. The ‘art process’ can thus be seen as a complex interaction between culturally significant objects and ideas that provide the stimuli; artists whose responses are realised in knowledge and skills with materials and art processes, and individuals who engage with and bring their own understandings and memories to the reading of artwork. As English professor, Estella Majozo writes:

At best artistic works not only inspire the viewer but give evidence of the artist’s own struggle to achieve higher recognition of what it means to be truly human. The works are testament to the artist’s effort to convert a particular vision of truth into his or her own marrow.


119 Bergson, Matter and Memory. 71.

All art processes are bound up in concepts of memory associated with time, with the art works performing as objects and carriers of time. Attention must therefore be given to Bergson’s foundational belief that “time ... [is] the central problem of philosophy; for him a direct, subjective perception of inner time is the source of knowledge about the self, and an assurance of free will”. This is a particularly potent proposition in a thesis dealing with the ideas of memory and contemporary art, because it provides more scope for deeply felt experiences that emanate from “the richness and variety of inner, subjective time”.

The operation of memory is well understood in traditional studio art practice, but understandings are not articulated when considering contemporary art, particularly collaborative, performative work. The conjuncture of Bergson’s and Halbwachs’ theories may yield more holistic understandings of contemporary art, with the opportunity to meld language and ideas around image-based and performative memory.

121 Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, Anachronic Renaissance (New York: Zone Books, 2010). 9. Memory is implied in Nagel and Wood’s quote on artworks and time. “No device more effectively generates the effect of a doubling or bending of time than the work of art, a strange kind of event whose relationship to time is plural. The artwork is designed or made by an individual or a group of individuals in some moment, but it also points away from that moment, backward to a remote ancestral location, perhaps to a prior artefact, or an origin outside of time, in divinity. At the same time, it points forward to all its future recipients who will activate and reactivate it as a meaningful event.”


124 Cogent examples of this melding are found in the thesis. Refer to: section 3.5 with Viewland/Hoffman electrical substation (1979) and section 4.2 in Yhonnie Scarce’s Odyssey: Unmapping the End of the World (2015).
3. Memory and contemporary art

3.1 Remembering modern art

Around 1850, ‘Modernism’ gained momentum as a key cultural movement, and the terms ‘modernism’ and ‘modern art’ came into common use as broad descriptors of new art.¹ This generic label was applied to an eclectic group of Western art movements (diagram 5) over the next hundred years.²

Diagram 5: Alfred Bar’s 1936 concept of the modern art movements operating between 1890-1936


² Barr produced the diagram for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA)’s seminal exhibition, Cubism and Abstract Art in 1936. At the time, Barr was MoMA’s founding director and the diagram reflects his personal, Eurocentric view of art. Barr, for example, ignored modern American art. However, his views directly influenced the collecting policies of the museum for at least two decades and consequently, his thinking had a profound influence on shaping the direction of modern art from the 1920s.
Although these movements had very different aesthetics and ideals, they all loosely ascribed to common tenets of Modernism:

- A rejection of history and conservative values (such as realistic depiction of subjects); innovation and experimentation with form (the shapes, colours and lines that make up the work) with a tendency to abstraction;
- and an emphasis on materials, techniques and processes. Modernism has also been driven by various social and political agendas. These were often utopian, and modernism was in general associated with ideal visions of human life and society and a belief in progress. 

Modernism supported the myth of the solitary, genius artist working independently to produce unique artworks. The finished modern artwork encapsulated the artist's private, temporal acts of production. This immersive process was sequestered in the artwork which then operated as an intermediary memory-image, and became an invitation to others to engage, deeply and immersively in viewing.

In a similar manner to Bergson (diagram 1, p7), art critic and historian, Hal Foster describes how Modernism operated in balanced tension at the intersection of two axes; the vertical representing the temporal, and the horizontal representing the spatial (diagram 6). Foster suggests that the avant-garde kept the spatial and

![Diagram 6: Balanced temporal and spatial tensions in Modernist art, based on Foster's description, “Return of the Real”, p xi-xii.](image)

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3 Tate, "Modernism". Any definitive statement of this kind is problematic, given the breadth, longevity, and different agendas that shape thinking around Modernism. However, settling on an institutional definition acknowledges the pivotal role these organisations performed in shaping the modernist movement. This is particularly the case post-World War II when New York art institutions, along with key art critics and collectors, dictated the agenda of late Modernism.

4 Kester, The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context. 3-4. The concept of the lone-artist-genius evolved gradually out of the medieval guild or lodge. Impressionist artists working en plein-air added to the mythology of this idea.

temporal dimensions of artmaking in sensible, dynamic opposition. Seeking fresh inspiration, they would look outward towards community and society while remaining attentive to their art roots by engaging with the knowledge, skills and understandings bound up in art’s history. If Modernism is considered as a single entity, its temporal understandings can be visioned as historical memory (its Bergsonian inner self) and balanced against its societal spatial perceptions held in collective understandings (its Halbwachsian outer self). Bergson understood this balanced “attention to life” as being directly related to ‘wellbeing’ and function as ‘a capable being’.6

### 3.2 Contemporary art beginnings

During the twentieth century, the concept of unique artistry began to be undermined by certain art movements. Marcel Duchamp’s Dada ready-mades suggested the art idea was more important than highly crafted artworks. Decades later, Pop art parodied and exploited market ideology, and created deliberately undifferentiated and unoriginal artworks. The visible hand of the artist that art historian Grant Kester calls “authored consciousness” declined with the use of autonomous work processes, such as frottage, dripped and poured paint.7 The value attached to crafting artworks became more tenuous as artists used manufactured materials, commercial fabricators, and industrial processes. The individual endeavour of the maker-artist consequently became less noticeable. With significant changes to the object – the traditional signifier of art – the art industry struggled to realise and articulate its being – its purpose and meaning – through what was produced.

This was also evidenced in a change to the general name for art of the current period. The term ‘post-modern’ gradually came to fore in the mid-eighties with predictions about the end of art objects made with traditional media.8 This was a time of intense scrutiny within the art world which was preoccupied with

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6 Bergson, Matter and Memory. xv. Douglas, “Introduction.” 2. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 491. Dauenhauer, “Paul Ricoeur.” Bergson, is of course, making this link considering balance in an individual’s psychical operations. Ricoeur suggests that Bergson’s theory of active consciousness has the potential to yield a “capable human being” who exhibits self-understanding of their place in the world “and their life with and among others in time in the world”. Refer also to: Jeffrey K Olick, “Introduction.” 17. These ideas evolved in part from Olick’s thinking.

7 Kester, The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context. 3.

8 Arthur Danto, After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997). 3-4. Danto made these predictions in essays and lectures dating from 1984, and acknowledges that similar predictions were made, almost concurrently, by the German art historian, Hans Belting.
interrogating its own memory and history. Work from earlier periods was often repurposed in different contexts, to explore new oppositional ideas.\textsuperscript{9} Hal Foster describes it as:

\begin{quote}
A postmodernism of resistance ... a counter-practice ... to the official culture of modernism ... In opposition (but not only in opposition), a resistant postmodernism is concerned with the critical reconstruction of tradition ... it seeks to question rather than exploit cultural codes, to explore rather than conceal social and political affiliations.\textsuperscript{10}
\end{quote}

The concept of the ‘postmodern’ period was divisive, and the term did not gain universal acceptance in the art world. The preoccupation with the past was short-lived as the locus of critical discourse moved instead to the immediacy of the present. Importantly though, this time became the transitional period from the modern to the ‘contemporary’.

Foster suggests that this transition “from a medium-specific to discourse-specific practice” ultimately shifted “our notion of what culture is ... and placed art [outside of its own traditional understandings] within a continuum of culture.”\textsuperscript{11} Art began to rely on present cultural perceptions and the knowledge and understandings of other fields of study such as sociology and ethnography, and lost the traditional balance it had with its own field of knowledge (diagram 7, p31).\textsuperscript{12} Effectively, art became less temporal and more spatial in its focus, and with this, less ‘Bergsonian’ and more ‘Halbwachsian’ in its memory operations. Foster’s thinking helps explain the difficulty in pinpointing the diffuse, eclectic character of contemporary art and the conundrum of understanding and evaluating ‘art’ that often operates outside its own traditional base in memory and history.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 3-4. Much of the work discussed in section 3.3 could be described as post-modern. It has also been framed as late modern and early contemporary by different critics and art historians.


\textsuperscript{11} The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century. 199. 202. Foster builds this position using Lawrence Alloway’s ideas found in The Long Front of Culture (1958). Foster suggests this shift had its genesis in the Pop art movement.

The term ‘contemporary art’ is derived, in part, from its more general etymological meaning associated with what is current and occurs within living memory.13 ‘Contemporary’ was first used specifically in an art context in the naming of new art societies and in this milieu, its meaning was conflated with new and ‘cutting edge’ modernist art. 14 Despite its initial use denoting recent, innovative art, the words, ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’ came to be used interchangeably throughout most of the twentieth century to refer to the “passing present” in art.15

Beyond semantics, it is clear that ‘contemporary’ is now the ubiquitous descriptor of global art. Contemporary art historian and theorist, Terry Smith writes:

... by the 1990s, “contemporary” had come to be the predominant descriptor of both current and recent art, and of all its associated modes of presentation, distribution, and interpretation, almost entirely banishing other labels, including those associated with “modern”.16

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13 Sydney Smith, “The Edinburgh Review,” Edinburgh review, or Critical Journal 12 (1808). 480. In 1808, when the term ‘contemporary’ was first conflated with ‘history’, it was used to describe events that occurred within living memory and could be recounted first-hand. Douglas Harper, “Online Etymology Dictionary,” accessed November 26 2016. Its current meaning, “modern, characteristic of the present” dates from around the mid-nineteenth century. Although Harper cites a specific date, 1868, he does not indicate where and how it was used. This date also appears in other sources.

14 Terry Smith, “The State of Art History: Contemporary Art,” The Art Bulletin 92, no. 4 (2010). 371. Smith’s article provides a detailed overview of the etymology of the words, ‘modern’ and ‘contemporary’. Smith names the Contemporary Art Society, formed in 1910 in the United Kingdom, and the Melbourne Contemporary Art Society established in 1938 as art societies that were established to promote avant garde art.


16 Smith (2010) 370. Smith undertook sample surveys at the Getty Research Institute, in Los Angeles (2001-2) and the University of Pittsburgh (2002-3), and supplemented these with searches of the literature from major art institutions in America and Europe. While the survey is not comprehensive Smith believes, “the patterns and repetitions in the data suggest a clear general picture”. 381.
However, this title is often applied heterogeneously and amorphously to all current art so that it can be difficult to decide what the term means beyond art made in the moment. Given its dictionary meaning, it is reasonable to associate contemporary with ‘up to date’, ‘open ended’ art with qualities of “freshness, recentness, uniqueness and surprise” that differentiate it from art of previous periods. Smith suggests the term applies to universal and democratic art, chiefly characterised by a ‘diversity’ that “tries to imagine the world as a differentiated yet inevitably connected whole”. Yet if contemporary art is that which foregrounds difference, within a global, holistic perspective, it is a term that clearly cannot have universal currency. For example, much recent public sculpture that is still made in the modernist tradition falls outside the scope of contemporary art using this criterion.

However, while the exact character of contemporary art is still evolving, it has a history of critical reflection on three key entities – the role of the artist, the art itself, and those interacting with the art, be they viewer or participants. Its focus has shifted:

... from artist to audience, from object to process, from production to reception and emphasizes the importance of a direct, apparently unmediated engagement with particular audience groups (ideally through shared authorship in collaborations).

The shift from modernist towards contemporary art can perhaps be best viewed as a movement from the temporal towards a pre-occupation with spatial understandings associated with place as a site of social interaction.


18 Terry Smith, Contemporary Art: World Currents (Upper Saddle River [N.J.]: Prentice Hall, 2011). 8. Some of these descriptors could apply to art merely because it is novel, but they would then fall away over time.

19 Ibid. Smith acknowledges this is a definition of diversity, applied directly as a descriptor of contemporary art. (original italics)

20 Ibid., 11. Smith labels work that has revised key elements of Modernism as ‘Remodernism’ and Retrosensationalism’.

3.3 The gallery-museum as site

With the contemporary identification of specific sites for art, the modernist circulatory system of art studio, gallery-museum, collector’s home, and auction house began to be undermined.22 In 1970-71, when conceptual artist, Daniel Buren argued for art to be viewed in situ, he was reinforcing the idea that the meaning and memory had diffused to site. He believed artwork had more integrity when viewed in its production site (the studio) compared with a traditional viewing site (gallery or museum).23 Buren saw meaning, once firmly held in the artwork as having diffused into site, so that the artwork and studio needed to be located together to realise the artist’s endeavour.

In the late 1960s, the gallery was perceived as a neutral space, “a no-place”.24 It was thought this stereotype, typified by the white walls and artificial lighting (the fabled “white cube”), allowed the archetypal viewer to engage viscerally and phenomenologically with art. However, the gallery-museum operated actively as a site of memory, both with its architecture and its historical place in culture. By the early 1970s, the modern art museum was increasingly seen as elitist and isolationist in its efforts to prolong the absolute authority that cultural institutions enjoyed in the modernist period.25

Conceptual artists worked within museum-galley spaces and interrogated the spatial characteristics, the cultural memory and the political agendas of these institutions. They challenged the framing of the work and the presumption of the “innocence of its space”26 by reconfiguring and paring back walls to reveal the physical structure of the museum-gallery site.27 Daniel Buren merged inner and outer gallery spaces to form a single display site for his striped work, Within and

22 Douglas Crimp, On the Museum’s Ruins (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993). 17. Crimp maintains the circulatory model can only exist if the meaning sits solely within the artwork itself. Crimp also disputed the independence of the artwork, maintaining that although “in and of itself” implies its does not need a place to realise its meaning, artwork was in fact associated with the museum-gallery.


24 Crimp, On the Museum’s Ruins. 17. With “no-place”, Crimp is drawing on the idea of the modernist art museum as a white cube, a neutral space that was designed to showcase the aesthetic ideas in art.

25 Ibid., 17, 45. Crimp suggests that Modernism “exerted a moral as well as an aesthetic influence” on taste, ensuring clear standards and quality control.


27 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 14-17.
Beyond the Frame (1973) (figs. 1 and 2). Mel Bochner measured and displayed the gallery room dimensions for Measurement Room (1969) (fig. 4). Back-of-gallery, hidden activities were brought to the fore when Michael Asher removed walls that exposed the administration office (fig. 3).
Mierle Laderman Ukeles critiqued the invisibility of the covert menial cleaning activities that occurred out of the public view. She restaged cleaning in performances, during normal open hours, in highly visible areas of the museum (figs. 5-6).28 This shift towards art as an ‘entity-in-site’ acknowledged that the performative nature of the site was critical to realising a work’s meaning. This idea had its roots in the display of the minimalist, sculptural forms of Donald Judd, Robert Morris and others (figs. 7-8, p36). Viewers were required to navigate the gallery to interpret how the relationships between the forms were realised in the space.29 With these works, meaning became more spatial, performative and Halbwachsian.

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28 Ibid., 18-19. Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s Maintenance Art (1973) performances can also be read as a feminist critique because of her use of nappies and diapers as cleaning materials. At the time, Ukele was a new mother seeking to reconcile her art practice with the drudgery of domestic life.

Large scale art installations were another way in which viewers interacted with art objects within assigned, prepared spaces in galleries and museums. One of the earliest, Hélio Oiticica’s *Tropicália* (1967) (figs. 9-10, p.37), was the antithesis of Pop and Minimalist art. Oiticica brought natural objects and materials into the gallery and viewers were asked to penetrate and wander through a series of makeshift shelters and actively interact with the tactile, sensory materials (sand, plants and toys). Oiticica called these structures ‘penetrables’, and in combination, they formed a type of a navigable maze that turned viewing into an active, participatory experience. Oiticica’s aim was to ‘let the real world in’, and make the museum more dynamic, accessible and democratic. He too critiqued the institutional space, and its separation from the real world, but with his installation he also suggested that viewers could have immersive art experiences through active and performative action.

With these interrogations of gallery and museum spaces, artists often presented art concepts, rather than actual artworks. They focused on the conscious act of

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30 Crimp, On the Museum’s Ruins, 159-165. Crimp provides other examples of Richard Serra’s large gallery installations that brought large scale, industrial rusted steel plates and blocks into galleries including: Strike (1969-70), Circuit (1972), Twins (1972), Slice (1980), Elevator (1980). These works operated in a similar manner to Donald Judd’s and Robert Morris’s sculptural works in that the structure and forms were realised when the viewers became an integral part of the space surrounding the objects.


32 Ibid., 63

33 Ibid. Bishop suggests Oiticica’s “drive towards interactivity and sensuous bodily experience” was representative of Brazilian art of the time, and “a political and ethical exigency in the face of state oppression”. A military dictatorship had seized control of the country in 1964, and from 1968 had suspended the constitutional rights of its citizens, amid practices of kidnap, torture and censorship of free speech.
viewing and the interactions between artworks and viewers. The artists relied on the viewing audience to embody interpretation and form which meant the site of ‘meaning’ was dispersed and shared between an art object or idea emanating from the artist, and the gallery-museum site. Artists thus critiqued and reinterpreted the historical purpose of art institutions, recognising the power that gallery-museum sites have in shaping collective memory, in practices that came to be known as ‘institutional critique’. 34

3.4 Place as site

In the late 1960s, Daniel Buren’s argument that the “reality/sincerity”35 of art is lost when artwork is relocated from its place of creation had a natural extension into the production and display of art, beyond the studio-gallery-museum into built and natural environments. The Land or Earth art movement is perhaps the best example of art’s symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. While this contemporary practice broke away from traditional modernist media, through the use of photography, video, mixed-media work, performance and installation, the artist continued to act as the central figure in the art making process.36

34 Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” Artforum International 44, no. 1 (2005).
35 Buren, “The Function of the Studio.” 22-3. Buren connects the “reality/sincerity” idea that informed the work to “the author and his workplace” and to “the environment, the landscape”. He refers specifically to the ‘real’, physical space of the traditional artist’s studio where the finished art intermingles with drawings and processes that inform the work and gives insight into the artist’s oeuvre. He takes this thinking into his own art practice of public and installation art.
36 Painting, drawing, sculpture and printmaking are the traditional art processes associated with modernist art.
Although the artwork had a direct relationship with the environment, it did not require the viewer’s presence to validate its meaning.  

Most land art can now only be accessed as archival documents, photographs and/or films. The image of Richard Long’s, A Line Made by Walking (1967) (fig. 11) records his first journey exploring the notion of trace-mark interactions with nature. In this intervention, Long simply walked back and forth in a straight line across the field until the grass was visibly flattened. The marks produced are an indexical record of the reciprocal action between artist and ground that for Long is about the tactile action of “touching and the meaning of the touching”. Long and

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37 Paul Moorhouse, “The Intricacy of the Skein, the Complexity of the Web: Richard Long's Art,” in Richard Long: Walking the Line, ed. Paul Moorhouse and Denise Hooker Richard Long (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002). 29-43. Viewing art made in situ was often impossible given the minimal, ephemeral and entropic nature of the work, and the fact that was frequently made in natural, often remote locations. Since then, Richard Long has exhibited widely in major museums and art galleries throughout the world. He uses documentary evidence in the form of photographs, text and maps to make his journeys more visible. In addition, his exhibitions have included large mud works applied directly to gallery walls and formal arrangements of rocks. These installations deal with relationships in the natural world, and examine how unity and harmony are derived from pattern and order. Viewer-participants traverse the installations, in mimetic actions that echo Long’s journeys.

