Agency and affect: curating political change

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Abstract

_Agency and affect: curating political change_ is a practice-led research project that considers the relationship of art to political change, and the critical possibilities for agency in this relationship. To establish this, I develop and elucidate a theoretical framework for understanding art’s operation in the social and political sphere, and relationship to the individual audience member. By foregrounding first an understanding of how an artwork operates within a relational sphere of individual subjectivity, I elaborate a new position arguing that the artwork and its affective potential can generate individual insight into the limits that bound behaviour and thought and, through this, enable a sense of agency in contributing to change through challenges to those limitations. I develop this framework through the process of conceiving, developing and staging a series of curatorial projects, employing the practice of critically-engaged curating as a research methodology, using a mode of curating situated within the discipline’s contemporary discourse. The ideas of social agency, and engagement of a political nature, are intrinsic in the content, form and presentation context of each curatorial project. Interspersed between, various ideas are tested against these curatorial projects over the course of the research, and the results form the ground for the subsequent projects. This process of testing and evaluation of concepts against actual artistic projects and their strategies, feeds into the development of a robust theoretical framework for considering art and agency. The research paper concludes with an argument for how this framework offers a recalibration of the nexus between art, the political and everyday life and, in light of this, the ways in which an artwork might be measured and understood.

The creative work is the curatorial development and realisation of the three projects: _Civil Twilight End, 2011_, a permanent public artwork situated in Melbourne’s Docklands; _[en]counters, 2013_, a program of temporary performances and installations staged in the public sphere of Mumbai; and _David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me, 2014_, a retrospective exhibition presented at the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. This creative work is documented through still images in the accompanying Durable Creative Record.
Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the 475AA Doctor of Philosophy, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne; due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and, this thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

_____________________________________

Simon Maidment

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**Introduction**

*Agency and affect: curating political change* is a practice-led research project that considers the relationship of art to political change, and the critical possibilities for agency in this relationship. To establish this, I develop and elucidate a theoretical framework for understanding art’s operation in the social and political sphere, and its relationship to the individual audience member. Through an investigation of existing theoretical positions, I identify a tendency in which broader theoretical frameworks have been misapplied in order to judge the quality of individual artworks and the methodology of their creation, at the expense of theorising with greater scrutiny the relationship of the artwork to the subjectivity of an audience member. By foregrounding first an understanding of how an artwork operates within a relational sphere of individual subjectivity, I elaborate a new position arguing that the artwork and its affective potential can generate individual insight into the limits that bound behaviour and thought and, through this, enable a sense of agency in contributing to change through challenges to those limitations.

Critically engaged curating is undertaken as a methodology within this research project to explore and test the emergent theoretical framework, in an iterative fashion over the course of the project. To elaborate, within the structure of the research project, the relationship of the curated artwork, program or exhibition to the theoretical investigation is one where the presentations act as a site where the ideas are put into practice, where the relations can be observed, where insights are generated (in the planning, experimenting, presenting and reception/interaction), and then fed back incrementally and recursively into the theoretical investigation, as one informs the other. Critically engaged curating is by its nature reflexive and here lends itself to being both a creative practice within this practice-led research project and its method of investigation. Each of the three projects undertaken required nuanced differences in the ways of working for different contexts and with different aims in mind. The case study projects were consciously developed and included to assist in triangulating the concepts in question, with each taking place over a different temporality, in different contexts, and with (or producing, as I argue later) vastly different publics. The first curated project (*Civil Twilight End*) resulted in a permanent public artwork situated and responding to Melbourne’s Docklands precinct; the second (*[en]counters*) a program of temporary performance-installations, presented in the public sphere of Mumbai; and the third (*David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me*) a museum retrospective of an artist nearly twenty years after his death. Individually, they contribute key insights
into a working model for considering art and political agency and, together, make up the practice component of the research project.

An aim of this research project is to test the binary between art and politics, and through this new theoretical framework re-think the linear causality from the sensory to the deliberative. I develop this framework through the process of conceiving, developing and staging a series of curatorial projects, employing the practice of critically-engaged curating as a research methodology, using a mode of curating situated within the discipline's contemporary discourse. The ideas of social agency, and engagement of a political nature, are intrinsic in the content, form and presentation context of each curatorial project. Interspersed between, various ideas are tested against these curatorial projects over the course of the research, and the results form the ground for the subsequent projects. This process of testing and evaluation of concepts against actual artistic projects and their strategies, feeds into the development of a robust theoretical framework for considering art and agency.

The research project is born out of an examination of attempts made over the past century to theorise the relationship of art (its making and presentation) to social and political change. The catalyst for much of this activity was the series of avant-garde art movements in the early part of the twentieth century that sought to change life through the practice of art, and these resulting theories have formed the basis of contemporary discourse considering art and social change. Indicative contemporary authors of this debate include Jacques Rancière, Gerald Raunig, Boris Groys, Claire Bishop, Nicolas Bourriaud, and Grant Kester, many of who are responding to and extending the historical positions articulated by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, in particular Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. As will be discussed in detail later in this research paper, both men were to undertake a public correspondence between 1928 and 1940, centring on questions about the relationship of art to life, as a way of considering art and politics.

Within the influential exchange between these philosophers of differing views, there was a shared belief that a key collective assumption had been undermined, a notion long held by almost all artists, writers and creative practitioners in different cultures: that they were working towards or contributing to a progressive social future simply by pursuing their craft. Adorno’s concept of Negative Dialectics undermined what he argued was an overly affirmative position in Georg Hegel's work, which had influenced Karl Marx and others to believe there was an inevitable unity or bringing together of binary positions. Benjamin refers in his correspondence to Paul Klee’s 1920 monotype Angeles Novus to elaborate the idea of an Angel of History moving with its back turned to the
potential for a unified future, instead looking over the destruction of the past. This centrality of contingent events and their relational subjective potential was inaugurated in these exchanges between the Frankfurt School philosophers, along with an examination of the relationship of art to change within this dynamic. Adorno argued that no path to truth was possible within a corrupted system, and art needed to exist in opposition to society; while for Benjamin, the loss of art’s authenticity – or aura – brings it into everyday life and allows for its instrumentation in challenging larger social orders or ideologies.