38 Richard Long, Paul Moorhouse and Denise Hooker, Richard Long: Walking the Line ( London: New York, N.Y: Thames and Hudson, 2002). 8. Long is quoted in the book’s foreword. Long’s durational walks have taken place on different continents and have titles such as A Walk across ... or Walking in ... that identify exactly where the journeys occurred, affirming the importance of site-specificity.

40 Rosalind E. Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press 1985). 278. Krauss describes Spiral Jetty as a “marked site”. Tufnell, Land Art. 43. Tufnell writes that the openness of the work has meant it has been ascribed with many divergent narratives. Smithson saw it as a representation of entropy, pointing out that it “comes from nowhere and goes to nowhere”. Erin Hogan, Spiral Jetty: A Road Trip through the Land Art of the American West (USA: University of Chicago, 2008). 21. As the book title implies, Erin Hogan saw Spiral Jetty as part of a land art pilgrimage in 2007. Hogan found it “beautifully and subtly distils its experience into those fundamental categories” of “space and time”.

Although Long’s and Smithson’s works are contemporary because their current meaning is constructed through viewer interactions with the sites, they also operate within the modernist paradigm, because at the time of their making, the sites were at once both the context and the art ‘canvas’.

3.5 The ‘public’ urban site

The move towards the spatial-social sphere can be clearly seen in the development and operation of America’s public art program between the late 1960s and the early 1990s. The idea of ‘site-specific’ art situated in open communal spaces came to the fore in 1967 with the implementation of the Art in Public Places Program.41 The ideological shifts in this program map the transition of art as objects-in-sites, to communal-social-sites, and then to sites-of-social-interaction.42

The 1967 National Endowment for the Arts’ (NEA) goal to, “give the public access to the best art of our time outside of museum walls”,43 resulted in large modernist abstract sculptures being placed in open public spaces. It was assumed that this ‘high-art’ would revitalise inner cities, by interfacing between the sterility of

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41Susanne Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys,” in Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art, ed. Susanne Lacy (Seattle, Washington: Bay Press, 1995). 21-22. The Federal Government agency, the National Endowment of the Arts (NEA) implemented the ‘Art in Public Places’ program in 1967. Lacy suggests 1967 was the date from which the contemporary public art movement developed and matured. Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 57. Kwon however, suggests an earlier genesis. In the late 1950s a new type of sculptural art began to be installed in open communal areas and was tagged as ‘public art’. She suggests the idea of ‘site-specific public art’ was apparent, but not articulated in the 1963 Art-in-Architecture program of the General Services Administration (GSA), and numerous local and state Percent for Art programs in the 1960s. These Federal programs had the precedent of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) that was implemented in 1934 to provide artists with an income during the height of the Great Depression in America. Jerry Adler, “1934: The Art of the New Deal,” Smithsonian Magazine, accessed 1 January, 2016, June 2009, http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/1934-the-art-of-the-new-deal-132242698/.

42Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 60. Kwon identifies three distinct ideologies that can be pinpointed in the goals and annual reports of the NEA – “art-in-public-places”; “art-as-public-spaces” and “art-in-the-public-interest”. Kwon elaborates these threads in chapters 3 and 4 of her book. This section of the thesis uses Kwon’s trajectory.

43Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 22. Also refer to: Tom Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art (USA: MIT Press, 2000). 21-3. Public sculptures meeting this criterion tended to be sized-up reproductions of well-known high art museum pieces by renowned international artists. While local communities chose their own public art, initial choices were made around the artworks’ status and value within the art industry rather than how they would perform in a public-social arena. It was thought that the art would be more inclusive and meaningful if it were chosen by the people who would interact with it, a view that was also adopted by state and city percent-for-arts-programs. At the implementation level, selection panels comprising arts and civic representatives were convened by the local mayor (as the people’s representative) to commission artists. Artist proposals might include samples, drawings, and maquettes. This system operates today for government public art commissions in Australia.
modernist buildings and the public. In 1969, Alexander Calder’s La Grande Vitesse, the first sculpture commissioned in the program, was installed in the city centre of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and became a hugely successful example of this strategy.

Unusually, over time, the sculpture transitioned from an-object in-site, to a site-of-social-interaction. Today, La Grande Vitesse (fig. 15) operates actively as a lieu de mémoire, in situ in the plaza, renamed Calder Plaza in honour of the sculptor. The sculpture's birthday is celebrated with an annual arts festival, and a stylised logo of the sculpture is a ubiquitous city symbol.

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44 Dialogues in Public Art, 3-21. Finkelpearl details the decline in the inner cities in America that was attributed to the failure of high modemist architecture. Public art was a deliberate strategy to mitigate this through the healing power of art. Susanne Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys,” in Mapping the Terrain: New Public Genre Art, ed. Susanne Lacy (United States: Bay Press, 1995). 21-2. Lacy suggests a cynic might see this move as a means of extending the market for high art sculpture by gaining public and corporate sponsorship.

45 Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art, 22. The public were informed that they would ‘grow to like it in the future’. Finkelpearl suggests this idea has “become a mantra for the defence of public art – you will like this in the future”. (original italics)


47 Ibid. “The Calder sculpture's birthday is celebrated with an annual arts festival, encompassing ten city blocks and attended by a half a million people.” The logo features on the municipal garbage trucks. Refer also to: Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art, 22-3.
Art promoter and agent, Tom Finkelpearl attributes this:

... to the overriding strength of High Modernism in the early days of the public arts movement. Public art simply meant placing large-scale work in open plazas, marking them as “unique,” even as the strategy became generic. 48

Not all modernist sculptures assimilated into their urban environments as successfully. 49 In 1969, the epithet ‘plop art’ was used to describe the numerous non-descript modernist sculptures that were ‘plopped’ in plazas in front of featureless modernist buildings. 50 The cultural memory of the high art object that was boosted in a museum-gallery setting was often lost in a more social setting. Unlike Calder’s work, these pieces did not transition from their temporal Bergsonian roots to a take on a more spatial, social, Halbwachsian meaning.

When the guidelines for public art were rewritten in 1974 they specified the need for art to have a unique, aesthetic response to its location. 51 The 1978 annual report spoke of working towards “better harmony” and “unity” in the arts. 52 By 1980, shortcomings were acknowledged and there was endorsement of art that integrated into space and had a performative, useful role in meeting public needs. 53

48 Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art. 23. Arts, “Initial Public Art Project Becomes a Landmark”. The success more likely links to the community. The sculpture is situated in the central plaza directly in front of the town hall, a site of civic pride. Local, public subscription paid for two thirds of the sculpture, and the community would be predisposed to like something they have paid for. The installation of the sculpture was memorable, and is still spoken about today by those who witnessed the event.

49 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 60, 63. Kwon suggests the site was often considered a constraint, rather than an inspiration. If site was contemplated it was for the “proper placement of the discrete artwork to best enhance its aesthetic qualities”. Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art. 22-3. Finkelpearl proposed that the artwork was dissociated from the artist in the manner by which it was made. Sculptures were often made of raw industrial materials and fabricated by others, using the artist’s specifications. Most artists did not visit the site. Finkelpearl cites Kwon, “It is important to note that Calder never saw, nor did he feel it necessary to visit the plaza before the sculpture’s installation”. Crimp, On the Museum’s Ruins. 17. Crimp suggests the lack of a visible artist’s hand reduced the prestige of both artist and work in the eyes of the public viewer.

50 Tom Eccles, "Plop," in Plop: Recent Projects of the Public Art Fund, ed. Anna Wehr and Jeffrey Kastner Tom Eccles (London and New York: Merrell Publishers Limited, 2004). 8, 19. The term is an ironic derivation of Pop Art. Eccles attributes its first use to the architect, James Wine in discussion at the art and architecture studio, SITE (Sculpture in the Environment) projects in 1969. As a negative term “plop art” was employed by various factions, from conservatives who preferred memorials, to progressives lobbying for greater attention to site and increased community involvement.

51 Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 23. National Endowment for the Arts, "Annual Report 1978," National Endowment for the Arts,1979, https://www.arts.gov/about/annual-reports. In 1974, the NEA stated that artworks should also be “appropriate to the immediate site” and by 1978 applications were asked “to approach creatively [sic] the wide range of possibilities for art in public situations”.

52 "Annual Report 1978", 4-6. The Chairman, Livingston L. Biddle, Jr., was referring to unity and harmony in arts organisations as well as, “… exploring new possibilities for cooperation with state, community, and neighbourhood arts groups”. He pointed out that unity did not mean uniformity which he believed would be the death of art.

Artists are working in new mediums... with such subjects as ecological and social structures... artists are forcing us to redefine traditional disciplines and even to revise our preconceptions of what art is...54

Changing expectations implied a visual connection between the material quality of the art and the physical nature of the site. As Kwon suggests, this was “advocated as an important step towards making artworks more accessible and socially responsible, that is, more public.”55

With this advocacy, public artwork moved further from its traditional, historical art heritage and became more social in its purpose. Within the art-as-public-spaces paradigm, artists were no longer communing with the natural world, but working in partnerships with architects, landscapers and developers to deliver a homogenous, integrated ‘package’.56 In some cases, artworks were merging into architecture in accordance with ideas about social harmony and unity (fig. 16).57

![Fig. 16: Kenneth Noland, Colour pattern design, lobby of the Arts and Media Building (1985), MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts (detail)](image)

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54 Ibid. The report also mentions the failures. “In past years, we’ve seen some regrettable results when the artwork is an afterthought, commissioned and installed after all else is completed. A sculpture in that situation often ends up looking as though it were stuck on where it didn’t belong.”

55 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 66. In this thinking, there are clear links to the ethos of the Land artists, and Buren’s notions of reality-sincerity, supporting the idea that public artworks could no longer be autonomous and self-referential.

56 Arts, “Annual Report 1980”. “Recently, the Visual Arts Program has had some success in bringing architects and artists together while a project is still being planned. We’re beginning to see some sensational results from this kind of collaboration.”

57 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 72.
The 1979 public art project Viewland/Hoffman electrical substation in Seattle, Washington involved the first ever design team of artists and architects working collaboratively with a public utility company. The unconventional, inaccessible space required a unique site-specific solution. Early on, the artists interviewed residents to canvas community opinion. The final work successfully balances the temporal and spatial constructions of memory. It performs successfully in a social, spatial Halbwachsian realm because the artists and architects worked consultatively and shared knowledge and understandings.

Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art. 26-7. Artists, Andre Keating, Sherry Markowitz, and Lewis Simpson were commissioned by the Seattle Arts Commission and Seattle City Light to work with architects, Hobbs/Fukui on the electrical substation. Finkelpearl discusses the initial problems in the collaboration. This first of its kind collaboration became a lengthy process, with artists and architects learning to work together and having to negotiate new roles for team work in public art. Jahaugh, “Iconic: Viewland/Hoffman Electrical Substation (Seattle),” Iconic Energy Consulting, accessed 30 November, 2014, http://www.iconicenergyco.com/utilities-based-public-art-viewlandhoffman-electrical-substation-seattle/. At the behest of the architects, artists were brought in from the beginning of the design process in the belief that art would help mitigate against the substation's unpopularity with the local community.
These understandings co-exist in the final work. The artwork has a strong visual presence and is not sublimated blandly into the engineering and architectural forms on site. A pivotal final feature is the installation of brightly coloured, folk art whirligigs that are both playful and engaging.\(^{59}\) Other art elements include sculptures, seating, a walkway and signage made in response to the whirligigs (figs.17-20, p44). Even the transformers and switches were painted in the colour scheme of the whirligigs so they too are part of the art installation. Tom Finkelpearl suggests the project was so successfully embraced by the local community, it has been accorded “mythical status” within public art circles.\(^{60}\) The work is innovative, it is fresh and has the element of surprise in its performance as a contemporary artwork-as-public-space. In Foster’s terms, Viewland/Hoffman electrical substation can be seen as having a truth to a folk-art history heritage.

Over time, with the gradual integration of public art into site, there was further advocacy for the public to be able to enter art spaces so they could engage more fully with works.\(^{61}\) With the transition from art-as-object to art-as-physical-place, the artwork came to be considered as a social space, open to shared, communicative memory experiences. When viewed in a social context, the ‘use value’ of such projects became a decisive factor in evaluating the success of the artwork. Where an artist’s decisions had previously centred on aesthetics relating to form and space, functional features such as lighting, seating and pedestrian safety became increasingly important.\(^{62}\) With this, public art became even further distanced from its art heritage. It became more Halbwachsian in its focus as artists and communities developed collective memories about the functional aspects of public art sites.

The controversial removal of Richard Serra’s notorious Tilted Arc (1981) in 1989 (figs. 21-23, p46-7) and its replacement with Martha Schartz’s mounded grass and circular seating in 1997 (figs. 24-27, p 48-9) epitomises public art’s requirement to

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\(^{59}\) Finkelpearl, Dialogues in Public Art. 27. These were made by local artists, Emil and Veva Gehrke from found objects. The artists solicited the Gehikes’ involvement and purchased a whole set of their whirligigs.

\(^{60}\) Ibid. “Word spread that artists had been allowed into the process early, and had made a significant difference. An electrical substation, an infrastructure facility that was the centre of citizen resentment, had been transformed into the focus of local community life ... public art administrators reasoned, artists could be more than merely decorators of a site. They could become ‘place-makers’.”

\(^{61}\) This idea draws on the space and purpose of installation art found in gallery-museum sites.

\(^{62}\) Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. 68.
perform a social function. Tilted Arc was designed to perform in antithesis to the ideals of a social site. When installed the sculpture dictated the movement of pedestrian traffic and obstructed vision across Federal Plaza. It became a provocation to the notion of idealised physical and social harmony by asserting its presence as an art object.

In ensuing the court action, Serra’s argument, “to remove the work was to destroy the work” had a literal truth. The large prefabricated steel panels were manufactured specifically for the location and assembled in situ so the Plaza was the site of creation as well as the place of interaction. The removal of Tilted Arc

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63 Numerous texts recount the controversy surrounding Serra’s Tilted Arc. The following have been used in this thesis: Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*. 150-186. Crimp situates Tilted Arc in relation to Serra’s earlier site specific sculpture in the chapter, ‘Redefining Site Specificity’. Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. 72-84.

64 In interview with Gerald Howagmyan, Serra outlined his ethos “There seems to be in this country [United States] right now, especially in sculpture, a tendency to make work that attends to architecture. I am not interested in work which is structurally ambiguous, or in sculpture that satisfies urban design principles. I have always found that to be not only an aspect of mannerism but a need to reinforce a status quo of existing aesthetics … I am interested in sculpture which is non-utilitarian, non-functional … any use is a misuse.” Cited in *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*. 72.

65 Ibid., 73.

66 Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*. 176-182. The Plaza houses key government office buildings and is adjacent to the federal and state courthouses. The main opposition came from the judiciary who cited personal safety and security issues as key concerns at the court hearing that sanctioned the sculpture’s removal. The opposition was in fact instigated and led by Chief Justice Edward D. Re of the United States Court of International Trade.
indicates that its high art intent was ‘out of step’ with the social agenda for public art at that time.

In hindsight, Serra’s work was ironically successful in its public agenda, precisely because it facilitated genuine (though somewhat negative), viewer interaction. In compelling the public to move in a particular trajectory across the Plaza, Serra created ‘real life’ collaboration. As art critic and theorist, Rosalind Krauss suggests, “The specificity of site is not the subject of the work, but its articulation of the movement of the viewer’s body-in-destination - its medium”.67 However, in sublimating active collective memory to the space and pedestrians in site, the artist withdrew attention from the artwork’s inherent aesthetic and Bergsonian art narrative.

Krauss’s statement also applies to Schwartz’s replacement work. Like Serra, Schwartz directs the pedestrian movement by requiring the public to navigate the seating and domes. Schwartz’s design attempts to marry ‘formal art installation’ with ‘useful urban design’. While the long circular seating adds functionality, the design has been criticised because it offers no shade or shelter.68

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Serra’s and Schwartz’s works provide cogent examples of the schism between modern and contemporary art. While Serra’s high art minimalist sculpture had an integrity to its art roots, and a truthfulness to the artist’s oeuvre, (thus conforming to Bergsonian active consciousness), it appears to have failed to address Halbwachsian community spatial concerns. Schwartz’s solution can also be viewed as a minimalist modern sculpture engaging people in a public space rather than a gallery. It blends into its urban setting and does not successfully perform as ‘high’ art. Nor is it a useful social product because it never successfully fulfils its purpose against the metrics of utilitarian urban planning. Using Foster’s schema, it sublimates its temporal (Bergsonian) artistic roots, but at the same time does not contribute effectively to a Halbwachsian social agenda.

Fig. 24: Martha Schwartz, ‘Federal Plaza’ 1997, (mound detail)  
Fig. 25: Martha Schwartz, ‘Federal Plaza’ 1997, (seating detail)  
Fig. 26: Martha Schwartz, ‘Federal Plaza’ 1997, (view from above)
3.6 The ‘social’ site and community

In 1995, artist, educator, and writer Susanne Lacy used the words ‘new genre public art’ to demarcate a new form of public art from sculpture and installation work. Lacy refers to the growth of a ‘grass roots’ public art movement that had evolved gradually over thirty years and came to the fore in the early 1990s, resulting in a further dematerialisation of the art object. Lacy describes it as:

... visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives... based on engagement... what exists in the space between the words public and art is an unknown relationship between artist and audience, a relationship that may itself be the artwork.\(^{(69)}\)

Site is clearly visualised as a place of active social interaction. Lacy alludes to the artwork having a performative quality and a social agenda, suggesting it may constitute social exchange instead of an object. Consequently, there is less need for permanent exhibition space or a passive viewing-audience.

It follows that the role of the viewer has morphed from being “witness[es] of a spectacle to participants in a situation... [and] extended into being a constitutive partner... actively involved in the whole field of meaning”.\(^{(70)}\) Lacy’s statement suggests that the participants can be ‘anyone’ and ‘everybody’ who is united by a common purpose and empowered to participate actively. The words ‘viewer’

\(^{(69)}\) Lacy, “Cultural Pilgrimages and Metaphoric Journeys.” 19-20. According to Lacy, the term was first used as the title of a three-day symposium, “Mapping the Terrain: New Public Genre Art” held at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, in November 1991. The term ‘new genre’, used from the 1960s to describe new art media (including performance, installation, conceptual and mixed media art) was simply added to ‘public art’, however the term referred to more than new media used in a public arena. Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. chapter 4, 100-137.

and ‘public’ lose relevance. Instead, ‘collaboration’ and ‘community’ become more meaningful in describing these varied social exchanges.

Since Lacy’s writing, this art genre has also been described as ‘socially-engaged art’, ‘community-based art’, ‘experimental communities’, ‘dialogical art’, ‘relational aesthetic art’, ‘littoral art’ and ‘social practice’. Art historian and critic, Claire Bishop uses a different historical trajectory to account for and justify the diverse collaborative and participatory contemporary art practices that have flourished since the 1990s. For her, it is about the “social turn”, connected with political unrest, dissensus and social activation for change.

Social activation is the driver in The Roof is on Fire (1993-1994) project in Oakland, California (figs 28-30, p49-50). Suzanne Lacy, Annice Jacoby, and Chris Johnson

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71 ‘Public’, with its prior association with large scale municipal sculpture, became a poor match.

72 With their etymologies, and established usage in other fields, these words also embody the memory of collective action, group camaraderie and ameliorative behaviour.

73 Claire Bishop, Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (London and New York: Verso Book, 2012). 1. According to Bishop, there are two historical precedents – the European avant-garde circa 1917, and the neo avant-garde that led to the Parisian political uprising in 1968. Both occurred in eras of political upheaval and social unrest, allowing Bishop to postulate that the third signifier for the 1990s collaborative practices was the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the collapse of communism.

74 Ibid., 3. “Each phrase has been accompanied by a utopian rethinking of art’s relationship to the social and of its political potential – manifested in a reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed and debated”. Refer also to: Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” October 110 (Fall, 2004).

coordinated a rooftop performance where 220 public high school students sat together in parked cars and discussed family, social issues and their futures, while the media and over a thousand local Oakland residents listened in.\textsuperscript{76} The event was filmed, and later screened as a one-hour documentary. Kester describes this art as “performative and process-based”, with the artists working as “context providers”.\textsuperscript{77} While the project could be thought entirely Halbwachsian in its purpose and process, scrutiny of its archive shows that artists and students successfully integrated social purpose with art knowledge and processes of performance, installation, photography, and video.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} Lacy, "The Oakland Projects (1991-2001)". Although the conversations were “unscripted and unedited” conversations, there was an extensive preparation period over two years leading up to the performance. Lacy details this on her website. This was the first of eight major projects and The Roof is on Fire was instrumental in determining the nature of several of the subsequent artworks.

\textsuperscript{77} Kester, Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art. 1.

\textsuperscript{78} The final performance was preceded by two years of intensive work with the students. The students not only worked with the artists but with educators and sociologists to understand and develop skills in media, art and communication. This process is detailed on both websites. Lacy, "The Oakland Projects (1991-2001)". "The Oakland Projects (1991-2000)".
This chapter’s examination of the devolution of modernism shows that spatial and temporal understandings in memory sit latently behind contemporary art’s endeavour to articulate its purpose and identity. The evolution of contemporary art has occurred amidst a wider and ongoing societal questioning of memory-identity.79 The dilemma around the diffuse nature of contemporary art, and its relationship with modernism, is similar in many ways to the dilemma of deciding how individual and collective memory operate together in modern memory. When Gabriel Motzkin writes the “nature of the collective call to individual action has changed,”80 and that “it is social rather than personal, and it substitutes performance or acting out for images”,81 he is speaking of collective memory. He could just as easily be writing about contemporary art.

With the emergence of site-specific and socially engaged practices, the meaning of art has flowed from the artist and the work, to the context and participants. With an increasingly social and performative agenda, art has become more spatial, more collective and more Halbwachsian in realising its meaning. However, if art needs as Foster suggests, to become more temporal in its direction to maintain a dynamic tension with its past, it requires more Bergsonian thinking.

79 This statement alludes to the Western world’s recent preoccupation with memory and identity, evidenced most strongly in the 1970s-90s, in all facets of society, particularly in academia. This time period is frequently referred to as a ‘memory boom’. Numerous texts attest to this period: Andreas Huyssen, Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2003). 11-29. Megill, Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice. 42-6. Jeffrey K Olick, “Introduction.” 3-6. The authors suggest ‘memory boom’ is a phrase commonly used to describe the preoccupation with memory in the late twentieth century.


81 Ibid., 10.
4. Memory, contemporary art across global communities

In the twenty-first century, residency and community art projects have proliferated as contemporary art has become more globally-focused. Culture and communication academic, Nikos Papastergiadis sees the community and global contexts as functioning symbiotically:

[to] have an attachment to specific place, but also to participate in the broader debates on what it means to be human, is influenced by the formation of new trans-national social spaces.

Papastergiadis suggests artists who once operated within a local community-nation focus, are now increasingly performing in a community-global practice.

This chapter discusses artworks from the Spaced 2: Future Recall, and the Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10 residency programs, and the PUBLIC16 street art program orchestrated by the art organisation, FORM. These programs share common features. All operate within a community-global praxis. They are run by non-profit art organisations with management teams that interface (to varying

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1 Smith, What Is Contemporary Art? Smith's book is devoted to understanding contemporary art. He identifies the growth of the internet, the phenomena of large scale exhibitions that travel internationally; biennials, triennials, and Documentas; the globalisation of the art market; spectacle art; the growth of large contemporary art museums, and the low cost of travel as some factors that have contributed to the globalisation of contemporary art.

2 Papastergiadis, "Collaboration in Art and Society: A Global Pursuit of Democratic Dialogue." 280-1. Papastergiadis made the statement in reference to a project called, Liminal Spaces that responded to the historic traffic artery that connects Jerusalem and Ramallah, known as Road 60.


degrees) between the artists and participant-viewers. While all are orientated towards the creation of art objects, active participation and collaborative processes are also foregrounded in their rhetoric because they are viewed as integral processes in making art. All three give importance to ‘place’ as a site of meaning.

4.1 The space-site-place nexus

The concept of ‘site’ as a ‘place’ of specific meaning came to the fore again at the turn of the twenty-first century. At this time, ‘place’ was conceived as having a unique meaning derived from deep personal, lived experience. Connection to place was seen as a way of ameliorating the memory-identity crisis associated with the rapid spatial and temporal change that was occurring throughout the Western world. Creative producer, Marco Marcon coheres the special status of place, by positioning it against ‘space’ in his statement:

... the homophonic link between ‘space’ and ‘place’ seems to promise an equally close semantic bond. Yet the relationship between the two ideas is a complex and ambiguous one. Space is a notion of highest generality, but seen from the vantage point of concrete human experience, it connotes an abstract potentiality that has not yet been formed or determined. Place, on the other hand, represents a specific and concrete segment of the spatial continuum, laden with meaning and history. Space becomes a place when its abstract and open-end formlessness is seized upon by an agency – an individual, a community, or a people - giving it a form, a name and a history.

As Marcon suggests, place is a construct that is used to describe physical locations and sites of social, communal interaction. Australia is a diverse multicultural society where many people have deep connections to place and land. For many indigenous Australians identity is, for example, irrevocably bound up in

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6 In the art world, site-specificity became important the late 1960s as a key idea demarcating modern and contemporary theory and art practice (discussed in section 3.4). Meyer, “The Functional Site; or the Transformation of Site Specificity.” 23. Site-specificity was associated with being present.

7 David Harvey, “From Space to Place and Back Again,” in Mapping the Futures Local Cultures, Global Change, ed. Barry Curtis Jon Bird, Tim Putham, George Robertson and Lisa Tickner (USA and Canada: Routledge, 1993). 3-29. Harvey writes about Martin Heidegger’s understanding of place as the locus of being, and juxtaposes this thinking against the Marxist thinking about place. Harvey describes generic places as: locations, regions, milieus, localities; while specific places are called as: countryside, wilderness, cities, towns, nation states. Emotive words and metaphor offer rich, associated meaning. Place, for example, can be a natural environment, community, landscape, a home-dwelling. We speak of: ‘the place of the heart’, ‘place of landscape in the Australian psyche’, and ‘my place in the community’. Harvey suggests that this multiplicity shows, “some underlying unity which ... reveal[s] a great deal about social, political and spatial practices in interrelation with each other”. Refer also to: Lucy R. Lippard, The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society (New York: The New Press, 1997). 4-20.


9 Marcon, From Space to Place. 3.
sovereign ties to country, established and maintained over eons.10 Other Australians, both rural and urban dwellers, likewise have deep ties to specific locations that are acquired through social interactions and lived experiences with physical places. This concept of place is premised on the belief that personal and collective identity is realised through memories, and emotional attachments.11 These attachments to place generally develop over time, and an individual may have several ‘place’ attachments at any one time (diagram 8).

10 Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was growing public awareness of the deep ties indigenous Australians have with place and country. Australian High Court rulings including the Mabo decision (1992) and the Wik decision (1996) gave traditional owners the right to make land right claims; and The Australian Federal Government passed the Native Title Act 1993 establishing the process for claims. Alongside, there was increased understanding of the plight of the stolen generation of Aboriginal people. Australian Institute of Australian and Torres Strait Islander Studies, "Land Rights," AIATSIS, accessed September 15, 2016, http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/land-rights.

11 Lippard, The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society, 5. 7-8. ‘Rootedness’ was tied up with emotional attachments and feelings such as sentimentality, nostalgia, and romance. Lippard admits she cannot help write about place “without occasionally sinking into ... [the] seductive embrace” of “romanticism and nostalgia”.

Diagram 8: Place as a site of meaning developed from real interactions over time. source: Valdene Diprose
Artists participating in the Spaced 2: Future Recall residency program in 2013-4 were asked to focus on different constructs of place and community using this thinking:12

...historical, cultural and natural heritage are the contested grounds on which different and sometimes conflicting interpretations of community identity engage each other. These disputations about the meaning of the past are important because they provide the means of making sense of the present and envisaging possible futures.13

Multi-disciplinary US artist Daniel Peltz tapped into the collective memory of the Tom Price community with his Future Recall project, When we dig, things come up.14 Peltz’s artwork is derived from a personal interest in the “ways in which people develop a kind of dual consciousness which is contained in the body and the experience of the body as they are performing labour”.15 Borrowing from the history of Tom Price as an iron ore mining town, Peltz mirrored the mining process and adopted a pseudo-itinerant mining role when he “extracted material everywhere” he went.16 He kept a diary, made notes, and elicited stories and snippets of collective memory in day-to-day conversations with local residents:17

Applying the same minimum standards used in the mining industry [65 percent purity] to the narrative fragments...selected fragments were then shipped to a Chinese opera company and a landscape painter, following the same trade routes as the mined iron ore...[there] artists ‘refined’ the...fragments and returned a Beijing opera and a series of landscape paintings.18

In the work, Peltz thus facilitated an import-export manufacturing process where he intermingled Australian collective memory and history (the raw material), with

12 Appendix 1 contains the transcript of an interview with Marco Marcon, Artistic Director and co-founder of International Art Space in Perth.
16 Marcon, Spaced 2: Future Recall. 102.
17 Spaced 2, “Daniel Peltz”. Peltz, for example, was initially drawn to Tom Price’s pre-existing connection to America through the story of fellow American Tom Price (the town’s namesake) who flew over the Pilbara in the early 1960s prospecting for iron ore. Peltz tells an anecdote, about a letter Price wrote to Henry Kaiser, the head of Kaiser Steel saying, “God made these mountains of iron ore. If we can’t make a mountain of money from them then God would have wasted his time.” This quote from the video recording features in the opera, though using dramatic licence, it is his daughter, Shirley Price who purports to be the recipient of the letter in the opera.
traditional Chinese art practices tied to cultural memory (manufacturing), to produce hybrid artworks (products/commodities).

For this, Peltz used his own concepts of community-place to meld personal and collective memory, alongside distinctive art practices in two culturally diverse communities. He presented a particular construct of community operating within a global praxis.

In terms of memory, the project provided rich opportunities to realise communicative memories though informal everyday conversations with Tom Price residents. At a deeper level, the intercultural communication promoted the exchange of cultural memories. In this way, the project was clearly spatial and Halbwachsian in its thinking.

Peltz is “fascinated by communities whose rhythms are mediated by the marketplace” and this clearly influenced how he conceived his artist role. Conflating it with the itinerant miners in Tom Price, he stated:

I’m not so different from all the other contract labour in this company town ... I’ve been sent here to mine, to craft a life from the excess. I am drawn to the itinerant nature of this town.

With this construct, Peltz aimed to make, “visible again the money, machinery and manpower of the production cycle.” However, the ‘artist-miner’ was a naive joining. Peltz worked as a facilitator-manager, orchestrating and outsourcing artwork, not as a labourer unearthing ore. Peltz’s ‘construct’ of effort

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19 "Tom Price: A Company Town". In conversation, Peltz remarks that, “Chinese Opera is embedded in the landscape of China, just as iron ore is embedded in the Australian landscape”.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 68. Peltz makes this statement in conversation with Coleman.

22 Ibid.
does not equate with Bergsonian conscious action which involves struggle and intuitive responses to the matter of the world.\textsuperscript{23}

At best artistic works ... give evidence of the artist's own struggle to achieve higher recognition of what it means to be truly human. The works are testament to the artist's effort to convert a particular vision of truth into his or her own marrow.\textsuperscript{24}

In failing to literally get his hands dirty in the red earth of Tom Price, and make art himself, Peltz works at a distance, raising the question of whether he actively involves himself in the immersive act of creation that arguably yields deep understandings of place. His mining is merely a metaphoric 'dig' for information.

This lack of depth in understanding place is (unsurprisingly) evidenced in Chang Yi-Tsu's drawing of Tom Price featuring a stereotyped kangaroo (fig. 36, p60). Made in response to Peltz's information, the marks seem shallow when compared with the conviction and fine detail in the third drawing in the When we dig, things come up series, Baotou, depicting a local steel city in northern China (fig. 37, p60).

This however, may be the very point Peltz is making with the work. When he speaks about the information passed on only needing to be sixty-five percent 'right', he suggests deep understandings of place don't develop with transient living. Peltz, thus, passes on a tourist-traveller narrative of Tom Price which would account for the clichéd kangaroo atop Mt Nameless. Peltz's work then becomes a critique and comparison of the 'value' attached to cultural and capitalist market driven endeavour. The juxtaposition of the export material, that is essentially the unique 'place' of Tom Price against the import of Chinese artworks that are infused with cultural memory suggests Tom Price may be selling its heritage (or it has none) and importation is needed to overcome the deficit. Peltz sees the Tom Price landscape as “daily blasted and minced and taken elsewhere”.\textsuperscript{25} In interview, Peltz was reluctant to call Tom Price a community “because a community is by definition static.”\textsuperscript{26} This is however, a very narrow, old understanding of

\textsuperscript{23} Mark Antliff, Inventing Bergson: Cultural Politics and the Parisian Avant-Garde (USA: Princeton University Press, 1993). 3. Antliff recounts Bergson's response when he was asked to assess the relationship of Cubism, he condemned it "for analysing artistic practice instead of intuitively preforming it." Peltz's work can likewise be considered as constructed and orchestrated in its execution. Refer also to section 2.2. of the thesis.


\textsuperscript{25} Coleman, "Tom Price: A Company Town". 66.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
community. Perhaps Peltz used his own sentimental, romantic construct of ‘traditional community’ to show how a different concept of community operations in the global market economy.

The Spaced 2 program encouraged resident artists to engage in depth with the unique specificity of place, and Peltz can be criticised for presenting a one-dimensional view of Tom Price, and not producing a truly representative collective memory of the community. He discounts the long term permanent residents and the indigenous past of the local area, forgetting to tell us that the Eastern Guruma people have always called Mt Nameless, Jamdunmunha.

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27 Peltz appears to be adhering to the idea that a sense of community-place is derived from deep personal, lived experience.
Fig. 35: Daniel Peltz and Chang Yi-Tsu, 'When we dig, things come up - Fontana, California [Kaiser Steel Mill]' 2014, photo: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo

Fig. 36: Daniel Peltz and Chang Yi-Tsu, 'When we dig, things come up - Tom Price' 2014, photo: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo

Fig. 37: Daniel Peltz and Chang Yi-Tsu, 'When we dig, things come up – Baotou' 2014, photo: Robert Frith, Acorn Photo

Images: Marco Marcon and Joanne Sandell, Spaced 2: Future Recall (p103)
Peltz's tangible legacy is a filmic recording of the opera (figs. 33-34, p60) that remains in Tom Price. There is an intriguing uncertainty as to how the community will construct memories around this memory object. Perhaps the opera will, as Marco Marcon suggests, be a “means of making sense of the present and envisaging possible futures.”

4.2 The ‘global-functional’ community

Since their inception in 1998, the residency-based Mildura Palimpsests have examined spatial and temporal understandings of community and place using the notion of palimpsest. The first director, Ian Hamilton made the connection to the ancient Greek palimpsest documents with his statement:

A parchment which has been partly erased and re-inscribed evokes the marks made by human settlement on the land, the passage of time, presence and absence, and the web of inter-dependence connecting the natural and the cultural, the material and the immaterial.

The palimpsest statement establishes strong analogous time-space relationships with the Australian landscape. Palimpsest text is erased and overwritten. Traces that remain are overlaid with new meanings. Australia is likewise often described as an old land – an ancient place, continually re-inscribed by nature and human habitation.

In the year leading up to a palimpsest, all participating artists undertake residencies in the Mildura region and are asked to produce art that engages with the palimpsest concept. Residency outcomes are displayed in a four-day culminating festival, held over the long weekend in October.

28 Marcon, "Foreword.” 8.
29 Vivian, "Inland.” 5.
32 Jonathan Kimberley, interview by Valdene Diprose, 30 April 2016. Refer to Appendix 3. Residencies can be for a few days or up to a year in length. The time frame is largely decided by the artist.
Each biennale residency program also has a unique theme, overlaying the founding concept. Artist and curator, Jonathan Kimberley’s Palimpsest #10 curatorial statement begins with the words:

... everywhere all at once ... here, is focused around a series of intercultural, durational and collaborative journeys aimed at expanding real-time discussion and engagement with the idea of ‘global intercultural contemporaneity’ and the reality that it has always been everywhere all at once ... here ...

Alongside this statement, Kimberley posed the question: “What does connection to country, groundedness and local identity mean in an age of globalization and technological revolution?” With the words, ‘all at once’, ‘everywhere’ and ‘global’ the theme of Palimpsest #10 is oppositional to Ian Hamilton’s founding statement. In conversation, Kimberley confirmed the divide and spoke of Hamilton’s statement as being old fashioned in its preoccupation with linear Western notions of time and overlays of trace marks. Instead, Kimberley has a Bergson-like vision of temporal past-presentness where memories are omnipresent, and ready for activation. In his schema, artists and viewers also operate as literal/virtual travellers, seeking global interconnectivity (diagram 9, p63). These outward looking actions can also be viewed as being spatial and Halbwachsian in nature.

33 Helen Vivian, Mildura Palimpsest #8: Collaborators and Saboteurs, ed. Arts Mildura (Mildura, Victoria: Sunnyland Press, 2013). 9. Palimpsest #8 theme, “takes up the threads of ... combined histories in order to encourage cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary exploration of the created worlds we inhabit.” “Inland.” In 2013 then-curator Helen Vivian revisited the notion of palimpsest as the main theme of Palimpsest #9, with a dialogue about the cultural significance of the “type of marks we make”.

34 “Everywhere All at Once ... Here, Curatorial Statement, Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10,” Mildura Arts, 2015, http://mildurapalimpsestbiennale.com/program/curatorial-statement/. The full statement can be found in Appendix 2.


36 “Conversation with Jonathan Kimberley.” Refer to the transcript in Appendix 3 for this part of the conversation in full. Fettling, “The Space of Palimpsest.” Fettling argues the opposite stating: “a palimpsestuous space is non-linear, is layered by intention, accident, ambition, progress and failure”. Fettling uses Henri Lefebvre’s “notion of space that is both dynamic and interactive: lived spaces; spaces that develop, grow, decline, metamorphose” to argue this viewpoint.
Kimberley’s ideas (and Bergson’s past-present) connect to Australian indigenous understandings of space and time. In interview, Kimberley acknowledged this, but was reluctant to make definitive statements about Aboriginal culture because he has no authority to do so.