Today consideration of the relationship of art to life, as autonomous or contingent, is widely considered to have reached a point of theoretical paradox and stasis (which will be described later in this research project as a ‘crisis’). The backdrop of the contemporary moment incorporates the impact of neo-liberalism, the individualisation of identity, and the fragmentation and explosion of community from geography in the information age, and the manner in which the social has become hyper-visual, transformed through digital communication technologies, while power and wealth are increasingly hidden through multi-national corporations and made opaque through the rampant use of off-shore banking practices. It is clear that the contemporary context for considering these questions has fundamentally changed.

The dematerialisation of the art object in contemporary art marked a shift in the way artists and their artworks engaged with the viewer, and in the social context of their presentation. If, in the past, ‘political’ art was often characterised by the critique of social, political and cultural institutions from ‘the outside’, the evolution of institutional critique, and an increasing complexity of political landscape, underpins a significant shift today in the ways artists work with communities, disseminate or present their work and, in many cases, the fundamental nature of what constitutes the work itself. The more complex contemporary situation is reflected in the emergence of socially engaged, collective art concerned with the dematerialisation of the artwork, which, along with the decolonisation of art history, is presenting different challenges to those anticipated by the Frankfurt School. This research project specifically focuses on an attempt to move beyond the crisis touched on above, and beyond considering art, politics and everyday life in binary ways. To do this, it is necessary to look beyond art history and to find tools in other areas. Rather than present a radical project to citizenry itself, instead I seek to locate through this research project art’s role in activating senses of agency and ownership in the citizenry, by focusing on art’s impact on the individual within a contextual field. I look to areas of cultural theory to better articulate the field in which the artwork is encountered and engaged with by a public to understand this as a relational field of contingent forces, rather than purely an art historical canon.
Further, I examine attempts made to evaluate the quality of engagement with the artwork and, in so doing, consider the insights and limitations offered by Bourriaud’s concept of ‘Relational Aesthetics’, as well as those offered up in a counter-position by Bishop, who argues for artwork operating in antagonistic and agonistic modes, itself indebted to the work of political theorist Chantal Mouffe. Practitioners who, over the past twenty years, have questioned our world by imbedding their work within the social fabric, often creating work about the social or political context, and with the public, are at the centre of my interest with this research and, more generally, throughout my curatorial practice. The research project considers Bishop’s argument to evaluate such practices through a disruptive rather than ameliorative measure, through key texts. Crucially, the research identifies a pathway to recalibrate the critical evaluation of an artwork away from that of comparing artworks to one another, including assessing the process of their creation (as Bishop and Kester have argued) towards a foregrounding of an artwork’s affective potential. The basis for doing this involves incorporating an argument about how this affective potential is generated through the artwork’s form and content in relation to the individual audience member’s lived experience. It is with this more specific understanding of the mechanics involved that a theory of affect, I argue, can be then productively employed in wider reconsiderations of artistic strategies of political agency as well as for the consideration of individual works.

Through the act of curating, my research examines practitioners who are undertaking projects that have progressed the traditional mid-twentieth century notions of site-specificity, beyond a mere physical space or geographic location, to embrace a broader understanding of the specificity of ‘place’, and to directly engage with social and political issues and conditions. Here the concept of place, articulated through the writings of geographer Doreen Massey, is understood as constellations of relational forces. It is within these fields of relations that artists respond to unique stories and histories of the local community, as well as the physical nature of the site and area, the context (historical, contemporary and projected future) of the place in which their project is developed, sited, and presented. The curatorial strategy for developing each project relied on the discoveries made in the research up to that point, both in relation to the overall aim of the research project to articulate a theoretical understanding of the operation of art (on an individual, within a body politic), and concurrent research to the specifics of the context within which the artwork is produced and/or presented. In the case of the first project *Civil Twilight End*, the notions of place and context are specifically related to the physical site of Melbourne’s Docklands, but extend into the history of Melbourne and previous uses of the area and building alongside the commission. *[en]counters* involved similar research into physical places within the city of Mumbai, including identifying its public space, and their present populations and
histories, and moreover the political history and changing present of India. Research towards the final project *David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me* differed from the other two projects in that the production of the artworks (for the most part) occurred prior to the research project, and the exercise was focussed more on the presentation and interpretation of them to reflect on the current moment through the lens of the past, and the life of the late artist. Learnings from each project then fed into further pathways of the theoretical research, a process which might be considered cumulative in that the insights the third project affords the final development of the overall argument of the thesis is equally reliant on the research informing the earlier projects, and the learnings from those, as it is on the research undertaken specifically in relation to its development and execution.

These ways of working may be described as site-specific, context specific, context responsive, socially engaged, participatory, inclusive or collaborative. Rather than attempting to argue for minor distinctions between various terminologies, the fundamental focus of this research project is to consider how art *operates* within the social and political sphere, and what is at play when it is presented and encountered. Crucial to this, and much overlooked in the evaluative frameworks discussed above, is a consideration of how the artwork’s form and content combine with the context of reception to impact a public through the experience of the individual. It is precisely this combination – which includes as part of its context the lived experience of the audience member – that generates the affective power a work of art might have over an individual.

Accounting for what actually happens when one encounters an artwork, and is moved or affected by it, is central to the development of this theoretical framework. The work of philosopher Brian Massumi on the generation and operation of affect is outlined in the research paper, and has been productively employed in establishing how the relationship between form, content and context produces intense sensation at the point of encounter. This however is only the initial spark in understanding the dynamic of art and political change. The sense of ownership and agency mentioned above relates to the individual’s sense of a world in which they can make different in some way. This research has relied on the work undertaken by philosopher Jacques Rancière in order to account for this and to finally establish the theoretical framework, which is tested against the work of the artist David McDiarmid, and the posthumous retrospective *David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me*. The near two-decade gap between his death and the exhibition allows for much greater insight into the changing social and political context between art making and art presentation. This is the focus of the last of the three curatorial project case studies and is used to unlock an understanding of
agency. The challenging and provocative nature of McDiarmid’s art makes visible the possibility for change, even more so looking back at it today. As Rancière writes, ‘Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection.’ The challenge to what we have assumed as visible, sayable, and doable allows the audience member, the public, to understand and embrace the malleability of these limiting structures in ways that can produce a sense of their own agency, as I outline in more detail in later chapters asserting the argument for this framework. This stands in marked contrast to the historical assumption (that underpinned the movements of the avant-garde as well as much of the Frankfurt School): that art contained a rarefied message that could challenge social structures should it be broadcast to a public. Here agency is situated within the audience member whose is active and responsible for their own recalibration of potential for political change. This framework might prove a useful starting model for further investigation, having established a clear relationship to understanding art and the critical importance of its form and content to its reception and potential.