The idea of artists as global travellers, seeking understandings and finding interconnectivity underpinned the most ambitious residency of Palimpsest #10. In the Unmapping the End of the World (2014) project, fourteen international and

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37 Kwon, One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity. Kwon discusses the concept of the nomad traveller in chapter six, writing from a personal perspective: A frequent traveller, Kwon suggests the logic of nomadism validates being “out of place all too often” to the extent that belonging to specific places “seems less and less relevant in the constitution of self”.

38 Kimberley, “Conversation with Jonathan Kimberley.” Kimberley acknowledges that he does not have the right to make definitive statements because he not Aboriginal. However, he does have a long history of close work with Indigenous communities.
Australian artists (both indigenous and non-indigenous) ‘walked country’ in three World Heritage sites on different continents (fig. 38, p63). The journey began in Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area (Mungo National Park), 110 kilometres north-east of Mildura, proceeded to Kumano Kodo UNESCO World Heritage Walk in Japan and then moved to Valcamonica Rock Art UNESCO World Heritage Site in Northern Italy (figs. 39-44, p64-5). The artists presented their art responses at the four-day Palimpsest #10 festival.

Indigenous Kokatha/Nukunu South Australian glass artist Yhonnie Scarce’s response, Odyssey (2015) (figs. 47-48, p67) was a performative work that explored how site-place operates in the psyche of the global-traveller artist. Scarce asked her fellow Unmapping the End of the World artists to identify and place a soil

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39 10th Mildura Palimpsest Biennale 2015, "Unmapping the End of the World," Arts Mildura, accessed 25 May, 2015. The artists involved were: Daniel Browning (Bundjalung/Kuilli); Daniel Crooks (Australia); Camilla Franzoni (Camuni/Italy); Julie Gough (Tebrikunna); Jonathan Kimberley (Australia); Mishka Henner (France/UK); Sasha Huber (Switzerland); Puralia Meenamatta (Jim Everett) (Plangermairenner); Ricky Mitchell (Paakantji); Kumpei Miyata (Japan); Daryl Pappin (Mutthi Mutthi); Koji Ryui (Japan/Australia); Yhonnie Scarce (Kokatha/Nukunu); Lyota Yagi (Japan).

40 United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), “World Heritage Sites,” UNESCO, accessed May 20, 2016, http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/. The world heritage status means all three sites are accorded special protection because of their outstanding, internationally important attributes. All have significant histories with evidence of unique, early cultures. Willandra Lakes Region: This location contains fossil remains of a series of lakes and sand formations dating from the Pleistocene period; and there is archaeological evidence, with the discovery of Mungo Woman and Mungo Man, of human occupation dating back 45–60,000 years. Kumano Kodo: For over 1,000 years pilgrims have used a network of walking trails, known as the Kumano Kodo, to traverse the mountainous Ki Peninsula to worship at the sacred shrines at Kumano. The Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes are listed with UNESCO World Heritage as part of the “Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range”. Valcamonica: This site, in Italy’s mountainous Lombardy region, has one of the world’s greatest collections of prehistoric petroglyphs. More than 140,000 symbols and figures were carved into the rock over a period of more than 8,000 years.
sample from a significant site-place into glass vials she had made. The soil was added with due ceremony, on the first day of Palimpsest #10, at a bush symposium held in Mungo National Park (figs. 45-48, p67).  

Three artists chose not to donate soil. Koji Ryui (Japan/Australia) contributed ground charcoal. As a city dweller, Ryui drew on cultural and personal memories and decided charcoal was a better referent of his Japanese art making heritage. Mishka Henner (France/UK) ‘added’ air from Mungo because he sees himself as a global citizen, with no affiliation to specific sites. Jonathan Kimberley added water, also from Mungo National Park, because of a past art collaboration with the indigenous artist Patrick Mung Mung. In the Living Water, Travelling Water

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41 Representatives of the traditional owners were all present, and these custodians spoke about the significance of ‘walking country’. Besides the large jar, artists filled a number of small glass vials. There was one for each artist and these were distributed after the palimpsest.
(2004) collaboration, Mung Mung saw himself as, “living water, the spring water that is always there in the ground”, and Kimberley “as the travelling water that comes and goes like the rain” 42.

Artists who were present spoke about their chosen soils’ origins, and connections to a site-place that is important to them. 43 Many connected this place to the culturally significant sites they had visited. John McBride, for example, donated soil from Sydney’s Bronte-Bondi cliff walk, and linked the indigenous petroglyphs along this walk with those found in Valcamonica. The artist stories helped the viewing audience to connect with the individual memories and overall collective-group narrative of the journey. Individual memory was an important part of this collective, ritualistic enactment, with the glass vials becoming memory repositories (fig. 48, p67). The intermingling earth, sand, water and air became signifiers of the artists coming together on their journey in country. The work activated both individual and collective memory. 44 It affirmed the connections between the two and attests to the innate human need to realise selfhood through connections to place, other people and culture.

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42 For Kimberley, this social narrative served as a metaphor for his life journeys – he has worked nomadically, in various Aboriginal communities over a number of years. Refer to Appendix 3.

43 This was not a straightforward task since approval was needed to bring soils in from overseas, and the samples required irradiation before they could be released for the art project.

44 This was a very evocative process. Viewers began to discuss the soil and locations they would have chosen.
Fig. 45: Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10 Bush Symposium, Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area

Fig. 46: Daniel Crooks, Sasha Huber adding soil to glass vials

Fig. 47: Glass Vials, filled, Bush Symposium, Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area, 2015

Fig. 48: Yhonne Scarce, ‘Odyssey: Unmapping the End of the World’ 2015, Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10, 2015
Paakantji/Mungo artist, Ricky Mitchell’s response to Unmapping the End of the World was firmly rooted in local place. From the outset, Mitchell had a clear vision that his Grandmother’s story of country needed to be told. His video, Ngymaka-Luku Kulpa-Ngupaa-Kiirda (2015) (figs, 49-50) honoured her role as “the first Aboriginal lady to fight for land, and win it, in 1981 and … [before going] on to

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45 Kimberley, “Conversation with Jonathan Kimberley.” Kimberley mentioned it was the first time Mitchell had travelled overseas (a fact also mentioned in Mitchell’s video conversation with his Grandmother), but he was not swayed from the importance of his original idea.
start the Native Title claim for the Paakantji nation". Mungo National Park is part of Mitchell’s country, so for him, her story provided a poignant beginning to his Mapping the End of the World journey. Mitchell present a video of an informal interview he conducted with his grandmother alongside press clippings that documented her struggle. The installation was a quiet contemplative space to ponder his grandmother’s unassuming account alongside highly political, emotive press narratives. With this work, Mitchell let viewers into his Grandmother’s lounge room to listen into a family story, providing a cogent example of how communicative, shared memories are built through simple conversations. While Mitchell had a general understanding of his Grandmother’s history, she enriched his knowledge with details drawn from lived personal memories.

In contrast, Mishka Henner’s (France/UK) art installation, Egg Shells: Unmapping the End of the World (2015) (figs. 51-52) was a travel evocation that explored movement in global territorial space. The artwork involved viewers walking a

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47 On a personal note, I immediately remembered the yams I had shared with my father, where he had recounted his struggles establishing a new land farm.

48 Mishka Henner, interview by Helen Vivian, April 1, 2015. Conceptually, the installation had a strong connection to Henner’s internet based, photography arts practice that addresses the territorial space of “us in a technological moment; alone, disconnected … [as] alienated voyeurs of other people’s lives".

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Fig. 51: Mishka Henner, ‘Egg Shells: Unmapping the End of the World’ 2015, Installation, (detail, day one), photo: Fleur Ruddick

Fig. 52: Mishka Henner, Egg Shells: Unmapping the End of the World’ 2015, Installation, (detail, day three)
corridor that was strewn with carefully arranged egg shells. Since the corridor connected two galleries within the Mildura Arts Centre that were both exhibiting artworks from the Unmapping project, the viewer became part of a metaphorical journey between art sites. This ‘journey’ was a sensory experience, with egg shells fracturing and collapsing beneath the feet of viewers. While the corridor’s context was about containing and directing movement to a particular destination, the shells suggested the tentative, uncertain nature of travel itself. This performative work recalls the reciprocal action of Richard Long’s journeys “about touching and the meaning of the touching”. Henner proposed the need to walk lightly, to look carefully. Egg Shells can thus be considered as a small, reflective critique of the artist’s personal journey, walking country in Mapping the World. There was also an opportunity for viewers to enact personal memory journeys. Watching the sensory experience of the breaking egg shells evoked involuntary Proustian, madeleine biscuit-like moments.

In an interview, immediately before the journey, Henner was asked why he had taken five weeks out of a frenetic international art schedule to participate in an intercultural collaborative project:

... I’ve been reflecting a lot on my working process lately, thinking about my dependence on screens, the Internet, Photoshop, etc. After spending countless hours each day behind a computer for years on end, it’s easy to start to feel disembodied. So, the opportunity to go on a five week walk with other artists, historians and anthropologists, and share ideas about culture, time and space was too good to miss ... it doesn’t really get any better than seeing 35,000-year-old rock art.

Henner’s admission of disembodiment, alongside his artwork that deal with territorial space and tactile sensory experience, suggests that “rootedness’ and “groundedness” in real experience is important in the constitution of self. This returns to the key question for the Unmapping project, “What does identity mean in an age of a global technological revolution?”

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50 Proust, Swann’s Way. 50-1. On a personal note, as I crunched the eggshells underfoot, I involuntary recalled collecting eggs for the first time as a small child with my mother, chasing the hens from their nests with a stick, then holding an egg so tightly for fear of dropping it, that the shell crushed between my fingers. I overheard others recalling similar stories.
51 Henner, “Blurring the Boundaries of Space-Time: Interview with Mishka Henner.”
Reflecting, Kimberley observed:

One of the interesting aspects... was the absolute devotion to the worldwide web by the majority of the artists on the un-mapping journey... the contemporary sense of rootedness and groundedness was being able to check your email. There were many occasions... where there was no Wi-fi access, notably out at Mungo for the first week. On the day before... some stayed up all night to make sure everyone knew they were going to be out of contact... the first day at Mungo it was quite concerning for a few artists, but then interestingly, they all said later that it was really valuable... because it meant that they could engage with the rootedness and groundedness of the place. And that was really significant, but at the same time, as soon as there was Wi-fi access... everyone was on it, immediately, so it was a fascinating contrast... of what rootedness and groundedness might mean in the contemporary world.53

This suggests that while the artists may have just been checking emails and the like, at the same time they were confirming their temporal presence in a local place (within a vast network of global space). Even whilst travelling, most participants seemed to need a certain rootedness to actual place. Philosopher, Henri Lefebvre suggests this idea depends on establishing difference:

... abstract space tends towards homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, [but] a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences.54

How then do memory understandings clarify these contemporary artworks?

Scarce, Mitchell and Henner artworks all operated within a memory framework to clarify how the relationships between the spatial ideas of the global travel transpose into thinking about local community as place. In the Unmapping the End of the World residency the artists experienced this for themselves. The three world heritage sites visited were steeped in cultural memory and provided a cogent comparison to the actual plane journeys. The artworks acted as memory-objects and they drew viewers into the performances, to become active participants. There were possibilities to imagine and consider how familial relations, the physical materiality of place and the way we interact with the world shape understandings of community and place. In different ways, each work gave importance to individual and collective understandings of unique places that are understood in Bergsonian constructs of personal lived time.

53 Kimberley, "Conversation with Jonathan Kimberley." Refer to Appendix 3 for a partial transcript of the conversation.

4.3 The ‘global’ artist in community

The street artists who produced large scale wall murals for FORM’s PUBLIC16 program epitomise the stereotype of the global artist who is mobile and transient in local communities. International street artists of high repute were brought to Perth to work alongside local artists in a street art festival during April, 2016.55

Street artists are generally more transient and mobile than artists who work in long-term residencies. They move rapidly from city to city operating in networked and homogenised cultural spaces. Numerous media platforms provide instantaneous, global interconnectivity and support them (through their work) to maintain multiple virtual presences. It follows then that the FORM artists have little need (or time) to interrogate the local Western Australian context, and site specificity in their art-making because the Perth and Albany sites, and everyone involved, are effectively constituent parts of a homogenised globalised space.

This thinking permits the repetition of largely undifferentiated works, an idea that was embedded in the rhetoric of the PUBLIC16 program.56 At the Curtin University site Italian artist Millo painted a persuasive example of this thinking (fig. 53, p73). His mural features black and white high rise buildings and shows a young, scaled-up protagonist exploring this urban landscape.57 These motifs are instantly recognisable as part of his oeuvre (figs. 54-58, p73). A simple internet search confirms Millo’s and the other artists’ status as global producers. This global presence not only affirms the artists’ international reputation, but also adds value to the works’ in situ social, economic and cultural status.58

55 PUBLIC16 was implemented in Claremont, a suburb of Perth; at the Curtin University campus in Perth and in the Great Southern City of Albany in Western Australia during April 2016. PUBLIC16 festival was part of a three-year cycle of street wall art. PUBLIC14 involved forty top international street artists, worked over nine days and decorated 30 walls, lanes and other public places in the Perth central business district and in Northbridge. During 2015, fifty artists worked on FORM’s PUBLIC15 program, decorating 42 walls, including an enormous abstract work on eight of the grain silos in the rural town of Northam. Art work and additional information can be found at: FORM, “Public2015”; “Public2016”; Publication: Form: Public Mural painted at Curtin University in Perth and the City of Albany, in southern Western Australia are discussed in this section of the thesis.

56 Promotional material and guided site tours continually drew attention the artists’ international status.

57 Information is drawn from a FORM art tour conducted at Curtin University on 10 April, 2016 when some artists spoke to their work. Francesco Camillo Giorgino, alias Millo initially trained as an architect which may explain his preoccupation with building motifs.

58 Andy Sharp, “Curtin University’s Andy Sharp Reflects on the Effect of Public 2016 on the Campus, and Asks If a University Cannot Experiment, Then Who Can?,” in Public, ed. Mags Webster (Claremont, Western Australia: FORM, 2016). 49. “Curtin partnered with FORM to bring vitality to the campus on a massive scale. FORM afforded Curtin the opportunity to work with world class artists to showcase their work in an environment well versed in trying new things and experimentation.” “The Curtin campus is undergoing a transformation that is exciting, engaging and visionary ... It’s being transformed from significant place making activities that aim to turn the campus inside out.”
Fig. 53: Millo, TL Robertson, Library, Curtin University, Western Australia, 2016

Fig. 54: Millo, ‘Heart Slingshot’ Milan

Fig. 55: Millo, Białystok – Poland

Fig. 56: Millo, ‘Urban Myths’, Minsk

Fig. 57: Millo, ‘Kriebelstad’, Heerlen, Holland

Fig. 58: Millo, ‘Mural #09 for Bart’, Turin

Photographs courtesy of the artist. http://www.millo.biz/category/works/murals/
The internet also provides an entrée for individuals to ‘buy’ into the ‘reality’ of a global art viewing experience. The viewer (everyone world-wide, with access to the internet) no longer needs phenomenological encounters with visual, tangible, real objects and places. This grants the “added polarity of possibility – [with] the click [transporting] from the actual to the virtual”. Art encounters can become shifting, transitionary interactions, in spaces that are increasingly virtual. They facilitate an uncomplicated art experience, where there is instant success in a quick search. There is also the ‘plus’ of being able to proffer an instant opinion that seeks to both give and garner affirmation. Within this paradigm, the act of art viewing is more likely to be a casual Halbwachsian conversational engagement than a deeply immersive Bergsonian act of consciousness.

Even if there were a local imperative, there is little time for transient street artists to develop cultural understandings of particular places. The Co-ordinator of the Vancouver Arts Centre in Albany, Amber Perryman suggests that for the travelling mural artist working in cities, local knowledge is probably limited to the experience of going between the wall and a hotel, and the artists could effectively be anywhere in the world. At best, they might develop a ‘tourist-

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60 Social media has given individuals the agency to be involved and have an opinion, a voice just about everything. It promotes active engagement and an expectation of participation. These actions affirm an individual’s identity and place in the world.

61 Amber Perryman, interview by Valdene Diprose, 19 May, 2016. had a key role in bringing FORM 2016 to Albany. A partial transcript of the conversation can be found in Appendix 4.
level’ understanding of place, as was evident in the text featuring in Karim Jabbari’s mural in Albany. It was Jabbari’s first visit to Australia, and he had obviously been told that Albany was the first place of settlement in Western Australia. The repetition of ‘beginning’ shows he was not aware of Australia’s fifty to sixty-thousand-year-old indigenous presence prior to 1826 (figs. 59-60). In mitigation, Perryman suggests, the text would not be understood as a definitive, permanent statement of Albany’s history. The work is in a side laneway, on a privately-owned wall. It will not be maintained and can be graffitied or painted over at any time. Perryman sees excitement and value in the ephemeral quality

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62 Jabbari is a Tunisian artist, renowned for his ‘lightgraff’, calligraphy work. Jabbari glued a photographic print of a lightgraff performance onto a laneway wall in Albany, added Arabic calligraphy, and then provided the English translation at the very bottom of the piece. This was explained during the walking tour in Albany.

of the street art because it allows for a multitude of voices, unlike the single narrative of the “old Modernist paradigm of push down art”.  

United States street artist Hense’s large-scale murals for PUBLIC15 and PUBLIC16 (figs.61-62, p75-6) do not address the cultural aspects of site. Instead surfaces are covered in colourful ‘abstract’ lines patterns and shapes linking them to the universally recognised ‘abstract’ art genre.

Hense and other PUBLIC16 artists presumed they were working on neutral surfaces in need of decoration. Hense’s stated, “it is better to have more public art than less” and the “alternative is not to do it”. However, in some cases for PUBLIC16, the surface was anything but neutral. At Curtin University, the grey off-form concrete which was used as the mural surface is integral to the buildings. Designed by Vin Davies, an architect at the Western Australian Public Works

![Fig. 62: Hense, Wall mural, 2016, Albany, Western Australia](image)

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64 Ibid.

65 Hense, “Future-Place: Creating Experience” (paper presented at the PUBLIC Forum, Curtin University campus, Western Australia, April 8, 2016). Hense discussed his work at the FORM ‘PUBLIC Forum’ held in the Curtin Gallery, Curtin University on 8 April, 2016. FORM promotional material tells us Brewer “has created site-specific murals for Apple Inc. in Miami and Facebook Global Headquarters in a building designed by Frank Gehry at Menlo Park, California. For PUBLIC 2015, Hense and UK street artist Phlegm created site-specific mural installations on eight 38m high grain silos in Northam”. Hense spoke of the way his work evolves through spontaneous decision making. Initially, he responds to the nature of the physical site – its materiality and shape of the base structure and its context to build the first paint layer. He then continually evaluates his marks, constantly adding and subtracting colour, line and pattern. Brewer considers his artwork to be abstract sculpture, rather than painted mural.

66 Hense was in fact working on a newly constructed blank ceiling but the other artists were mostly working directly onto grey off-form concrete found on the exterior of Curtin University’s brutalist buildings.

67 Hense, “Future-Place: Creating Experience.”

Department in 1968-9, and completed in the early 1970s, the buildings are significant examples of brutalist architecture. Marcus Canning, artist and director of the Perth Fringe Festival, has thus emphatically criticised the street art’s “irreparable desecration of ... very significant porous cast concrete brutalist architectural fabric.”