This supporting thesis consists of nine chapters that chart: the field of curatorial discourse that informs the working methodology; details on the art historical backdrop against which the research is undertaken; details of the development the curatorial projects; and an elaboration of the cultural theory discourses that underpin the development of a theoretical model, which, in turn, informs and is used to consider the curatorial projects.

The first chapter ‘Curating and the Curatorial’ elaborates the relationship of the curatorial practice to the subject of the research project. The chapter charts the emergence of the practice of ‘independent curating’ and articulates the tension of artistic authorship borne from this. It includes reference to the development of curatorial practice in order to show that the approach and position adopted by the curator can be understood as a curatorial modality. An argument for the adoption of critical curating as a reflexive methodology concludes the chapter.

To provide some backdrop for the theoretical developments of the research project, the second chapter ‘Art and Social Change: a crisis’ briefly outlines key theoretical positions in relationship to art’s role in social and political change. Informed by the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, the arguments largely focus on the relationship between art and life, and art’s autonomy, leading to a situation described in the chapter as ‘a crisis’ facing artists creating socially engaged work.
The third chapter ‘Context: place and specificity’ outlines what is understood to constitute a public sphere as a site of presentation, exchange and judgement. It introduces the concept of ‘place’ as a relational field, and argues for the importance of specificity in activating the potentialities of audience engagement.

The fourth chapter, ‘Civil Twilight End’, describes the first of three curatorial projects, a permanent public art commission in Melbourne’s Docklands. The chapter outlines the process and various curatorial considerations underpinning the act of artist selection, project development and the realisation of the artwork, all substantially informed by the ideas outlined in the previous chapter.

The fifth chapter, ‘Relationality, judgement and artistic strategies’, further develops the concept of art encountered in a relational field, following the ideas outlined in the third chapter, with particular reference to Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of ‘Relational Aesthetics’. It outlines arguments against Bourriaud’s theoretical schema, including its claims for art’s emancipatory potential. The chapter incorporates consideration of Claire Bishop’s counter model, and the key concepts that inform it.

The sixth chapter is devoted to the second curated project, a temporary program of Australian relational art practices presented in the public sphere of Mumbai. Entitled ‘[en]counters’, after the program, the chapter describes the curatorial decisions and relationship to each of the artists and their projects, informed by the previous project and the thinking in chapters three and four. It briefly summarises the experiences of presenting the works, which provides a backdrop to consider the intensity of sensation experienced by an audience member.

This sensation, its relationship to the artwork and how it is produced, is the subject of chapter seven, ‘Experience’. It is theorised in this chapter through a brief examination of the accounts by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari of the ontology of art, which underpins the argument for the operation of affect by Brian Massumi. This accounts forms the basis of understanding art’s autonomy not in relation to life but to the experience of a work of art, in the latent potential of the production of affect held within the artwork.

The following chapter ‘David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me’, chapter eight, describes the final curatorial project, a museum retrospective of the late artist and activist David McDiarmid. The chapter outlines the curatorial concept for the exhibition and gives an overview of many of the artworks on display. The chapter describes the layout of the exhibition through the lens of projecting a possible audience experience of the show, relating this process involved in the creation of the exhibition as akin to
choreography. It further describes a range of mediating platforms created to further the experience of the artworks and exhibition.

Chapter nine examines in detail a number of the artworks presented in the third case study, in relation to the potential for social and political change under the heading 'What can be said, done and seen'. It introduces Jacques Rancière's concept of 'the sensible', being what can be said, done and seen in any specific historical, social and political context. It solidifies, through Rancière's work, the autonomy of experience as a crucial way to conceive the ontology of an artwork. The chapter describes art's operation in relation to the potential to challenge, disrupt and extend the boundaries of what can be said, done and seen through an examination of the work of David McDiarmid, and relying on the role of affect described in 'Chapter 7: Experience'.

The conclusion summarises the theoretical position developed through the research project and charted in the earlier chapters. It introduces some additional positions critical of the framework, and counters their claims. It concludes with an assertion of the importance of the audience member for the operation of art within the social and political sphere to be identified – and thus reveals the fundamental contingency of art to this concept. Further, it reveals the ways in which a recognition of the malleability of the sensible through an encounter with an artwork, made manifest through the irruptive nature of affect, can lead to agency for change within a political context.
Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial

Throughout this research project, I have relied on the act of curating as the engine for, and method of, investigation. This is not, however, strictly a research project about curating per se. This chapter charts, in brief, the development of curatorial practice in becoming an activity undertaken in a burgeoning, and discrete, discursive field. It outlines some recent positions on curatorial practice in order to elucidate the approach to curating employed to realise the projects that make up this research, and argue for understanding these as operating as modalities of curating. I do not attempt to do this exhaustively, as I have established that the role of curating as a practice within this research is as a methodology, to create projects and events as a way to investigate art and its operation, rather than a purely self-reflexive undertaking. Further, the practice of critical curating is a generative one, one that produces knowledge through the organisation of signs and by creating opportunities for their presentation – and, as will be argued in ‘Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity’, a practice that produces publics. This stands in clear distinction to an approach that might consider curating as limited to organising the communication of meaning within signs, or acting merely as interpretive interlocutor to an existing audience.

There exist today volumes dedicated to the changing nature of contemporary curating and curatorial theory. It has been noted by many that the profession has shifted from a largely anonymous role within a museological institution, emphasising the care of a collection of objects. This is a change that has been extensively documented elsewhere, underpinned by an increasing visibility of curators as figures interpreting or mediating the work of art for a public, and – as exhibitions or art projects grew in their public reach and scale – with the associated authorship of such presentations becoming a topic of speculation and self-reflection. S. Cagol writes, 'The emergence of the thematic exhibition, instead, coincided with an interest in addressing the exhibition itself as a medium, and potentially a mass medium, through which to develop a concept and share its experience with the wider community, to allow the development of a critical judgment in relation to the topic addressed.' The divergence of ‘traditional’ museum curating – ascribing relevance within a purely art-historical discourse – and the interest in exhibition as medium for engaging with, and commenting on, socio-political contexts and subjectivities was arguably inaugurated with artists themselves leading this change, acting in the role of curator. Adam Jolles has noted that the Surrealists in particular played a central role in challenging the norms of exhibition making (with Marcel Duchamp playing a key part):
Unlike their more strident predecessors [in Dada artists], however, the Surrealists demonstrated little interest in tearing down the museum. Indeed, for the most part, the historical avant-garde of the interwar period did not so much reject the modern museum and gallery as challenge the professional class of trained curators and the privileged community of exclusive dealers. As much as the Surrealists lamented the current state of both the museum and the gallery, by late 1925 they had decisively committed themselves to the practice of curating. Such an approach provided the avant-garde with a new critical outlet through which to interact with a broader public.  