The murals clearly perform in antithesis to the concrete surfaces, arguing to provide a more social, decorative interface. It has been suggested that the decorative, bright murals will provide a foil for the alienation of everyday life, and counter the Brutalist architectural style that is modernist, formalist and true to its materials. Many see the buildings as unfriendly, alienating and not particularly habitable. In this, there is a faint whiff of the Tilted Arc controversy, but in this case FORM, as the art facilitator, and Curtin University both have a vested business interest in putting a ‘positive marketing spin’ on the decision to overlay a graphic pop-art-type social experience onto a revered ‘high end’ example of culturally significant architecture. FORM’s publicity heralds PUBLIC 16 as yielding significant social benefits, with rhetoric stating: “new resilience for community citizens”, “... will be transformative creativity for the common good”, and “will reconnect us with the world around us”. This has an evangelical note and suggests a social purpose similar to the 1967 National Endowment for the Arts’ goal for public art in America. FORM’s rhetoric suggests the murals are the new public art face in Perth because of their performative, social nature.

When considered as a collective whole, the murals clearly provide a superficial entrée into the global network of street art, that is primarily self-referential. ‘Sensible Perth’ blogger, Graham Mathwin discusses the PUBLIC murals and suggests they are, “not particularly intellectual, or particularly egalitarian, but definitely dynamic” and “aimed at Low Culture”. Perryman describes most as

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70 Canning, "Form Follows Finance and the Public Banality." Appendix 5 contains a transcript of the relevant section of Canning’s talk.

71 Phrases used at FORM ‘Public Forum’ held in the Curtin Gallery, Curtin University on 8 April, 2016.

72 Chapter 3, section 3.5 of the thesis.

73 Perryman, "A Conversation with Amber Perryman." Refer to Appendix 4. The statement also links section 3.5 of the thesis.

“graphic art and illustration”. The imagery is easily digested and understood and it has none of the political edginess associated with street art’s beginnings.

Lived spaces have their own dynamic life. Much like humans, they come into existence, develop to meet needs, decline, regenerate and adjust to change. The built environment relies on people to activate change. For a short period, PUBLIC16 artists activated the art spaces and the public clearly enjoyed witnessing immersive, creative actions, as the artists worked alongside one another to realise the murals. Under the auspices of FORM this became a highly staged, theatrical event. ‘Dynamic’ was often used as a descriptor, suggesting their real appeal lies in the highly visible, performative way they were made, rather than their presence as finished murals.

If the artwork is about creating a sense of place through experiential action, the end work does not need to have a lengthy life. On the day of the PUBLIC16 talks in Albany, FORM Executive Director, Lynda Dorrington marketed the work as ephemeral, suggested was aimed to appeal to a novice art viewer who does not engage with gallery art. Both Dorrington and Perryman saw the wall murals of a novel way of engaging the public outside of the gallery context. Not only does this acknowledge that the meaning ascribed to art and places change over time, but it suggests that the work of the PUBLIC artists is ‘of its time’, that it is merely part of conversational memory, and is not sufficiently weighty to justify its becoming part of cultural memory. Ultimately however, the decisions about the works’ lifespan will be made by the building’s owners, and this will to some extent depend on the value the community accords the street art.

Returning once more to the thesis argument; How do personal and collective memory understandings explicate the meaning of these works?

The PUBLIC16 program is founded on the premise that cultural shared memory held in the place and objects in public sites, can be overwritten, perhaps erased;

76 Mathwin, Sensible Perth blog says: “Standardised approaches was practically written all over its walls”, while Perryman speaks of the need for the artists to consider Albany’s conservatism which led to discussion about the artist, Borondo’s images being far less political than his other global work.
77 Fettling, “The Space of Palimpsest.” Fettling acknowledges Henri Lefebvre’s thinking in, The Production of Space with this statement.
78 Mathwin, Sensible Perth.
and most certainly improved by the addition of new marks and new memories.\textsuperscript{80} This understanding suggests PUBLIC 16 is spatial, performative and Halbwachsian in its operation. In choosing not to consider the history of place, the program discounts the need for a present-past concept of time which is a foundational idea in Bergsonian theory. At the PUBLIC forum, when artist Karim Jabbari said, “we are not painting on walls, we are putting pieces of our lives on walls”, he was clearly asking viewers to engage with the works as unique memory-objects. While the images clearly evolved out of individual memory and personal cultural understandings, much also uses repetitive, stereotyped motifs.\textsuperscript{81} If these are considered without understanding personal contexts, they become just colourful, decorative in situ records of PUBLIC 16 events.\textsuperscript{82} It this art type wants to provide viewers with greater scope to reflect, wonder and imagine, the art making process itself, will require more time and self-reflection.

\textsuperscript{80} With this thinking, there is a link to Ian Hamilton’s initial palimpsest statement, though he is clearly writing about land, rather than the built environment.

\textsuperscript{81} Not all the street artists use repetitive imagery and symbols. In Albany, Borondo for example, painted the interior of Mary Thompson house where he stayed. Perryman, “A Conversation with Amber Perryman.” Appendix 4: 12.46.

\textsuperscript{82} This thinking returns to question of who holds the meaning: the artist, the work or the viewer. In this case, it is the artist.
5. Conclusion

The thesis gives considerable attention to understanding how memory operates in space and time, which provides the foundational base to argue that foregrounding memory theory allows for a better understanding of contemporary art. The fact that artists effectively enact memory in every creative action suggests that there is a logical, natural conjunction between memory processes and creative actions.

The explication of memory theory demonstrates the merit in connecting Bergson’s and Halbwachs’ notions of individual and collective memory by showing they enhance one another. Together, they provide an additional framework for the discussion and analysis of contemporary collective and community-based art practices. They provide a language that helps delineate social, shared practices from the individual actions of artists, collaborators and viewers. Memory theory also provides some clarity in distinguishing between art that sits in conversational, communicative memory and art that has been assigned cultural value. While this separation has historically been considered as ‘low’ and ‘high’ art, the thesis contends that the transitional possibilities between the two can be better understood through the ideas of communicative and cultural memory, and Pierre Nora’s concept of lieux de mémoire.

However, the main value in introducing memory theory into contemporary art discourse and practice lies in the understandings that it brings to space and time.

When Henri Bergson posits memory as sitting in the active consciousness in a state of potential readiness, he emphasises the active role it plays in shaping an individual’s perceptions of the present. With this positioning, he effectively claims the ideas, history and knowledge that are bound up in memory to be an integral part of the ‘presentness’ of the present, and all conscious, forward action. However, contemporary art has broadly become increasingly atemporal,

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83 This has not been a common practice. Individual memory has traditionally been the province of philosophy and psychology, while collective memory has been associated with cultural studies, sociology and anthropology. Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” 1. Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, ed. Theories of Memory: A Reader (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007). 4-13. Kansteiner and Rossington both discuss memory in academia. Jeffrey K Olick, “Introduction.” 36-39. While there is convergence in thinking around memory through the new fields of ‘memory studies’ and cognitive science’ Bergson’s and Halbwachs’ theories are not commonly joined. Burton, “Bergson’s Non-Archival Theory of Memory”. 323. In relation to Bergson, Burton states: “Bergson’s Matter and Memory is still waiting for a full appreciation of its potential significance for fields in which memory is a central category, such as (social) psychology, cultural history and memory studies.”

84 In this schema past understandings are less likely to be dismissed as being no longer relevant since they exist either as something ‘useful’ or ‘potentially useful’. 
ahistorical, and more social and spatial in its focus. Effectively, it has become less Bergsonian and more Halbwachsian in its processes and memory. With this, the links to its foundational history have weakened. The Aristotelian idea that “art imitates life” can be seen in how artists, art historians and critics strive to reconcile periodisation and stylistic diversity to develop clearer understandings of how contemporary art operates in space and time. Globally, all levels of society—from small communities to nation states—are similarly preoccupied with understanding how to work co-operatively in space and time for a sustainable future. All the while, artists have gone on making ‘art’, and a plethora of different social exchanges have been situated in the framework of contemporary art. There is a difficulty in judging the value or efficacy of these art forms, because much of it sits outside of art’s traditional boundaries, which results in a lack of historical criteria for assessment. In 2005, visual theorist and cultural critic Johanna Drucker, in writing about Jason Rhoades’ slacker aesthetic, turns the question, “Why is this art?” on itself, by asking, “What is art since this is it?” Bergsonian thinking, alongside that of Hal Foster, suggests that to answer this question, the past needs greater activation.

Returning finally, to where this research began, to the viewpoint of the practising artist, Bergson’s vision of active consciousness provides a useful model for action and reflection in artmaking. Bergson suggests “attention to life” involves balancing spatial and sensory perceptions with temporal image-objects in memory. For Bergson, conscious action is active, experiential and forward looking, with the subconscious state of ‘wellbeing’ devolving out of authentic, intuitive, immersive, and phenomenological encounters with the matter of the world. Attending to this temporal thinking allows artists to reflect on the depth and breadth of their creative acts (regardless to its forms and processes), and ask

86. Smith, Contemporary Art: World Currents. 8-13. This statement also alludes the Western world’s recent preoccupation with memory and identity, evidenced most strongly in the 1970s-90s, in all facets of society, particularly in academia: a time period is frequently referred to as a ‘memory boom’. Jeffrey K Olick, “Introduction.” 3-6. The authors suggest ‘memory boom’ is a phrase commonly used to describe the preoccupation with memory in the late twentieth century.


87. Bergson, Matter and Memory. xv, Douglas, “Introduction.” 2. Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 491. Dauenhauer, “Paul Ricoeur”. Ricoeur suggests that Bergson’s theory of active consciousness has the potential to yield a “capable human being” who exhibits self-understanding of their place the world “and their life with and among others in time in the world”. Refer also to: Jeffrey K Olick, “Introduction.” 17. These ideas partially devolve out of Olick’s thinking.
whether they are deeply felt experiences that emanate from “the richness and variety of inner, subjective time.” 88

Paul Ricoeur’s statement, “in remembering something, one essentially remembers oneself” 89 reinstates the symbiotic connection between memory and identity. Foregrounding memory gives those working in the field of contemporary art the opportunity to reflect, to come to know and then remember, and better understand its ideas.

89 Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. 96.
Bibliography


———. "Conversation with Marco Marcon." In discussion with Valdene Diprose, 8 June 2015.


Appendix 1: In conversation with Marco Marcon

[Marco Marcon is the co-founder and Artistic Director of International Art Space (IAS) in Perth. He was the creative producer for Spaced 2: Future Recall (2013-4). What follows is a full transcript of the conversation which took place in the East Perth office of IAS on 8 June 1915.]

VD: Can you begin by talking about how the Spaced program works. How do you get the artists and residencies happening?

3.53 MM: It is fundamentally a kind of a matchmaking process. The main concept behind the project is to have a network of partnerships. These partnerships involve an artist, a community, which is an organisation based in that community, ourselves and other partners like a presenting partner such as museums. In the case of ‘Spaced 2’ we had a partnership with DADAA and with Asia-Link which co-funded a couple of projects. And the question of funding relates to what they gain from the partnership. At the same time we try to keep things within the boundary of what is our philosophy and our general aims and objectives. In practical terms, what we did last time was we actually advertised and asked for expression of interests from both artists and communities. Then we had the committee and we selected the artists and we tried to match them with communities. There was a little bit of discussion with the artist and the prospective hosts about the best match. Obviously, there are limits to what can be done. Some artists may want a certain location that is not always possible. In one case for example, one artist we selected was really, really keen to go to Derby, but Derby partnership was run with DADAA and they did not want this artist for whatever reason, and the artist did not want to go to any other location so I suggested we do it next time. So, this is more or less how the project management works.

VD: So, it is a process of negotiation and you hope to include everyone in the matchmaking process?

6.27 MM: Yes. Some artists already have an existing relationship with some locations. They know that place, they may have family in that town or they have done projects there before. So, we take that into account as well. In some cases, we are not really matchmaking at all, but using an existing relationship for a new project. For example, last time there was a project in the Western desert with Lily Hibbard, she had already done a project there before.

VD: How would you describe your role in this process?

7.10 MM: I am not a curator. I often say that. What it is called in other arts fields is a creative producer. So, in a way I come up with an idea and then I find the money and, I find other creative people to implement it. As far as the partnerships are concerned, basically, we are matchmaking but also monitoring – making sure there is the right degree or proportion of freedom for everyone to do their own things, but also to make sure that people do not go off on tangents which is outside what we want to do.

VD: Do you also make sure the support is there for the artists?
8.07 MM: Yes, as far as the local communities there is a minimum we ask from them. We ask them to provide accommodation and then at least one liaison person. So, that is the minimum. Some people-communities, depending on the situation can provide more. For example, the Shire at Laverton had a very good relationship with the local mining company so we got flights, we got a four-wheel drive.

VD: It seems, from listening to the artists speak in the symposium that they took on different roles in the community, depending on the context they were in.

9.05 MM: Very much so.

VD: But also according to how they perceived their role. Can I ask you to comment on certain of the artists who used quite different approaches in their practices?

MM: Yes, sure.

Valdene: John Mateer’s work seemed to have one of the best outcomes of Spaced 2.

9.38 MM: John Mateer as you know is more of a writer than a visual artist. He had been interested in this issue of the Malaysian diaspora for a while so we didn’t go through the selection process because we just wanted to have a project with them. So, in his case we have been talking for a while about this project so it was more prepared than others. What he did was part of ongoing research.

VD: That’s how it came across when he spoke about it. The project was extremely well thought through.

10.30 MM: In his case, he basically did a chapter in a larger research component that he continued.

VD: What about Lily Hibberd’s residency?

10.53 MM: Again, a similar situation, an existing relationship with Laverton, the Western Desert people. She had already done a project with the Western Desert Communities, Martumili Artists. She had developed a very strong relationship with that community and she knows several artists, and also a researcher who has been working in that community.

VD: Of all the artists who spoke she seemed to have the richest collaborative project going with the local community. It seemed to be an equal two-way relationship.

11.57 MM: Yes, very much so. Also, there are quite a few artists working in that community, so they understood each other. Both the projects that you have picked so far were both long term projects. That’s another thing I guess, another issue, obviously long term projects are more successful, they have more depth that ones where there is one artist who arrives in a place where they have never been before.

VD: I would like to see Lily’s final outcome.

12.34 MM: Yes, she is still working on it. And she is in France now. That’s another issue with many of these projects. Residency based projects are difficult to organise because artists
do other things. They need to be working in community and that has to fit in with whatever else is happening in their lives.

VD: Can you speak about Pia Lanzinger's work in Geraldton?

12.57 MM: We had never worked in Geraldton before, though there had been a project on the Abrolhos Islands. In fact, there was a lot of interest and it went really well with the amount of collaboration she generated. I didn’t actually realise that there is quite a lively arts community there so she tapped into that.

VD: One of the residencies I have done has been out at Mullewa, as the inaugural artist in residence. I realised as soon as I got there and spoke to people that the central mid-west community has a strong craft heritage. All the women in the Mullewa District somehow network and create social relations through craft. So, when you talk about art they are actually interested in the idea of community art. It was much more apparent when I got there that I thought it would be.

14.46 MM: There are always surprises and many of these projects you don’t know in advance how they are going to go. There are often surprises, things you do not expect.

VD: And Tea Mäkipää’s work in Esperance?

15.10 MM: Tea turned up with a baby which was something we didn’t know she had and that was obviously a bit of a problem, so we didn’t know how things were going to pan out. Luckily the baby turned out to be a great asset because she developed a relationship with her baby sitter. Monica Thomas actually managed to get together a lot of people to complete the site-specific work – the hot spot – that she couldn’t complete while she was in Australia. The work was completed by Monica with a huge amount of determination. She was well established in the community so she managed to get a lot of people to help. This happens very often in this type of residency – there are one or two people who establish a very strong relationship with the artist, and if these people happen to be also respected in the community, they are the best way to bring other people into the project because they are a sort of a link, a bridge between the visiting artist and the local community.

VD: Do you try to pinpoint a liaison person?

16.50 MM: Sometimes it is by chance. We didn’t know about Monica. Sometimes we know of people in advance. Sometimes it just happens by chance, when they happen to get on well with a particular person. So, there is quite a degree of chance in this type of thing.

VD: I thought Maddie Leach gave one of the most interesting talks at the Symposium but overall her project was ...

17.25 MM: A bit strange. Something I need to point out here is that the kind of artists we invite, sometimes it is the first time they have done this kind of work, or maybe they have done similar works but in a different context so we want to encourage parties who haven’t worked in this more community focused way to take on the challenge. Sometimes it works and other times it doesn’t. She has done projects before of this kind but her work is very cerebral in many ways, to an extreme extent I would say. Also, there was this problem with
the City of Mandurah. I don’t know how it developed. I don’t know if there was some type of personality thing or what because the City seemed to object to her focusing on this memorial plaque and site for the Pinjarra Massacre which is only a little bit out of town. For us that is not important. We sent an artist to a town, and if they want to do something in the surrounding area, that is fine. You don’t necessarily have to draw the boundary of the city, as long as it is a part of the region of that place, for us that is fine. I got the impression that it was a boundary issue, but in the end the results were so obscure people would have scratched their head rather than get offended by it.

VD: I didn’t really see much of Jay Koh’s work but I had the impression that he was not working as an artist, but as a facilitator at Cervantes.

19.35 MM: Exactly, he is an extreme example of an artist who embraces collaboration as the only means of doing something. Nothing much was done. His attitude was to go there as a facilitator, as you mentioned. To be someone that guided and generated interest, to get the community to come up with ideas of what they wanted to do. The result is that nothing was produced, except a series of meetings and plans, despite him being there for over two years. But that is part of it. He was one extreme and in many ways Maddie was the opposite. Next time we will try to do without the extremes.

VD: Is his project a success in the sense that the people in the community are talking about art and putting a public face on art? Will it be realised over time?

21.00 MM: I think someone actually just finished doing a report, an assessment by asking people. That can only be judged by the locals so we really need to go there to get the impression. I can’t gauge it from here. I am just waiting to see what comes out of that report.

VD: I imagine Daniel Peltz had a lot of money through mining sponsorship to realise his opera.

21.27 MM: He didn’t have any money what so ever, just the money we gave him. And he spent it all on the project because he had a full-time job. We tried to get some sponsorship money but we weren’t successful. The Shire had applied to have an artist and then they completely lost interest. I think the person who was the main driver got a job and moved on and that happens so often in regional areas. There is someone who is very active and ‘can-do’ and they approach you and then after a year they have moved. By the time the project comes on board they have gone somewhere else. It happens with you work with schools and shires, with a lot of people. He only used our money and we tried to go to Rio Tinto a couple of times but nothing came out of our meetings despite the project being completely about mining.

VD: I would like to ask you some personal questions about some of the issues that were raised in your dissertation. As a maker of art and then trying to write objectively about it – you need to be able to distance yourself from the subject. And I don’t think I have been handling the objective distance I need very well at present. I think some of the artists we have just spoken about took on this pseudo sociologist, ethnologist, anthropologist roles. Do you think that these are valid roles for artists?
There is obviously that famous essay of Hal Foster’s, “The Artist as Ethnographer?” that critiques this whole thing. There are two things to be said here because like all questions/issues there is a grey area. One is it could be seen, from a negative side, as people taking on a role that they are not trained for, and becoming a little bit arrogant. On the positive side, I find it positive and interesting that artists look outside their own specific domain and see the broader picture. Between this positive and negative thing is just the question of judgment, where you draw the line. One of the main critics of this way of working is Claire Bishop who says that these people are pretending to be sociologists or social workers but they do not want their work to be assessed using the criteria that a real social worker would be assessed by, so they don’t want it to be art but they want it to be judged as if it was art. A real social worker would have some objectives, some type of qualitative assessment that would be judged by peers that understand, while these people do not want to do that. So, that is a valid criticism I think.

VD: Do you think these types of projects would have more validity if they had partnerships with professionals?

Yes, and I was just talking to Daniel about this. He is in Sweden at the moment. We were talking about the possibility of another project. He also said the same thing. He is talking about partnering artists with anthropologists for example. So, you do have some artists who are talking about this, beyond being just an amateur.

VD: My first degree was in applied science and I feel very uncomfortable when I read case studies where people are taking on these pseudo roles; the outcomes in my mind are very mixed, and very difficult to assess.

Also, because the truth for us, in my position, contemporary art can be many different things. For me what I want from my artists is something that is assessed, in as broad a way as you like, but with criteria that belongs to the art field. This is why I am not too sure about Jay Koh’s work. I was critical of it. I thought it was too passive, although but I am leaving the judgment open until I hear back from the community. But what you say is actually right.

VD: I also had the impression that some of the artists take on this quasi type of religious, evangelical role – they have a type of do good mentality. They are going to fix something. I am not sure that the community are interested in this.

Tea’s project with the road kill had overtones of this. She was very fervent about things, whereas the idea that you are going through a publicity campaign save these precious animals from road kill, is for people who live in Australia extremely naïve. That seemed to come through in the way she was presenting the art products at the end.

VD: Tea’s project with the road kill had overtones of this. She was very fervent about things, whereas the idea that you are going through a publicity campaign save these precious animals from road kill, is for people who live in Australia extremely naïve. That seemed to come through in the way she was presenting the art products at the end.

29.34 MM: Yes, that’s right. Some artists are more aware and they avoid this, but when an artist gets into a new community and new culture, and you are there for a couple of months you can’t really turn around and tell them ‘how to suck eggs’. We do tell artists and we warn them against that, but they do not necessarily pay attention. It is in our contract to them. We tell them they are a guest, and we ask them to use their skills and
imagination as an artist to develop something but don’t pretend to understand the situation after being there for a couple of weeks. And don’t pretend to tell people what they should and shouldn’t do.

VD: How long do the artists spend in the programs? They come twice, I think.

30.47 MM: Yes, some people spend much longer than others. We only ask them to be there when we pay them. We pay them an average wage and that is for about ten weeks. We suggest they go more than once. They can go once to do their research and understand the place and then they go more to think about what they want to do. Some artists however, especially those from Asia, manage to make it stretch longer so I think Archana spent up to six months in three or four different times and also Jay Koh as well.

VD: So, you’re saying that you are hoping the artists will interface with the community and utilise their artistic understandings.

31.57 MM: Exactly, if you call yourself an artist and people regard you as an artist – that is what you bring to the exchange. Other people coming into a community will bring something else. As an artist, the best you can offer is art. If you are a sociologist, the best you can offer is sociology. If you are a philosopher, the best you can offer is philosophy. If you are a doctor the best you can offer is medicine. It is just your contribution to a bigger discourse. There is often the tendency of artists as you said to assume other roles.

VD: In Miron Kwon’s article “One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity” she writes about the role of the artist she suggests the artist in community is equally as powerful as the artist-genesis in the modernist paradigm because they make all the decisions. Their decisions are not necessarily mediated by the gallery-museum system-industry.

33.38 MM: Exactly, it is all fundamentally their responsibility. They become a one stop shop. They are the creator, gallery, critics. They are everything because they are the only ones in that location. Her argument is paradoxical although artists think they are democratising art, but they are on the other hand taking on a very authoritative role because without that what they do is not art anymore. It is something else, and it disappears into ...

VD: In the Spaced projects do you intervene? Do you mediate with the artist and the community?

34.30 MM: I try not to and it is kind of difficult. It is difficult for two reasons. First because we are a long way away. However, if we do have someone that we trust who is an independent observer who is in contact with us and tells us that there seems to be an issue, then we intervene sometimes. Artists tend not to listen very much. We have a contract with our artists that mentions all of these things. This is advice that we give them. Next time, as well as giving this information on paper, and asking them to sign it, we need to actually have an interview with them and we go through it face to face and we talk it and we make sure that they understand that these things are important.

VD: How important to you is it that the community is involved in the discussions? Obviously, in a lot of the communities there was discussion. But what about production and staging of the art?
36.13 MM: It varies a lot. And when we mean communities we basically mean individuals, small groups – parts of communities – because you cannot interact with the whole community. Artists tend to interact with representatives of the community. I am really pleased when some people take it on board like in the case of what Monica Thomas managed to do. Those people that helped, I don’t even know if they understood the work or agreed with it but they helped. The fact that there was this active participation is something that happens in the country. A lot of people help each other although they might not, for example care about the pony club, but they still help. It’s a neighbourhood thing to do and whether or not you really understand it does not matter. So, if that happens we are pleased. At a deeper level this usually happens when there is much more time. What really interests me is an opening because we have been running this project in Kellerberrin for a long time, before Spaced. As long as people are not alienated, as long as the artist manages to develop a relationship with some people, generate some curiosity, a level of energy or debate, that is enough for us.

VD: In your thesis, you look at dialogical aesthetics, which is quite problematic in the way Kester frames it. One of your criticism seemed to be that the dialogues were very specific to the particular communities, and they often didn’t have any universal aspirations.

38.25 MM: Obviously, the universal can never be achieved but my argument, but it is good to aspire to go beyond the people who have been involved in that exchange.

VD: I wonder if the end result is sufficiently interesting, complex and rich. It should in a sensory way generate an interest. I think it is problematic in that in the end there is not an outcome – there is nothing to engage with.

39.20 MM: Well there is no work. If you take it in the most extreme case, there is no work produced at the end of the exchange. The work that he mentions is almost like an excuse for the exchange more than something that can be shared by other people. That is what I find problematic. Also, because the paradox of his position, if you take it to the extreme consequences is that it is impossible for anyone who was not part of that process of exchange and dialogue to be able to assess it. How do you assess it? It is not there. I don’t know how much he has been involved in these projects he has described. Maybe he spent a lot of time there. Maybe, but if you are not part of it, how do you know if it was good, interesting and valuable? You can ask people I guess, like a second degree-source but you can’t assess it personally. You just have to rely on other people just like a purely sociological study.

VD: I think you have answered my next question because I was going to ask how important is it to have an art product.

40.53 MM: For me it is important. Obviously, this idea has been shifting but it is still important. It doesn’t have to be an object but, a product has these sort of commercial overtones, you can call it an outcome or a work. It has to be a work. We pay people to create a work and we can discuss what the work is. It could be a performance, it could be a book, it could be a video or it could be an object. It could be a series of activities that are augmented and then presented. As long as the work is shareable to someone who was not part of its production. That is the principle.
VD: So really, you are asking for a work that is open to a variety of interpretations; is sufficiently ambiguous to facilitate sustained conversations?

42.09 MM: Exactly, I completely agree. You need to leave something for someone else, otherwise it becomes something like a personal relationship which is fine. Personal relationships are great you know. You have a family. My family is important to me but not to anyone else, unless I write a book about it that becomes shareable. The book talks about something that becomes shareable. It becomes the work in which that relationship is open to other people. It is not just important to me.

VD: Rachel Whitehead’s work House was, I think, a particularly powerful example in this regard because of the indexical mark making. You actually have a trace of place and location embedded in the art work, and it was very ambiguous, interesting work.

43.35 MM: Ambiguity means richness. There in not just one interpretive meaning but there is something that allows the viewer, the reader or the listener to be a part of the process because the work solicits ideas and generates a reaction, and it is not exhausted in the one line.

VD: Work that you look at and get at the first glance is something that doesn’t hold any interest.

44.18 MM: There is a very interesting essay Umberto Eco, “The Open Work”. There is one other essay, I don’t know if it is a science theory of communication or of complex systems, I don’t know all the details. It is not written from an art or philosophy viewpoint, but from a scientific theory of information. The clearest most stimulating work you can find, the best is a tautology. The richest, the more confusion, the more things become uncertain, the more information there is. But the richest source of information may also be impossible to work with because we can’t make sense of it. And there is the question about the right amount of richness and complexity, but you must also be able to grasp it.

VD: I think you must give the viewer an ‘in’. Pared down minimal conceptual art that doesn’t aesthetically engage in a sensory way may be underpinned by a great idea. But if you can’t read the idea it is a problem. If you are displaying work that nobody understands and they can’t engage with it, there does not seem to be any point to it.

46.45 MM: I was in a symposium with Nick Sudos who used to run an art space in Sydney. We went to look at lots of studio spaces at the Cable Factory, then we had dinner and he said, “You know I often have this experience entering an artist’s studio, I have no fucking idea about what I am looking at.” And that is true. I guess one way of perhaps mitigating that incomprehension, is that the more ‘stuff’ you look at the more you discover the broader context in which they are actually placed so you begin to understand a little bit more. It is not there overtly. I used to teach art at Curtin. At times, you needed to join fragments. This comes from here and this comes from another artist and I could see why they are doing it. So, then you recreate a missing context in which the work makes sense. And it is much easier to do than when you have a solo show by one artist with lots of works. When you see a lot of work together you get a much better idea of the relationships between the works. You can see things happening and then you get an idea. If you see only one work by an artist in a group show and you are not familiar with their work, then it is often almost impossible to make sense of it.
VD: How important is it to have some sort of sensory engagement to provoke interest?

48.46 MM: I am just reading a book at the moment which talks about that – “Anywhere or not at all” by Peter Osborne. He talks about that amongst other things. There are two things to be said. One thing he said that is interesting and true, but it is nothing new. When conceptual art started in the 1960s or even with Duchamp before, Duchamp said he wanted to do something that had no taste, but in fact that is never really possible. There is always a physical element to works of art that needs to be taken into account. This interacts with the conceptual element, so most works are a combination of conceptual and aesthetic. By aesthetic we mean what goes through the senses. There is one important distinction that he makes clear which is true – that there are two fundamental meanings to aesthetics. One more or less means a sense of experience, but the other one is a Kantian meaning which is reflective judgment. To explain reflective judgment is of course you need to understand Kant. Reflective judgment is a type of judgment which is not based on concepts but is based on feelings. It is still in both concepts but it is an indeterminate concept so when people think that Kant based aesthetics does away with concept they are wrong. It is not only about sensory perception, but it is also about ideas, but they are indeterminate ideas, not determinate ideas. There is nothing new if you look at the whole history of art. You look at Raphael, look at the Greeks there is always an aesthetic, a purely sensorial element but there is also a meaning. Don’t say the word narrative, there was a religious meaning. They all had meaning. There were both things. And there was this split with modernism that either became purely sensorial or in the ’60s it became purely conceptual. But there is always a mix between the two. Good conceptual art addresses both.

VD: How important is it to stage the work locally?

52.36 MM: Well in practical terms, with this type of project like the one we run, people do not often have a group show, they are left to themselves to present the work themselves at a local level, and then document it. In our case, we commission artists. They know from the outset that there are two outcomes. One can be ephemeral or site specific – non-transportable. And the fact that is ephemeral does not mean that it is limited. As I tried to explain, potentially there may be only one spectator, and anyone could be that spectator. But that person would be outside their working relationship with certain people at a local level. We wanted to have a museum show also. One of the aspects is political in the sense that it is too easy for museums to leave themselves to presenting studio based work. They should be persuaded to show art from all sorts of practices. Also, if you want to be taken seriously, you need to be seen in some of these sites.

VD: I imagine a group show is also important to your continuance of the Spaced program to keep a public profile?

54.14 MM: Yes, a bigger audience is important also. There are a number of practical reasons but from a strictly practical point of view, the artists know from the beginning that the works need to have two outcomes (these could be the same). One local, and one group show in a museum.

VD: I imagine a group show is also important to your continuance of the Spaced program. Spaced 1 was at the Fremantle Arts Centre (FAC) which is a type of community art space,
whereas Spaced 2 was in the museum. They have a different contextual setting. Was that deliberate?

54.54 MM: Well in many cases it is because there are only three or four venues in Perth that can take a show like this. In the museum case, because many of our project have to deal with issues of memory, heritage, history, society and so forth. That is something that a museum deals with from a different point of view. So, we were hoping that there would be more of a collaboration between the artists and the museum staff. But that didn’t really happen and it was obviously very difficult to realise because everyone has their own business. That was the kind of idea. Also, the other idea for the museum was - when you see something in a museum you do not expect to see the whole story. You know if you see a Woolly Mammoth, interesting as it is in itself, the Woolly Mammoth is there because it speaks of a whole eco-system in which it was a part of. If you see again an Aboriginal artefact, beautiful as it might be in itself, it also speaks of something which is not there. In our case too, as interesting as the final work may or may not be it also speaks of something else, that happened somewhere else. We do the video documentaries, we do the symposium and the publication will be another way of engaging with the audience and providing the contexts.

VD: What type of curatorial decisions do you make at the point of exhibition?

56.53 MM: Because I am not a curator, my decisions are purely to set up the show. I create a machine and then let the machine run itself. The machine is made up of these parts which are all of these partnerships. I make sure that all of these partnerships work together harmoniously within the program and the curatorial space. Then I switch the engine on and I let it happen, and just keep an eye that things do not get out of hand. I mainly just design the apparatus that allows this project to happen.

VD: So, you wouldn’t call yourself a curator and you are not really mediating between the work and the audience?

57.48 MM: I guess I am when I write about it. I am to a certain extent mediating it. I am more like a museum curator rather than a curator from an art museum in a sense that I try to make sure there is as much information and documentation as possible for people to make sense. But it depends on what you call a curator. Everyone calls themselves curators now. I’m doing it because I am the only one who is not a curator in the arts.

VD: In the Spaced 1 catalogue, you made a very clear distinction between the idea of space and place in your essay and the notion of place and location was critical to the idea of community.

58.48 MM: Space is an abstract concept, whereas a place has a historical and social concept. It is a concrete one.

VD: Would you say that memory is critical to the concept of place?

59.00 MM: Yes, of course. Memory is part of people’s notion of where they see themselves – in their life and their place. And also it correlates to how they project themselves in the future, so it is part of that continuous process in both a community and a personal way.
VD: Do you see the ‘unknown’ artist as linking to the community consciousness – the collective memory – whatever you would like to call it – as a way of engaging with the community?

59.58 MM: Well there are two things at play. Their own sense of identity, their own different cultural background. They come from different places. And then there is whatever they manage to gauge when they are interacting with the people that they find there. The work is a hybrid thing that comes out of that. There was an interesting project that was done in IASKA by the artist, James Lynch called, “First memories”. Basically, when he was in Kellerberrin Lynch advertised for people who might be interested, and asked them about their first memory in life. Together they created a video animation that recreated that first memory. It was a lovely project. He created a type of campfire situation. People sitting around a campfire talk about things that may have been buried.¹

VD: You worked in the community arts sector for a long time with the town of Kellerberrin, so has your thinking shifted in that time frame in how you approach community arts and what community arts should be?

1.02.18 MM: In many ways, we don’t call what we do community arts. My idea is that community arts is much more focused on what the community does, than what the artist does. For us the art is more important. But it has shifted. When we started we just simply wanted to have a gallery and a studio space there. And then what came out of it came out of it. It kind of refined itself. It was very important – something that was really seminal was work by an Italian artist, one of the first artists that came, Savatore Falci’s, Silent Communication (1998). This project was fundamentally exactly the same as the performance artist, Marina Abramović’s project, “The Artist is Present” (2010) with much more pomp. He did it with the community sixteen years ago. He was part of a group of artists in Italy that now includes some people who have now become quite famous. I actually learned from some of these artists. Now and again you see an artist and you see what works and what doesn’t work. Every time I bump into something like this, I say, “Okay, this is a good idea. I will incorporate this idea next time”. So, I learn by working with artists, and by reflecting on what works and what doesn’t work.

VD: I’m going to use the word community art again. You seem to be suggesting in your dissertation that community art is a valid way of exploring the problems of how an individual may sit in society and how that community might then sit in a larger, broader group. You suggest this is an ongoing problem that came to the fore with Kant in the eighteen-century. Do you see that type of nexus: the individual-the community-the society fitting into the twenty-first century?

1.05.16 MM: One of Kant’s problems was that taste, because it is not based on concept, it is based on feelings, it seems to be a purely a subjective thing. We don’t talk about: “I like this, I like that and so forth.” If this were the case it would be very little value. In the same way my relationship with my family is only of interest to me and to no-one else and so, why would anyone bother to look at art if it was just a personal thing. So, the situation in the 21st century, is a very complex thing, because you can see we have some people on social media now. There is a huge explosion of relationships which are not face-to-face. I don’t have an opinion. I am just witnessing how this concept of the relationship

¹ Marcon, From Space to Place. Lynch’s work is documented on pages 8, 16-17, 36.
between individuals develops. Western society is obsessed with individuality; it is kind of bullshit. I remember I was in therapy for a while. I asked the therapist you know I think I am a unique person but probably ninety percent of people think exactly the same thing so I don’t know how to answer that. Obviously, just to witness what has happened with the internet, it is changing very greatly the way … and I don’t know if it is good or bad. I have friends that live abroad and when they come to Perth I don’t bother to go and see them you know but we are still Facebook friends right, but is that good or bad, I don’t know. It is just changed – a lot.

VD: So, the notion of community – do you still think we need an emotional place?

1.07.26 MM: Well again the internet has interfered with that in a sense that there are places that do not have a physical reality, but just exist on the internet you know, a second life or whatever.

VD: I guess that can still be called ‘place’ even though it does not have a physical presence.

1.07.50 MM: I think that place is certainly … you need to be somewhere right. A place is related to community and it is related to me and it is related to history. I just discovered Heidegger in the last few years I have just been working on that at the moment and he has interesting things to say about that. Of course, I have no immediate answer or position, I am just observing and working through things.

VD: Possibly it is because we are so close to the situation … a bit like a historian … you can only make good judgements about what is happening from a critical distance. And you need time to do that.

1.08.52 MM: My personal story, I was born in the north east of Italy, near the border of Yugoslavia. There was a very distinctive culture there. Like Australian religions are quite different. So, I left when I was three, we went to Milan first and then to Rome, though I used to go back every summer. In Rome, I never really felt completely at ease, and then I came here and again … I feel fine everywhere but not completely of the place, but I had no relationship with my original place where I was born. I still speak the dialect and a number of things but … I am not the only one, people are born and they move around … the notion of home is changed. I have been living in Perth for thirty years and twenty-eight of these years I have been living within three hundred metres of here. I have always lived in Highgate for basically twenty-seven years, and although I have changed house three times but it was only within two hundred metres from this place. So, my home is Highgate.

VD: Do you have a real sense of place for Highgate?

1.10.16 MM: Yes, because you have a history. Obviously, with my daughter yesterday, we were talking about how sad it is that Highgate is changing. You remember the Planet Video was there and she still remembers that she used to go there when she was a little kid, and now it is closed completely. There is another restaurant I used to go to, there was a Mongolian restaurant again. Lots of these memories are attached to my family, and my daughter. Nostalgia, but in Rome things don’t go, the Colosseum is still there. They do not knock them [buildings] down any more. They are still there but here these places are not there anymore.
VD: We are only beginning to value our old buildings.