He goes on to write: ‘...the leftist avant-garde’s turn to experimental installation practices during the interwar period might be considered in no small part an attempt to stake out new territory in which to establish its political and aesthetic platform. Surrealism, one might say, established its identity to no small extent through such curatorial endeavours.’ A schism had been created through these curatorial experiments, using the exhibition as a platform that enabled the idea of the curator performing a singular identity and voice. 

**Harald Szeemann**

Swiss curator Harald Szeemann (1933–2005) represents the most visible historical example of the construction of the curator as an individuated figure, with a kind of impresario role. While director of Kunsthalle Bern, he staged the exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form. Works–concepts–processes–situations–information* in 1969, which is widely considered to be the first major European survey of conceptual art. The exhibition engaged a range of artistic practices and approaches that had begun to challenge the orthodoxies of art, with Szeemann grouping disparate, then experimental, approaches around a curatorial rubric that sought to elucidate art's potential to establish unique interior worlds. Notable examples of works that challenged orthodoxies included Richard Long’s contribution to the exhibition being a series of walks over three days through Swiss mountains, Michael Heizer’s turning the pavement outside the Kunsthalle into rubble, and Piero Gilardi treating the gallery as a site of ongoing studio activity throughout the duration of the exhibition, with his process-based practice. Incorporating work that belonged to a number of different contemporaneous art movements, the artistic approaches featured in the exhibition tested the very nature of art in the minds of the general public at the time, as Christian Rattemeyer has noted:
When Attitudes Become Form marked the end of a decade of extremely fertile investigation that had a great influence on the visual arts. In short order Pop art and Fluxus, Minimalism and post-Minimalism, Conceptual art, Land art and Arte Povera transformed the discourse on the nature of art and its materials, questioning how and by whom a work of art can be made, where a work of art can exist, and even whether it needs to exist as an object at all.\(^8\)

The public did not react well to this challenge, and the exhibition was the subject of much scorn in the media, accompanied by protests by Swiss artists.\(^9\) In response to the outrage caused by his expanded programming, the administration of the Kunsthalle cancelled Szeemann’s forthcoming exhibition of Joseph Beuys, leading him to resign his post.\(^10\)

The foregrounding in When Attitudes Become Form of art that tested the accepted boundaries of its own ontology is important to recognise in relation to the following chapters that consider art’s operation in the social and political realm, as is Szeemann’s curatorial focus on the role of the interior world, or subjectivity of the audience. These operations are articulated in the practice of this research, and within ‘Chapter 9: What can be said, done and seen’, in considering the formation of, or ontology, of artworks. Already with When Attitudes Become Form, we see the relational coming into prominence, as a formal component in some of the artworks but, more importantly, as a function of the role of the curator, as a pivot between public, artist and institution, described in terms of mediation by critics such as Paul O’Neill. This aspect of the role will become important in the investigation of the processes of narrative and affect discussed in ‘Chapter 7: Experience’.

Curator as artist, exhibition as artwork

Following his resignation from the directorship of Bern Kunsthalle, Szeemann established a proto-business, a solo operation called Agentur fur Geistige Gastarbeite, or Agency for Spiritual Guest Work. The terminology related directly to the wider political situation in the country, “guest worker” being the term for immigrant labourers in Switzerland and therefore an obvious jab at Bern’, writes Daniel Birnbaum.\(^11\) In doing so Szeemann ostensibly went freelance, and became the first ‘independent curator’ as identified in later discourse that charts the shifts in curatorial practice.\(^12\)

Szeemann had approached When Attitudes Become Form with an open invitation to participating artist, ‘artists were more or less free to contribute any work that they felt
would be relevant’, which was typical of the way he worked for much of his career, selecting on his own the artists and working with them directly in the development of their contributions. The approach in his subsequent role, curating Documenta 5 in 1972, was a departure on both fronts. For the first four iterations of Documenta, billed as a ‘Museum of 100 days’ and held in Kassel every five years, Arnold Bode had performed the role of sole artistic director. Szeemann’s appointment to the position saw him re-imagine the exhibition as a ‘100-Day Event’, for the first time bringing a programmatic and performative sensibility to it, working with multiple curators to develop parts, or chapters, of the exhibition.

Szeemann set up a sprawling conceptual framework for the exhibition, entitled Documenta 5: Questioning Reality – Pictorial Worlds Today. It covered broad discursive territory by incorporating objects and images from the broader realm of the 1960s everyday, popular cultural materials such as science fiction publications, kitsch objects, exploitation films, as well as advertising imagery, alongside the art. As Claire Bishop describes, the exhibition was ‘split into 15 discrete sections, and presented reality not just through works of art, but through the broader field of visual culture: the work of the mentally ill, science fiction images, political propaganda, Swiss bank notes, and “trivialrealism” (kitsch objects including souvenirs of the Pope, military insignia, garden gnomes, and so on). Alongside these small displays were three themed panoramas of contemporary art, the most controversial being Individual Mythologies. This featured over 70 artists working in performance, installation and process art. Through this section, Szeemann posited that all artistic activity, even in its most political and critical forms, concerns the formation of an interior world.’