1.11.11 MM: My Dad used to live near Venice. I used to go to Venice all the time and the fact that it was always the same, the fact that it was getting a little bit older in time, but it was not changing. But here, Planet Video is not there anymore.

VD: I was going to ask you this question but we have gone off in a bit of a tangent. This idea of individual-community-society – when you plonk an artist stranger as a new arrival into this place, do they almost become a token individual exploring this dilemma? You go in, I’m just about to start my third residency … when I go somewhere new I have a real sense that somehow … I don’t want to be an outsider in the community. I can never truly be a part of that community that would be naïve to think that but I want an entrée into that community and I want to establish connections and relationships and achieve a temporary sense of my place in that community. And to value that sense of temporary place. It’s not an aspiration for a long-term relationship. In a way, I feel like I’m exploring this notion of an individual and how much of my individuality is bound up in community. It pushes me into situations where I personally have to really think about my identity.

1.13.11 MM: That happens a lot. We are part of a community and we are taken out of it to go somewhere else and with that process paradoxically you start questioning. This is why people keep diaries and we keep blogs because you are being displaced from the context in which your individuality has grown and makes sense because we as individuals always operate in the context of relationships with others. When this changes then you question, you start looking at yourself as being more aware of the fact that the relationships are not as smooth as it is in your place of origin so that paradoxically that generates a gap. You work with a community but you also reflect on yourself as an individual. It only happens because you are being taken out of your familiar context. You are placed in different relation and then as I mentioned previously, (maybe in my PhD) Viktor Shklovsky, a Russian Formalist in the ‘20s, wrote about different familiarisation as an important technique in art. If you are too familiar with things, you keep seeing them in the same way. And art de-familiarises your relationship with reality. The de-familiarisation allows you to see in a different way. Assume that we all suddenly become three metres tall, we see everything for above and everything would look different, so everything becomes more interesting and you discover new things. This is why being out of context can be conducive to creativity.
Appendix 2: Palimpsest

An extract from View from a Plane written by Jennifer Hamilton after a flight into Mildura:

The land lies beneath,
A palimpsest etched
Erased and re-etched
By wind and time
Symbols in ancient script
We slice the ancient parchment
Into squares, triangles, parallelograms,
The straight line rampart.........²

Mildura Palimpsest #10: Curatorial statement

Everywhere all at once ... here

“Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10, 2015: everywhere all at once...here, is focused around a series of intercultural, durational and collaborative journeys aimed at expanding real-time discussion and engagement with the idea of ‘global intercultural contemporaneity’[i] and the reality that it has always been everywhere all at once...here.³

Artists and thinkers from many nations across Australia and around the world including:

| Awakabal | Bundjalung/Kullili | Gija | Kokatha/Nukunu | Mutthi Mutthi | Ngarrindjeri | Ngiyampaa | Paakantji/Barkindji | Plangemaireenner | Tebrikunna | Yolgnu | Yorta Yorta | Canada | Finland | France | Greg ece |

² Fettling, "The Space of Palimpsest." Fettling writes: “This fragment of an unpublished poem titled ‘view from a plane’ by Jennifer Hamilton alludes to ... the exploration of a palimpsestuous space. Interestingly enough, Hamilton wrote this poem while reflecting on a flight over Mildura. For the un-initiated, the geometrical patchwork of vivid green horticultural blocks butted against the tonal, organic texture of the semi-arid desert, is profound. This is then overlayed with the evidences of ‘process”—the natural and human made scarring of roadways, rivers, cutaways and crusts of white salinity breaking the land’s surface. Palimpsest becomes the metaphor for the way in which land is changed by human activity.”

³ The wording of Jonathan Kimberley’s curatorial statement varies in different contexts. This version was current leading up to and during the Palimpsest #10 Biennale.
Imagine for a moment that there is no such thing as history; and that rather, everything that has ever happened is always entirely present, everywhere all at once ... here.

For example, we can recognize that contemporary knowledge about the continent of Australia and its place in the world has always been held concurrently by peoples from the hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations that have always lived here; and we can also recognize that contemporary knowledge about the Australian continent is held amid its global intercultural hybridity, made up of every nationality on the planet, forming and reforming ‘Australia’ in perpetuity.

Contemporary notions of post-national world order are so replete with ambivalence, that the dissolution of any delimiting intercultural palimpsest will rightly be resolute with doubt and belief. Yet, any starting point in the world is of course already ‘out of time’. Imagine therefore, that intercultural memory were unable to be consigned to the past and that we each carry with us at all times an innate sense of contemporary responsibility for everything that has ever occurred in the world. How would such a sense of ‘spherical consciousness’[ii] affect one’s approach to intercultural relations? Would such an awareness of the dynamics of difference and a customary sense of ambitious diversity become the salutary source of life, rather than a problematic to be homogenized (globalized)?

Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10 resists the persistent biennale model of a ‘temporary utopia’[iii] by inviting experimental and intercultural investigations of such post-national doubt and belief.

Embracing cultural diversity unfettered, and finding clarity in the global convergence of international traditions, beliefs and technologies that are breaking with global modernist timelines in meaningful ways, is arguably the central artistic challenge that defines our age. Concurrently however, outmoded notions of exclusivity, authorship and non-transmutable locus are often too presumptuous. Without actively seeking non-hegemonic intercultural collaborative agency that is capable of recognizing anew the contemporary
The simultaneity of ancient knowledge and virtual reality, we remain at risk of Elysian delusion with regard to equitable intercultural discussion.

Mildura is a diverse intercultural zone at the edge of the idea of disurbanity[iv]; a powerful locus of intercultural contemporaneity that is capable of asking the key biennale question:

What does connection to country, groundedness and local identity mean in an age of globalization and technological revolution?

A globally significant dynamic exists between one of the most important sites of continuous human occupation in the world at Willandra Lakes Region World Heritage Area/Mungo National Park and one of the most diverse migrant communities in the country, with over 65 international languages spoken in Mildura. This distinctive cultural character is amplified by the visceral physical transition between the fertile yet liminal irrigated plains of Australia’s largest river and the desert country that stretches out on all sides to the great inland of the Australian continent.

At first glance therefore, the Mildura region is a palimpsest of the highest order, a diverse intercultural zone layered with ‘history’ and yet presumed to be off the beaten track of the international art world. However, Mildura is in fact an inland city that harbours a far more complex generative agency, with a significant experimental art legacy[v], capable of interpolating the shifting ground of the international.

Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10 is very much an artist led biennale, emphasizing durational process, intercultural discussion, artistic responsibility and supporting the development of new work as integral to a dynamic program that is primarily interested in how site-specific, durational and collaborative journeys can coalesce into something otherwise unimaginable. Walking as durational art practice has emerged as a core-uniting medium of the biennale, in dialogue with traditional, interdisciplinary and e-media technologies. Walking Country specifically, as both creative practice and vital metaphor, is a grounded movement revaluing Indigenous knowledge of country, which has always been in dialogue with the virtual world. Participating artist Yhonnie Scarce describes,
Walking together, sweating together, causes something. The total immersion makes people into brothers and sisters. It’s about trust. I feel empowered climbing these mountains with everyone. We’ve relinquished something to be here.\[^{vi}\]

Every artist undertakes unique residencies in the Mildura region and beyond, the outcome of which is often unknown until the biennale opens. Risky, ambitious and challenging, the scale of artists’ new works for Mildura Palimpsest Biennale might occupy an entire salt lake, or a vast wheat field, an epic journey, a new take on the very nature of durational existence. Others are condensed into a single minute, developed in immediate real-time response to the Biennale itself.

Imagine for a moment that there is no such thing as history; and that out of history, we can perhaps reconfigure the core element of intercultural contemporaneity; the notion that we can be everywhere all at once … here. It is not for any one of us to know how or where such a collaborative journey might take us, but rather that we can be more open to how it might change us.”\[^{iv}\]

Jonathan Kimberley  
Curator, Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10, 2015


\[^{vi}\] Yhonnie Scarce (Kokatha/Nukunu), participating artist, in discussion with curator Jonathan Kimberley while walking the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage in Japan as part of the Mildura Palimpsest Biennale project Unmapping the End of the World, May 2015.

Appendix 3: In conversation with Jonathan Kimberley

Jonathan Kimberley curated the Mildura Palimpsest Biennale #10, 2015: everywhere all at once...here which fostered residencies by 76 artists from many nations across Australia and around the world. This conversation took place via Skype on the 30 May, 2016. A partial transcript follows.

VD: Please will you begin by talking about the theme of the 2016 Palimpsest.

“Everywhere all at once ... here ... and engagement with the idea of ‘global intercultural contemporaneity’ and the reality that it has always been everywhere all at once ... here”

JK: Terry Smith proposes an idea of contemporaneity in terms of contemporary art. Really what is means for me is that everyone has always been contemporary at all times everywhere all at once. I think it is an interesting expression of something that is actually very old. I can’t really talk about the Aboriginal notion of contemporaneity, because I am not Aboriginal. But from what Aboriginal people have told me they see the world as being always contemporary in all times. I’m interested about the meeting point of learning about Indigenous world views on contemporaneity and Terry Smith’s view on contemporaneity. And it seems to me that a key difference is Joseph Campbell’s idea of ever present origin which in some ways links the two together. Terry Smith tries to fit contemporaneity into a traditional historical timeline while indigenous perspectives of contemporaneity aren’t interested in that linear notion of history. They consider what we are all doing together is right here, right now and everything that has ever happened is also right here, right now.

VD: That concurs very much with my understanding of the way indigenous people understand the past to be in the present, and continually lived, whereas Terry Smith has tried to blur the divisions between past, present and future but her still operates within these parameters because he comes from a Western perspective.

JK: ...the Mildura Biennale was the perfect opportunity in many ways to further that inquiry, and to invite a really diverse range of artists to engage with it. In many ways Mildura is ... a very liminal location and it is also a contradiction because it is located on the biggest river in Australia, and yet that river is so hotly contested in terms of resources. ... the Murray River is a natural border between the lush and fertile southern part of the south and the much more desert, like northern, central parts of Australia so metaphorically Mildura is straddling that discussion and that question, particularly in the minds of non-indigenous people ... long term Mildura families are still coming to terms with the ... many different indigenous nations all around Mildura ... There are over 75 international languages spoken in Mildura, including indigenous languages. The three major indigenous nations around Mildura, are all very, very strong in knowledge of country, strong in their knowledge of contemporaneity. The other factor that drew me into wanting to curate the biennale at Mildura was the proximity of Mungo National Park which is one of the most significant locations, globally in terms of understanding the origins of human beings ... so it is one of the sites of oldest contemporaneity in the world. And particularly in Australia.

VD: How to you think your Palimpsest theme ties in with Ian Hamilton’s statement about the palimpsest – the parchment and the poem?
JK: I think Ian Hamilton’s introduction of palimpsest as the theme of the biennales is effectively the next incarnation of the Mildura Sculpture Triennials. Twenty years ago when he first introduced that theme it was very much of its time, with people coming to terms with the many layers of history that were being realised in this country ... To me the term palimpsest is actually very old fashioned now. And it does not fully articulate where we have come to since, over the last twenty years ... as an idea is too linear. It’s about linear layers, one on top of another. The most recent one obliterating the one before, but a small amount of the one before remaining visible which is not appropriate in terms of the intercultural diversity of this continent. It is an outdated term really ... rather than a palimpsest it is more of an emulsion ... The majority of the people more have the mindset of linear layers on top of another, like the stratification of rock through time or through layers of earth out at Mungo. The scientific approach of delineating is that way.

VD: It is a very western reading of time with a past, present and future.

JK: Yeah, so I don’t think palimpsest as an idea can embrace more of an emulsion of existence. So, as a curator of the #10 Mildura Palimpsest Biennale I was deliberatively questioning the idea of palimpsest, and encouraged artists to engage with others and the region in order to question that rather than validate it.

VD: So, what role do you think memory has in the palimpsest thinking and/or the contemporaneity idea?

JK: Well to me one of the most beautiful things about memory is that one often doesn’t realise they’re having a memory (remembering) until the present time. Memory comes forward for me that I didn’t even know existed, and they come forward to me partly because of what is happening in the present time. So it is not like a memory is an historical event. It’s a contemporary evocation of something within us, that relates to something that has happened before but wasn’t apparent until what is happening now is happening.

VD: Yes, and you reconfigure whatever happened in the past in the now context, so in my mind, having read and thought a lot about memory in the last eighteen months, it actually exists in the present and is a present manifestation so although it draws on events that have happened previously, it is (for me) very much a present thing.

VD: Getting back to the Palimpsest how important are the residencies? Is it important for the artists to live/stay in Mildura?

JK: I think in the art world ... residencies are vitally important. They don’t happen extensively enough. They are usually relatively fleeting and they don’t usually allow for a long term committed engagement between people. There is the opportunity ... in the Mildura Biennale #10 ... for artists to come and do residencies for as long as they wanted to effectively. We tried very hard to accommodate any length of stay that artists wanted to undertake, ranging from an artist who stayed for a full year, to artists that stayed for a number of months, to artists who stayed for a week. It was essentially up to the artist and the availability of the accommodation. To me the residency aspect of the biennale is vital and unique, and it fosters engagement with people and country. Most biennales in the world are more like pop up shops. One thing that really attracted me to the Mildura Biennale based residency model was that it was actively fostering something other than...
a representation of cherry picked works of art. It is truly about artists coming and making experimental new works that relates to the place and their experiences there.

VD: Yes, there was a real relevance to country feel. Can you talk to me a little about your responsibilities as curator in terms of selection of artists, logistics, funding?

JK: As curator in a small town like Mildura you end up doing a bit of everything. I sourced funding grant applications ... Initially I was co-curating with Helen Vivian for the first year and then she decided that she didn’t want to continue. Some of the artist selection was done in collaboration with her but then inevitably with a year to go things changed. Some artists we had invited couldn’t make it, others were substituted ... It was always a developing program ... whereby you remain open to possibilities. Some artists came for a residency and decided that they wanted to come back. It was always a bit of a ‘movable feast’ ... that was a really important and dynamic part of that particular biennale.

VD: So, having a lot of flexibility is important?

JK: Yes, which in many way is a more difficult way of doing things because you need to remain flexible in your planning.

VD: Do you think it added to the dynamic qualities of the final show?

JK: Absolutely. The dynamic nature of the biennale exhibitions themselves is really is the residency program and the riskiness of inviting artists to come and try something that they haven’t done before, not knowing what the outcome will be. It’s risky for the artists and the curator. But at the same time it is much more dynamic and for me it is much more what a biennale should be.

VD: One of the things I think was really evident in the biennale was the strong collaborative relationships between what could be called marginalised groups – the local indigenous, the young indigenous artists you brought in and the SMECC (Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council) program. And that seemed to be a real driver in your thinking.

JK: Absolutely, and for me it was always about finding more way to acknowledge and involve as many diverse cultures and people from the Mildura region as well as bring in a diversity of international perspectives, and artists from across the Australian continent to engage with that. There were difficulties in doing that and it required a lot of strong resolve from me to keep that as the core agenda of the biennale. And I think it challenged many people in Mildura to broaden their view about who lives here and who they are living with in the Mildura region.

VD: I thought some of the work at SMECC was really strong.

JK: Absolutely, and the refugee communities are growing very fast in Mildura and they have received very little recognition, and very little opportunity in the arts. I think what we achieved by bringing the Sunraysia Community Council was to invite some refugee artists in, but also SMECC inviting us to use their fantastic venue, their ‘home’ in Mildura as one of the venues in Mildura was really important. I feel like we only dipped our toe in the water. And if I had had a longer lead time there would have been an even greater diversity and greater numbers of participants from the SMECC communities. It was all new
relationships that ... hadn't been fostered before by the Biennale or Arts Mildura in terms of the refugee communities.

VD: That was evident ... you could see that it was a beginning, but a really good start, Some of the work was really well resolved and very interesting from an aesthetic viewpoint.

JK: ... Mildura is really a country town, and cutting edge contemporary art is really a difficult thing to engage many people in. The traditional idea of an art audience in different in somewhere like Mildura than in the major cities. At the same time, there are many things that occur that wouldn't occur in a major city in terms of artist and audience engagement, particularly through the residency program. It is a bit of a two-edged sword, and it is the ongoing difficulty for so called region centres to develop contemporary art audiences. On the one hand, seeing those centres as regional sets them apart from the major cities but it also sets them apart in terms of funding priorities in terms of government and audience numbers. ... when a place like Mildura or an event like the Mildura Palimpsest is seen as a regional event, it downplays the significance, not only for visitors but also for locals. I actually believe that the Palimpsest ... is an international biennale and I think biennales such as Mildura Biennale perhaps have not come to light yet or exist yet in places that are major cities. These may be the most interesting and exciting biennales of the future because city based biennales are becoming a bit homogenous. Contemporary art audiences are much more interested in a participatory experience. And I think that this is something that new biennales such as the Mildura Biennale can actually offer and foster.

VD: Obviously, the artists' collaboration was very evident – there were all types and layers happening with local residents in the making but when it came to viewing – if we consider that is necessary to finish the meaning of the work. How do you think that played out?

JK: Well I think the audience was engaged with the overall idea of the Biennale and what it. The opportunities to engage with the artists' work was there. As with anything that is challenging or questioning the usual way, it takes time for audiences to come to terms with what is happening. I think audience engagement can always be better, and to be honed in terms of the Mildura Biennale, it was a matter of resourcing and a lack of funding for marketing and promotion.

VD: At the time, I was so involved in what I was doing, but afterwards, thinking about it, there did not seem to be a lot of money for marketing.

JK: No there wasn't. And there was not a lot of money ... and from my perspective the most important aspect of the Mildura Biennale is the artists' engagement with the residency program, so the majority of resources went towards that. Funding is always difficult. I think in a smaller community that is always the case, particularly when events are very reliant on voluntary participation and funding levels are low. The pressure is pretty high, on everybody. And I think considering all of that Mildura, as a small community did an incredible job.

VD: Mildura did a magnificent job. Pressure and tension are necessarily bad things because they make people stop, and reflect deeply about future directions.
JK: ... Great art comes from critical enquiry, deep self-reflection and challenges and we are living in a time when the intercultural reality of the world is challenging all of us across the globe, all the time, whether it is through art, it is through conflict, or through resources or the imbalance between rich and poor... These are the questions of our time and if you don’t go there, you are not fostering critical contemporaneity. Many people find that really difficult, but for me the role of a biennale is to challenge people.

VD: I think that is the challenge, all good art needs to be thoughtful art, and not just confirm the status quo.

JK: Yes, absolutely and with that there are great highs and great lows. And that is the story of life.

VD: The Unmapping the End of the World (2015) project was really interesting. Can you briefly talk about the types of collaboration that took place, between the other artists and in the presentation of the work?

JK: The title itself, ‘Unmapping the End of the World’ is deliberately confounding. I saw a little recording made by one of the artists saying how confounded they were by the title. They said it was really hard to understand at the beginning but it made sense once we had been on the journey together. Really that project is something I have been developing for many years; the idea of journey uniting diverse people, taking artists out of their comfort zones, travelling to three significant sites around the world on a very open ended tour. I think it is a really rare, unique and important thing to do. There were many times when artists on that journey would come up to me and say, “I have no idea what you expect me to do on this journey”.