Szeemann’s exhibition model for Documenta 5 was heavily criticised by conservatives as well as by the political left who felt, so close to the events of May 1968 that the exhibition framework did not allow for Marxist-inflected radicality. Criticism came from artists too, accusing Szeemann of usurping their artistic autonomy, and situating their work in service to the exhibition, rather than the other way around. This dissent included a co-signed letter of protest in Artforum by a number of high profile artists, some of who had been invited to participate. These included two who also critiqued the exhibition through contributions to the exhibition catalogue itself: Robert Smithson, through the printing of his letter of withdrawal; and Daniel Buren, with his text ‘Exhibition of an Exhibition’. In it Buren claims, ‘More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art.’ Through an insistence of this position, Buren marked Documenta 5 as a significant exhibition in understanding the changing nature of the role of the curator (indeed Claire Bishop has noted Szeemann’s exhibition structure ‘broke with the
convention of showing only high art at Documenta, and stamped Szeemann’s identity over the exhibition to the extent that since 1972, all Documentas have been referred to by the name of the curator.’17). Buren was to return to this theme decades later, believing his prediction had become a reality over the subsequent period, writing that artworks in exhibitions had become:

particular details in the service of the work in question, the exhibition of our organiser-author. At the same time – and this is where the problem has become pointed enough to create the crisis in which we find ourselves – the ‘fragments’ and other ‘details’ exhibited are, by definition and in most cases, completely and entirely foreign to the principal work in which they are participating, that is, the exhibition in question.18

After the clear contribution that artists had made to curating in the early twentieth century (described earlier in this chapter), beginning the shift in the production of exhibitions from an approach rooted in connoisseurship to one employing experimental, conceptual frameworks, an antagonism took hold, with some artists believing Szeemann had overstepped his mark.19 Szeemann continued to explore this new terrain of the independent curator, a practice that manifested in the production of exhibitions that were identifiable with him as the author, in particular with his exhibitions The Bachelor Machines, 1976, and the unrealised La Mamma20 On this Pietro Rigolo writes:

The development of La Mamma constitutes a very important phase of Szeemann’s professional life: it represents a further attempt to realise a highly original type of thematic exhibition, following on The Bachelor Machines, the first episode of a trilogy of exhibitions through which Szeemann sought to experiment with the exhibition format as a medium for the visualisation of abstract and complex concepts, with topics as various as theosophy, literature, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and current political affairs. Through these projects Szeemann was developing a personal reading of twentieth-century culture and of the creative process while at the same time creating a new reputation for himself as a highly innovative professional figure – what we would refer to today as an ‘independent curator.’21

Szeemann was, and was seen to be, involved in every aspect of his exhibitions, and to communicate this he adopted a working philosophy he articulated as ‘From Vision to Nail’. This further reinforced the idea that his projects were not only authorially but procedurally his singular creations, that, as Rigolo writes above, the exhibition had become a medium itself, an event around which a discourse of practice could revolve.22
On the elevation of the exhibition to that of a medium in itself and a cultural *event*, Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak describe the changed understanding of the curator’s individuated role within this in their text ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur’, under the subheading ‘From Curator to Creator’:

The exhibition curator’s function authorises a measure of fame which eludes other colleagues to the extent that an exhibition assumes the guise of cultural event whose positions and merits are publicly discussed by a cultivated audience. Furthermore, specialised critics are increasingly attentive to the scenographic aspects; no longer content with discussing the exhibition’s subject, they tend to stress the exhibition as an object in and of itself, more frequently citing the ‘author’. In other words, the press deals with the exhibition not so much as a transparent medium produced by an institution but as the work of an individual with a particular name...

These changes themselves are significant with regard to the many ways in which curators’ relationships to the institution and to the artist have been complicated, being seen now as practitioners themselves rather than mute, faceless collection administrators. In recent years, beginning in the 1990s, the expectations on the curator, the discourse they are situated within, and the elements that are constituted within the discourse, have all undergone rapid change. In some ways the role has expanded into other contingent fields, further blurring approaches. Kate Fowle, in the introduction to Terry Smith’s book *Thinking Contemporary Curating* writes:

Art historians are trained (and expected) to propose a unique observation (no matter how minutely different) on any given topic, outline the facts and problems that pertain to its specificities, and present their solutions before providing a conclusion that proves they are right. Curators, on the other hand, take a far more speculative (and often meandering) approach, outlining the issues at stake from personal experience, describing a project and various artists’ practices that test ways to understand key points, then making an open-ended proposition for consideration, with the conclusion that research is ongoing.

Curators no longer necessarily work for a museum setting the parameters of, and expectations on, their professional responsibilities in relation to the institution’s collection, publishing and programming. While disengaging from the institutionally constituted job, the activities of independent exhibition making have cohered to become
an autonomously recognised role – the independent curator – today increasingly
distinct from the activity of being an artist or critic. Curator Massimiliano Gioni notes:

In Italy in the late 1980s and early 90s, everyone seemed to want to become an
art critic; nobody knew what a curator was supposed to be or do. That kind of
ignorance was perhaps more productive, since roles were less defined, systems
more fluid, possibilities more open. The anxiety around curators is a 90s
phenomenon, and it corresponds to the art world becoming more integrated into
the culture industry and therefore more attached to specific roles and
functions.25

Given the complexity of the cultural frameworks and power dynamics that curators
work within today, rather than reductively attempt to provide a singular definition,
there has been a wide-spread adoption of the term ‘independent curator’ since
Szeemann inaugurated a self-consciously freelance curatorial practice.26 It may appear
initially perplexing that many ‘independent curators’ do in fact work for institutions,
large and small, but the ‘independence’ lies largely in the fact that curators can, as
creative professionals, now choose for themselves their own ways of working, which
areas of the expanding field they wish to dedicate themselves towards, and what their
own authorial relationship might be in relation to art, artists and publics.27 Ostensibly
this recognises that curating involves choices of how to work in the first instance, of how
the curator will figure, as an actor among many, within the unfolding of events of an
exhibition of art project. This in turn infers the curator is adopting a mode of curating
that can be distinguished in relation to other modes.

Modalities

A great deal of discourse on curatorial practice has concerned itself with the role of the
curator in relation to the artist, and with situating the individual curator within a power
dynamic whereby notions of authorship and artistic autonomy are contested between
the roles. O’Neill writes in his 2007 essay ‘The Curatorial Turn: from Practice to
Discourse’:

From surveying the key debates within publications dedicated to contemporary
curatorial practice, it is apparent that curatorial discourse is in the midst of its
own production. Curating is ‘becoming discourse’ where curators are willing
themselves to be the key subject and producer of this discourse. So far, for those
unwilling to accept the provision made for the figure of the curator within the
reconfigured cultural field of production, critical response has been maintained at the level of an over-simplified antagonism, where the practice(s) of artist and curator are separated out.\textsuperscript{28}

Fuelling this antagonism – of the kind that made Buren feel in 2004 that he had been ‘prescient’ in his critique of Szeemann’s approach some thirty years before – was the rise in the 1990s of a curator-led discourse that overtly featured the individual situating themselves in the aforementioned power dynamics, as its principle subject matter. O’Neill argues:

By the 1990s, curatorial anthologies had begun to appear... Without exception, these publications placed their emphasis on individual curatorial practice, first person narratives, and self-positioning, as articulated through primary interviews, statements, and exhibition re-presentations. Other publications, such as \textit{MIB–Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice} (2004) followed suit, extenuating the problem by giving significant attention to insubstantial and personalised responses by curators on their own rarefied practice (in which ‘biographical notes can be found beside well-placed theoretical accents, cheerful interpretations of purpose, political goose-stepping, and embellished ego pirouettes’). While claiming to represent the ‘new spirit in curating’, this amounted to statements by curators about their own positions and the uniqueness of their projects, again reinforcing a curator-led discourse.\textsuperscript{29}

O’Neill goes on to raise examples where a greater ‘level of generative self-criticality was demonstrated in relation to the authorial position’ and that included ‘a shift away from the egocentric, patriarchal discursive model into more dialogical settings aimed at reflecting what had been done..., through a more strident analysis of certain exhibition forms and their specific histories.’\textsuperscript{30} Such is the approach that this research embodies, reflecting on the specificities of the projects within it, though it also attempts to situate the curatorial modalities used in relation to questions of authorship. While much of the earlier material O’Neill references borders on unreadable solipsism, there are significantly different curatorial approaches undertaken that have bearing on notions of authorship. Within the context of a reflective research project, it is important to articulate the positioning of the curatorial approach in relation to these power dynamics. This is particularly important to acknowledge given the role of curating within the research, as a methodology to further consider and investigate art. It is necessary to achieve critical distance to articulate the separation of authorship between this methodology, however ‘generative’, and the art generated by artists as a topic of study.
I will briefly summarise a number of curatorial positions below, and provide sources for further elaboration, in order to situate the curatorial modes broadly adopted throughout this research project. In light of each individual project within the research, further articulation of differences applied within the development, execution and interpretation of each art project or exhibition are discussed in relation to those specific instances throughout the paper.

The curator as...

O’Neill lists some of the ways in which approaches to curatorial practice have been situated in the discourse: 'There is now a long list of metaphors that attempt to reconcile diverse modes of practice, ranging from medium or “middleman” via “midwife” to the "curator as" phenomenon – from curator as editor, DJ, technician, agent, manager, platform provider, promoter, and scout, to the more absurd diviner, fairy godmother, and even god.'

I will specifically look at a number of more established poles with respect to the question of authorship, including the very question of whether authorship can be distinguished between artist and curator at all.

The curator as auteur

Buren has already described Szeemann’s curatorial approach as being related to that of the auteur. In part this oft-used designation in relation to Szeemann, along with his ‘independence’, is perhaps why he remains the most cited curator in discussions on the development of the contemporary curator. In part, the term was a natural one given Szeemann had a theatre background, creating and acting in experimental plays, prior to becoming a curator (though curator was a term he eschewed in favour of ‘exhibition maker’). There are a number of characteristics of the auteur that curators have engaged when deploying it as a self-ascribed moniker, the idea of the curator being in the centre of a film production, steering a cast and crew being one. Locally (in Melbourne) for instance, curators Juliana Engberg and Chris McAuliffe both referred to the role of the curator being ‘like a movie director’ in a news article from 2005. The implication being that the artist is seen as an actor, performing for the director, as Buren pointed out in both texts (1972 and 2004). The auteur is more than just a movie director however, what’s produced needs to be publicly recognisable as the work of the auteur, characteristic of their wider oeuvre and unlike any other’s (this trait is why the format of an ‘authored’ thematic exhibition’ is perhaps the most apt for those employing this
The implications for an artist’s work, and any notion of autonomy, are obvious. As Beatrice von Bismarck has noted, after a decade of frenzied curatorial self-positioning of this ilk:

In 1998, at the *Curating Degree Zero* symposium... the discussion focussed on the artist-like charisma attributed to curators since Szeemann, with criticism directed specifically against projects where curators ‘present their curatorial concept as the actual artistic product and themselves as the actual artists’, thus reinstating ‘the concept of genius from traditional art history’ as the art historian Sigrid Schade wrote.

**Curator as exhibition maker**

Szeemann’s adoption of the term ‘exhibition maker’ may have been in response to this aspect of criticism, though also, in part perhaps, because the term ‘curator’ had not reached today’s level of ubiquity. Seth Siegelaub too referred to himself as an ‘exhibition organiser’ when he practiced in New York between 1968 and 1972, rather than a curator. As he has pointed out recently:

When I was young, a curator was very simply someone that worked at a museum doing exhibitions, and there were very good curators and very bad curators, but they were both characterised by their attachment to power, as part of the permanent staff of a museum, and they would work in this context. My appearance in the history of curating was directly linked to the presentation of a certain kind of art [notably American Conceptual art], and my working very closely with a group of artists to find formats, conditions and contexts that responded to the art that they were doing, which, among many other things, did not necessarily include a permanent gallery situation.

Like Siegelaub, there have certainly been people organising exhibitions that have not self-identified as curators prior to the solidifying of the discourse described earlier. In many cases the adoption of alternative terminology, such as exhibition maker, is made seemingly to avoid the issues associated with authorship and autonomy and in doing so rejecting the notion of the exhibition as medium itself, curating as a discourse in itself. This is commonly associated with curators routinely listing the tasks of the curators rather than engaging with the idea of the existence of different, viable, modalities within the discipline. The most visible might arguably be Robert Storr, who between 1990 and 2002 was a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in addition to being a critic and artist (having completed an MFA in painting at the Art Institute of Chicago in...
1978). His text ‘Show and Tell’ for the publication Questions of Practice: What Makes a Great Exhibition\textsuperscript{38} is an iconic example, in which no criteria for the judgement of an exhibition is proffered, but the process of ‘making’ an exhibition is discussed in great detail.