VD: On the journeys, did you function as an artist-collaborator rather than a curator, in order to leave the art outcomes very open? So, whatever the artists did was fine?

JK: Yes, absolutely, it was all about the artists doing whatever was right to them in response to that journey. Some artists engaged with me in discussions about it and others did not feel the need to. And others engaged with others in discussion about it, and didn’t engage with me. And that was all fine. That’s all part of the whole process and I wouldn’t define myself as one or the other – as a curator or artist in that project. I think I was always both, or always neither, or always one or the other – blurring the borders of what is a curator and what is an artist. It was kind of an incidental part of that project. But that project would not have occurred without my long history of intercultural engagement as an artist.

VD: When you presented your work in the gallery, there was obviously a collaboration with the other artists who were sharing that space. Please can you tell me a little about that?

JK: Mishka Henner’s sound work was very important in that space, as well as the egg shell walkway leading into that space, that was Misha’s work as well.

VD: When I first saw that it was quite squashed, but even the soft crunch, the sound that came with that walk was amazing. It would have been an even more amazing experience for the first people who walked that space with the uncruished shells.
JK: ... Unmapping the End of the World was all about going on this huge open-ended journey with a group of artists from around the world and across this continent to look at ways of art can un-map our preconceptions.

VD: The question you were asking yourselves was, “How does rootedness, groundedness to local identity mean in an age of globalisation and technological revolution?” So, what did you discover or decide?

JK: I don’t know yet. But it is interesting. One of the interesting aspects of that I had not expected was the absolute devotion to the world-wide web by the majority of the artists on the un-mapping journey. For example, where the contemporary sense of rootedness and groundedness is being able to check your email. And there were many occasions on that journey where there would be no Wi-fi access, notably out at Mungo for the first week. On the day before we started the journey, we did the briefing with all the artists and I mentioned there would be no Wi-fi access for a week, you should have seen the frenzy.

VD: Really, so people got quite anxious about that?

JK: Yes. Some stayed up all night to make sure everyone knew they were going to be out of contact, to check everything that needed to check. Because our lives are so dominated by having Internet access, we take it for granted. And for the first day at Mungo when there was no Internet it was quite concerning for quite a few artists, but then interestingly once they had come to terms with that they all said to me later that it was really valuable, that they did not have Internet access because it meant that they could engage with the rootedness and groundedness of the place. And that was really significant, but at the same time, as soon as there was Wi-fi access anywhere on that journey everyone was on it, immediately so it was a fascinating contrast in terms of what rootedness and groundedness might mean in the contemporary world.

VD: Ricky Mitchell’s video and documentation was interesting because it was so grounded in his sense of place which is tied to a physical space – and also a social place.

JK: Rootedness and groundedness is a very clear notion for someone like Ricky. He knows exactly who he is, what his country is and then at the same time there is the ongoing battle for his family, like many, many other indigenous people to maintain that connection to country in the face of colonisation. I think it was very important in the overall context of that Mapping the End of the World project to have a very local perspective. And that was the most important thing for Ricky to present. I’m pretty sure it is the first time he has been overseas. I know it was profoundly important and he got quite a lot out of the journey but when he returned he still wanted to make the work about his Grandmother’s struggle.

VD: There may have even been a stronger need after being away.

JK: That’s right. And it was poignant in terms of the overall journey because the journey started at Mungo and that is part of Ricky’s country. That had a profound effect on all the artists who are not from Barkindji country and connecting that international journey at Mungo really set the scene for what it means to walk country. Ricky and Daryl Pappin were both very important in that whole discussion. Ricky, Daryl and the Paakantji, Ngilampaa and Mutthi Mutthi elders welcomed all of the artists and commenced the
journey with all of us. They set the project, the whole journey and the whole group of artists off on the right foot.

VD: Did the elders walk country with you on the first days?

JK: All of the elders came to the start of the walk and some walked with us on the first day. And after that it was mostly the artists.

VD: Some of the elders, because of their age, would have health issues too.

JK: Absolutely, they weren’t able to walk long distances, but they were certainly there at the beginning and there were many wise words uttered at the commencement of the whole journey which were very helpful.
Appendix 4: In conversation with Amber Perryman

[Amber Perryman is the Co-ordinator of the Vancouver Arts Centre in Albany. She had a pivotal role in bringing the FORM’s street program to Albany and this conversation took place at the Art Centre, on 19 May, 2016, a few weeks after the PUBLIC16 event in Albany. A partial transcript of the conversation is included here.]

VD: Perhaps you could begin telling me how the partnership with FORM came about?

AP: As part of our strategic plan for 2016-19, I developed a concept proposing a new festival which is in line with the economic development targets for the region. To a certain extent, I thought Albany was of age, or is coming of age [with art and culture]. Historically, regional areas tend to import art rather than create their own product. I think Albany is at a stage where we can look at creating our own product and our own festival.

VD: You have some very talented artists in the area.

AP: Absolutely, so that is part of it. I read … a book, called “Exploring Site Specific Arts: Issues of Space and internationalism by Judith Rugg. The festival idea came out of the ideas in this book. … the FORM project this year was a way of giving the idea a small test. We were interested in partnering with FORM anyway, around their PUBLIC program. There was a drive from a couple of councillors to see some street art in Albany. My view was that whatever we did had to reflect a local context. We’re not a mini-Melbourne. We’re not even an urban environment. We don’t have that many walls, but we do have some. We have some laneways that are undiscovered … there was some potential so we approached FORM and asked if they would consider partnering with us to extend their PUBLIC festival down here this year. When I spoke with them early on, I … flagged … that the FORM event would help … test out some of the festival ideas we have.

The murals … created through FORM are … considered to be temporary. Although they do have a permanence there is no requirement for them to be maintained. If the wall owners don’t like them they can paint over them. Around that we engaged some local artists to create specific ephemeral work in other locations around the CBD.

We concentrated on the CBD to create that festival, condensed vibe.

VD: The fact that people could walk to the different venues gave the event a unified feel, and was a real plus for me when I participated.

AP: Exactly, it was all in one area that gave it a sense of occasion, an event. While our site-specific festival idea is obviously bigger and grander in scale; and we hope [it] will encompass a variety of art forms. You might, for example, have a land art installation somewhere out in the bush. We’re country – we have more trees, grass and plants than we have walls. It could be a performance out at the Gap, where you have teamed up the Choral Society with a composer. And that could be something that you could then sell tickets to … a whole site works festival would allow you to engage in spaces in a different way. You may have been to the Gap before but to … visit to listen to a site specific choral piece, involving music that references that site at night with the stars shining and drinking a glass of wine would provide a different experience.
VD: You seem to be basing the idea for the festival around the concept of site-specificity, of meaning that is attached to the physical spaces.

4.54 AP: Well, Judith Rugg’s book talks about permanent pieces of public art which is one person’s perspective ... [of a] space and what that location means to a community. ... It’s the old Modernist paradigm of push down art, whereas the beauty of ephemeral work is that it allows for a multitude of voices. Because it is ephemeral ... [and] someone does not connect, or agree with it, it is okay because it is not going to be there for any length of time.

VD: So, you see the work as an ongoing dialogue about place? It would have a real tie to physical location, and possibly help generate a greater sense of community.

5.58 AP: More than simply commissioning an artist. In regional areas, often artists from out of town are commissioned to create sculptures and then they are just ‘plonked’ somewhere. It is incredibly frustrating for the local arts community ...

6.54 AP: And further to that, I have no issue working with FORM ... A large group of artists worked in Albany. Some were international, some were Perth based and some were local. I have no problems with using International artists and bringing artists in from elsewhere as long as they are sensitive to the community. As long as they are doing their research and they are not here to just impose their opinions. Some of the artists who came asked about ... Indigenous icons and that sort of thing. I ... advised them to just steer clear – there was not enough time for consultation. It’s good to have those International artists come in but sometimes they ... respond to site as a visitor. In regional areas, we have lots of visitors so their view of a location may resonate with [that of] the visitors we get, [but it] might not ... [reflect the ideas of] the local community.

VD: Karim Jabbari’s understanding of Albany is an example of this. Someone had obviously told him that in 1826 Albany it was the site of the first settlement in Western Australia. From this he assumed it was a people-less place before then and he wrote text on the wall to that effect. It was really interesting that he was depicting a tourist understanding of Albany. I thought at the time several things could be done. You could reflect on it and think we should have another look at how we are portraying ourselves. I think that is perhaps a timely thing to do. You could ask local Minang Noongar artists to paint over that part with the text and, in doing so, assert their presence here too. The reality is that nothing will happen.

9.24 AP: No, but obviously, it is only one view. And ... it is less offensive because [Albany] didn’t commission that work to the tune of a million dollars in metal and put it in the town square. We are not saying this is the definitive description-explanation-meaning of settlement and this is Albany’s position that everyone should adopt. People won’t be offended because it is just Karim’s view and it may stay up there for a year of two ... ten years’ maximum. It won’t be maintained. Someone can go and graffiti over it. That’s the thing with ephemeral work. I think it is quite exciting.

VD: What did Albany hope to get from PUBLIC?

10.27 AP: For most people, it was just seeing their CBD enlivened a bit with artwork. Putting those artworks in the laneways and in the CBD encourages pedestrian traffic. There is a
connection with the whole York Street redevelopment which is about slowing the traffic down from the Town Hall up. The City is trying to encourage York Street to be the heart of Albany again. You don't often see lot of people walking around.

VD: The location is quite sterile.

11.23 AP: I know and if you think about it, all the main shopping is away from the street, in the development between the Plaza and Woolworths, that is ... busier, that is where everyone hangs out. And then you have York Street that is windy and empty so... we are trying to activate that space.

VD: I notice that the feedback form was couched in how much money participants were going to spend while viewing the art.

11.59 AP: Yes, because FORM get a lot of their money from supporting economic and tourism development. People will come here to see some of these works.

VD: They were looking at a potential economic spinoff.

12.27 AP: That’s how you sell it to the business owners as well. They gave up their walls. They are essentially responsible for the works now. They own them.

VD: So, for example, the works on the side of the Hub building are owned by the Hub?

12.46 AP: Andrew Fraser and Borondo’s works, Yes. That work by Borondo is the inside of Mary Thomson house. [Mary Thomson house was formerly the nurses’ quarters that were part of the old hospital, and the house is used for short term accommodation for official visitors to the City of Albany.]

VD: I didn’t realise that. That is really interesting.

13.03 AP: Not many people would know that because not many have been into Mary Thomson house. Borondo thought it was kind of ghostly. For him it was one of his quintessential experiences of being here - this ghostly heritage house with two corridors that mirror each other.

VD: He also did a corridor mural at Curtin University. When I searched the web to see other work, a lot seemed to be around the human figure. The nude figure. He deals a lot with victimisation so often the human figure is portrayed as being in some type of bondage or in an oppressed state. He makes quite political art. And the message is very clear because he is a skilled, realistic painter. The work he did in Western Australia was subtler and much more covert in its meaning. How much did people dictate the subject matter of what should go on the walls here?

14.38 AP: The artists would have been asked, and I certainly suggested that they be sensitive to the fact that Albany is quite conservative. It is quite different from Barcelona, for example, that wants to pride itself on having an edgy reputation at an International level. The Hub wall is in very close proximity to the Church. They were told that the Church was really happy to have the mural adjacent but they asked that it not to do anything
that would be too offensive in terms of religion. The artists are paid, so if they want to make highly political art they can do that in their own time I guess.

VD: There are venues in the world that would welcome that.

15.56 AP: Yes, and in Albany, slightly covert makes sense. All the artists were really pleasant, friendly and appreciative of the hospitality and the welcome we gave them ...

VD: ... They seemed to be very genuine.

16.42 AP: And they were the artists who wanted an opportunity of travelling outside of Perth. A lot of the other international artists just travelled to Perth. Really if they don’t get out of Perth, they end up with a very limited experience of Australia – the experience of going between the wall and a hotel. They could be anywhere in the world. Whereas the artists who travelled to Albany, two Italians, a Spaniard, a Portuguese guy, a Tunisian, and HENSE and his partner had the opportunity of a different experience. Stormie Mills came down too. And the artists who came wanted to see country Australia so we did a lot of sightseeing. I took them out walking around Mt Clarence. We went to the Gap. They wanted to see kangaroos because they had never seen any real live kangaroos that weren’t in a zoo. We did manage to find a few that weren’t dead. I got some friends to take them four wheel driving so they had a proper Australian country experience and they loved it. We went at night, it was dark. We went down on the beach and we got bogged twice. Stormie had to pull someone out in his Defender, which was great for him because he had never pushed his vehicle to its full extent before in that environment

VD: What other roles did you have before everyone arrived? Who chose which walls would be painted?

18.54 AP: We had some ideas about the walls that would be good. FORM came down for a couple of pre-visits and there were lots of conversations between the planning, tourism, and the events teams because there was a whole event wrapped around the street art. Major projects were also doing the York Street upgrade. So, there was a large meeting at the City a couple of months ago, and FORM did a presentation about who they were and they outlined some of the benefits of partnering with a cultural organisation. Often you need to sell the value of the art and culture to local government. And that is what FORM are quite good at doing because they are very good at joining the dots between cultural development, economic development and tourism outcomes. We then drove around and identified walls that would be appropriate, before deciding on a maximum of nine. Then we divided up the walls– some needed heritage approval. Planning got onto that, and because Nick Walker from major projects had developed relationships with some of the major business owners as part of the York Street redevelopment he spoke to them. Between the four of us, we spoke to all the business owners, and then we created a memorandum of understanding between them, the City and FORM. It outlined the scope of works. Timelines were really short and it was very complex because a lot of people were involved. FORM was not really used to having intermediaries liaising with the community so they were really happy with the level of admin support and facilitation that we provided. In the past, they seem to have operated out of smaller regional communities that do not have as much infrastructure.
VD: They have a big footprint in the Pilbara. Their art centre I think was established after the Canning Stock Route project.

21.20 AP: That was an amazing cultural community development project. Albany is different from small regional communities because we have a functioning art centre, we have a planning team who are interested in art and we have quite a progressive younger middle management who come from a variety of different backgrounds including not for profit art centres and architectural firms so they are all able to mobilise quite quickly. It was a big project.

VD: The actual day, (I was here on the Saturday) went really well.

23.18 AP: I agree. I think over a hundred people came down for the talks. Feedback from the community was great. Teenagers – young drivers were beeping their horns – when they were driving past the artists painting, saying, “Thanks mate, for doing this in our town”. I think it helps change the perception of Albany. There is a perception that Albany has an aging population, it’s for retirees. There are a lot of younger people here but they are somewhat hidden.

VD: FORM market their street art as an alternative to a gallery.

24.03 AP: They have done … [so] for three years. I think that street art is very accessible … It helps to destroy the notion that … art galleries are for the initiated. There is a large number of people in society who do not engage with the arts, because they believe they don’t know anything … Our focus has shifted from trying to get people to come to our community arts centre, (and we are not really … ‘highbrow’, although we do have an exhibition program that is at times, academic, conceptual and theoretical but we really are focusing much more on outreach, taking art out into the community where people ‘hang out’. There is no point in simply sitting here asking why only a few people come through the art centre …

28.19 AP: When we did the big draw, it was so difficult to get adults to be brave enough to pick up a pencil and draw something … they were … too timid to even try.

VD: Do you think the street art has any real aesthetic value? Is it just bright and cheery? Does it really engage in a sensory way, or is it more of a graphic style of art?

29.49 AP: Because they are large scale I think they are quite immersive. In some cases, they are in laneways so you can’t actually stand back to take in the whole work, so your perception of the work is quite close. From an aesthetic value, the walls look far better than they did before, so our town is improved. I quite like graphic art and illustration and I would say the majority sits in that genre. Compared to a crumbling wall previously, I think it is an improvement. Borondo’s work is more fine art than others, … it is more painterly …

Addendum:

AP: A worthwhile benefit of bringing international artists to town to create ephemeral works was that they helped to inspire and challenge local artists in their practice, particularly those who were engaged to collaborate alongside them in the PUBLIC street art. This type of interaction has the capacity develop broader art understandings and
additional skills at a local community level, that hopefully will result in greater vibrancy and
diversity in our public art spaces in the future.
Appendix 5: Form follows finance and the public banality

[Marcus Canning is a practicing artist, and founder and CEO of the Fringe World Festival in Perth. He spoke at the Bureau of Ideas symposium: “Art in the City: Cool, Cliché or Clutter?” held at Belgian Beer Cafe, 347 Murray Street in Perth on 24 October 2016.]

Presentation excerpt:

“The title of my talk tonight is FORM FOLLOWS FINANCE & THE PUBLIC BANALITY⁵ – this is of course a play on the battle-cry of modernist architecture – FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION, as coined by the mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis Sullivan who was following in the footsteps of a turn of the century essay ‘Ornament and Crime’ by Austrian architectural allegorist Adolph Loos. From Form following function, to Form following fashion to Form following finance is a decent way to sum up the progression from modernism to post-modernism in the realm of art and built form and the penultimate late-capitalist ransacking of art and culdersacking of culture as global commodity. From a parochial point of view, FORM FOLLOWS FINANCE & THE PUBLIC BANALITY is of course a gentle satirical dig at local arts agency FORM and their annual festival of urban art – PUBLIC.

Now don’t get me wrong. FORM implements an extraordinary amount of work across many fields and terrains right across the state. Some of it is very, very good, and much of the work in the annual PUBLIC festival sits in that category. I have always had some intrinsic personal if not professional concerns about the PUBLIC initiative, which by its very nature involves street art sanitisation and graffiti as tool of gentrification. This kind of thing makes me imagine a pack of wolf children having their fangs removed with surgical flyers in order to become more productive and less menacing. Personally, I think wolves should be encouraged to stay wild and not be domesticated as the pets of place making propaganda – otherwise they become, by default, dogs. But that is a personal viewpoint, and comes down perhaps to taste.

From a professional stance, it was the irreparable desecration of some very significant porous cast concrete brutalist architectural fabric on the Curtin University campus during the last PUBLIC festival that was more concerning.

This vandalism has been an ongoing topic of great consternation throughout the architectural, design and visual art community of Perth. Beth has written about it. David Weir has some interesting things to say on the subject available on his website. The fact that photos of children looking animated in front of this desecration are still being used for promotional purposes only adds further insult to this injury as it indicates that the key decision makers and gatekeepers involved do not necessarily see, let alone acknowledge the error of their ways.

⁵ Canning, “Form Follows Finance and the Public Banality.”
A quote from the FORM website about the works at Curtin, “It’s about using culture and creativity to enrich the way in which we live, work and learn. Finding ways to improve our places, neighbourhoods and cities for the good of all is a central theme. A university campus is a perfect place to put some of these ideas into action.” If this is the action (referring to the image on the screen) – I think the ideas – or lack thereof, are incredibly sad and shallow.

On the subject of public art gatekeepers getting blindsided by their own hype, some other targets alluded to in the summary description of my talk include bureaucrats and corporate clients. If I were to extend the list I’d definitely include consultants – including funded organisations that manage public art commissions on behalf of government departments, commercial developers and corporations.

My view is that there is a lot of very good public art and there is also a lot of not so good public art and generally, that the more gate keepers and middle men and agencies and marketers get involved, the greater the chance that the results will not be what they could be …"

Marcus Canning