O’Neill has pointed to a 2005 text ‘Reading Circle’ by Storr, published in Frieze, in which Storr steadfastly rejects the notion of the exhibition as medium, and draws a line between the authorship of critics and the non-authorship of curators.\textsuperscript{39} O’Neill wastes little time describing such a position as retrograde given what he sees as developments of the discipline, since the 1990s auteur model. In a rebuttal in Art Monthly, O’Neill writes:

Storr situates the origins of the idea of the curator as artist in Oscar Wilde’s 1890 essay ‘The Critic as Artist’ (where it is the eye of the beholder that produces the work of art) rather than in Barthes’ poststructuralist analysis of authorship. Storr’s conclusive response, ‘No I do not think that curators are artists. And if they insist, then they will ultimately be judged bad curators as well as bad artists’, reiterates the artist/curator divide and inadvertently returns the power of judgement to the critic. Storr’s argument against curating does not allow for the embodiment of today’s curator-artist... [nor] ...allow either for the inversion of the art-as-curating equation for post-Conceptual art-projects in the guise of curatorial initiatives.\textsuperscript{40}

**Curator as creator**

Although also adopting the moniker exhibition maker on occasion, curator Jens Hoffmann has publicly taken a more overt position in terms of shared cultural production, and has noted the same shift that O’Neill elucidates in his book The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures. In Ice Cream: Contemporary Art in Culture, Hoffmann comments:

I’ve been increasingly fascinated by the idea of the curator as author and creator rather than as a facilitator or administrator of exhibitions. A clear paradigm shift in curating has been taking place over the last fifteen years as a result of the integration of artistic strategies into curatorial work that has changed our understanding of curating.\textsuperscript{41}

Hoffmann, like Szeemann, comes from a theatre-making background, where he would work with an ensemble or collective of actors, and has carried this methodology into his
curatorial approach for exhibition making. Following this logic, Hoffmann described to O’Neill how his ‘signature’ curatorial style:

[used] the idea of the world as a stage: something that is fluid and temporary, constantly changing, evolving, unpredictable and in continuous progress. I am interested in a concept of curating as directing, the exhibition as a play and the play as an exhibition. It is the idea of the curator having a role in the set-up of an exhibition that is similar to the one of a director in the set-up of a theatre play.42

Hoffmann is one of a number of curators who have pointed to the direct influence of the methods and strategies of artistic production over curatorial modalities. Beatrice von Bismarck notes that from 'the 1990s a discernible close relation can be seen between art curators’ practices, and the interdisciplinary developments that took place in artistic practices.'43 Further, the link Hoffmann makes to performing an exhibition resonates with the position that O’Neill ultimately describes as a modality that he cites multiple generative curators as employing, an approach that he calls ‘performative curating’. He writes:

These projects are representative of durational and evolutionary curatorial endeavours that are discursively stretched out over time. They advocate a form of analysis through doing, making things appear by performing them, and employing the exhibition moment as a research tool for further investigation and discourse production.44

Thinking curatorially

The aforementioned mode of curating – a self-reflexive, temporal, praxis of analysis through creation – goes some way to describing a modality appropriate for this research project. It is important to acknowledge that today the term ‘curator’ has been widely adopted for any number of tasks involving individuated ‘selection’, ‘programming’ or ‘experience-manipulation’ in the contemporary world. Terry Smith, among others, has noted incidences of the term being employed outside an art-related discourse: ‘Google invites us to curate our profile, Picasa our very own image gallery. Certain restaurants proudly display menus curated by a food expert. A leading department store boastfully advertises the name of its curator of jewellery.’45 46

To assist in moving beyond merely understanding curating as a technical undertaking, or of diffuse ‘selection’, Maria Lind has extrapolated the potential of seeing ‘the curatorial’ as a methodology, an approach to thinking and working.47 In order to ‘try to
reinstate art and its possibilities', Lind proposes a configuration of the relationship between curating and the curatorial to ‘move away from the curator as a person, and a position, and to concentrate more on the method and the effects of the work of curators’. She writes, 'This can be described as “the curatorial,” a way of working that means combining artworks – which today certainly can be extremely multifarious – with questions, places, people, et cetera, in precise ways. In doing this the curatorial shares something with editing, but with more diverse materials.'48 Situating the term ‘curating’ as the ‘craft or technical modality’ (the ground covered by Storr’s ‘Show & Tell’ text for instance) Lind suggests a relationship to the term ‘curatorial’ in line with Chantal Mouffe’s description of ‘the political’ as compared to ‘politics’: ‘Whereas politics is what politicians are doing, that which gets reported in the news, Mouffe argues that “the political” is tied to the potential that goes beyond the already known and accepted.’ 49

The curatorial, a methodology

This description of the political as a field of potentialities, as being situated in the yet to be known and unable to be said, is central to this research project, and is articulated in chapters five and seven. This research project concludes that art and its political potential must be understood as operating in a relational field and, to attempt this, the methodology of investigation adopts the generative, recursive, mode of curatorial thought that Lind proposes. Curatorial thought manifests as instinct (or the brain’s unmatched capacity for pattern recognition if one prefers) developed through immersion in a discursive, relational field, with the aim as a curator to coax meaningful experiences out of a yet-unrealised situation. This is the intention behind all aspects of the curatorial practice described in the following chapters.50

This conceptual approach has recently been identified by Terry Smith as ‘curatorial thought’, which in many ways parallels with Lind’s proposal. Smith writes:

In fact, the elements of contemporary curatorial thinking can be readily identified. Curators regularly speak about them, reflect on them, and share them with others. They amount to a concrete mix of principles, values, ideas, rules of thumb, and ethical necessities. The seven points that English-born Australian curator Nick Waterlow, director of a number of Sydney Biennales, wrote in his notebook shortly before his untimely death in November 2009 are a particularly poignant instance. Entitled, with dreadful prescience, ‘A Curator’s Last Will and Testament’, they read: 1. Passion; 2. An Eye of Discernment; 3. An Empty Vessel; 4. An Ability to Be Uncertain; 5. Belief in the Necessity of Art and Artists; 6. A Medium – Bringing a passionate and informed understanding of works of art to
Smith notes further: ‘Values such as these resonate within more programmatic efforts by curators to reimagine museums; write the history of curating; innovate within exhibition formats; extend curating into educational activity; and, in some cases, commit to activist curating in venues beyond the art world.’ This research project I hope goes some way to showing that ‘activist curating’ described in Smith’s account as being necessarily separate from the institution or academy, in fact takes place within and through them also. Smith posits that the history of curating, from that of an exhibition maker in a museum context, is ‘expanded’ by outcomes occurring elsewhere, in slightly different formats. In fact these outcomes, like all those produced through this project, are exhibitions in an expanded sense, where the curatorial practice remains the same, and which, however responsive, remains rooted in the same discourse and with the same concerns. The curatorial position, as Smith describes it, might be considered a combination of principles and values, but crucially is situated in ‘activist’ terms regardless since there is a process of recognising opportunities, artist selection, project development et cetera, that is rooted in attempting to activate potentialities, and is thus both reflexive and generative. These potentialities are generated through the experience of a work in a specific context, which will be the focus of the subsequent chapters. As Ralph Rugoff writes, the curator is working in the hope that the audience member will be caught ‘off guard by what they’re seeing’ through ‘re-imagining the conceptual context in which art is encountered by viewers’ and by invoking ‘strategies that create a psychological space for the critical first phase of our encounter with artworks, which occurs on an emotional and experiential level.’

The encounter however, as Simon Sheikh argues, is not purely one of reception by a public, but one through which a public is itself produced. He writes:

The modes of address in exhibition making can thus be viewed as attempts to at once represent and constitute a specific (class-based) collective subject. This also means that a double notion of representation is at play, at once the narrations and sensations of the displayed artwork themselves – the aspect most commonly referred to in both curatorial discourse and criticism – and the representation of a certain public (as spectator), being represented, authorised and constituted through the very mode of address. Making things public is also an attempt to make a public. A public only exists ‘by virtue of being addressed’, and is thus ‘constituted through mere attention’ as Michael Warner puts it in his recent book *Publics and Counterpublics*. What is significant here is the notion of a
public as being constituted through participation and presence on the one hand, and articulation and imagination on the other. In other words, public is an imaginary endeavour with real effects: an audience, a community, a group, an adversary or a constituency is imagining, and imagined through a specific mode of address that is supposed to produce, actualise or even activate this imagined entity, 'the public'. This is of course crucial to exhibition making, to the techniques of the curator.\textsuperscript{54}

The evolution of an understanding of the public and the contingencies of its creation that Sheikh argues for – one that is both relational and produced by the presentation of art to an audience – is adopted within this research project to inform the relationship between artwork and audience and the reflexive action that is performed between art and social and political sphere, and is expanded upon in depth in 'Chapter 9: What can be said, done and seen'.\textsuperscript{55} The centrality of context, and the nuance of emotion compared with experience described by Rugoff, will be the focus of the subsequent chapters in which a generative mode of curating underpins the development of an argument about art and its operation in the social and political sphere (which is, itself, constituted by actions that occur to draw people together). This is undertaken through the curation of the three case study projects, via the formulation of a presentation and discursive framework in relation to the context within which the project (artwork or body of work) will be presented. In the first instance, \textit{Civil Twilight End}, this is done through research into the physical and historical nature of the site, and provided to artists in order for them to interpret and propose new works to be created. In the second, \textit{[en]counters}, through the selection of specific, pre-existing works, artistic strategies or tendencies, and the staging of context-specific versions of the works. In the third, \textit{David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me}, through using exhibition strategies to present a selection of artworks and ephemera, creating a reinterpretation of an artist’s career and changing social context, and extending the apprehension of works through mediation, hosting, presentation, programming and contextualisation.
Chapter 2: Art and social change: a crisis

In this chapter I return to the foundational work of the Frankfurt School in considering art’s role in political change, and the contemporary interpretations that have led many practitioners to maintain their contributions are held in a zone of contradiction, against a crisis of theory and interpretation. This research project is fundamentally driven by a desire to think beyond such senses of stasis.

The Frankfurt School turned their attention to the operation of culture in relation to wider societal structures and political power dynamics following the rise of Nazi Germany during the Weimar Republic. A flourishing of culture had taken place throughout the 1920s, including the Bauhaus, members of which were close to key figures of the Frankfurt School (many of whom were also Jewish). Adolf Hitler's appointment as Chancellor – while the Nazi Party was a minor partner of the ruling coalition – led swiftly to the establishment of a state of emergency, after which the Reichstag passed the Enabling Act; the Weimar Republic was over, replaced by the Third Reich. What followed was an extraordinary aestheticisation of political power, manifest as early as the 1934 Nuremberg rallies (captured in the Nazi-commissioned film Triumph of the Will by Leni Riefenstahl). The Nazi aesthetic and aggression towards those cultural movements and intellectuals not aligned with their vision was to become a defining moment of the relationship between art, life and politics in the twentieth century.

A little over one year after the fall of the Weimar Republic, in April 1934, Walter Benjamin sent Theodor Adorno the text for a presentation he intended to give entitled 'The Author As Producer'. The paper, which was not presented nor published during his lifetime, encapsulates that even in the early part of the twentieth century, there was a tension oft conceived as between aesthetics on the one hand, and political efficacy on the other. Benjamin indicates the difficulty when it is defined in this way:

There you have the key word [tendency] about which there has long been a debate, as you well know. It is well-known to you, so you also know how fruitless it has been. It has never broken away from the boring 'on the one hand – on the other hand': on the one hand we should demand that the poet’s work conform to the correct political tendency, on the other hand we have the right to expect that his work be of high quality. Naturally this formula is unsatisfactory as long as we do not understand the connection which really exists between the two factors: tendency and quality. Of course we can simply decree what this relation is. We
can say: a work which exhibits the correct political tendency need demonstrate no further qualities. We can also decree: a work which exhibits the correct tendency must necessarily exhibit all other qualities. The second formulation is not uninteresting. What is more, it is correct.  

Benjamin concerns himself throughout the text with the argument that for the ‘progressive type of author’ the effect their work has on its audience is the crucial question for the ‘producer’, informed by the political position they have taken (‘an advanced type of writer... places himself on the side of the proletariat’). The ideal effect for Benjamin, is one which will encourage their readers’ own production of writing, and that the key to creating this kind work for any artist is to focus on ‘transforming the function’ of their artform. Benjamin here is quoting Bertolt Brecht’s concept of Umfunktionierung (‘functional transformation’), and goes on to argue that they are ‘at a point in time at which certain works should no longer so much relate individual experiences (have the character of a work), but rather should be aimed at the utilisation (transformation) of certain institutes or institutions’.

Gerald Raunig makes the following observation in relation to the ‘point in time’ mentioned, in his text ‘Artist as Traitor’:

Even before Stalin’s cultural politics, such diverse positions as Lenin’s, Bogdanov’s and Lunacharsky’s were all, despite their very different ideas of proletarian culture, oriented to the production and presentation of proletarian contents. Even in Germany, in the socialist circles of the 1920s and the 1930s, there was a line of giving precedence to revolutionary contents over form. Benjamin’s attitude, which focused primarily on the technique and organising function of art practice, was the exception.

The avant-garde movements of Dada and Russian Constructivism were very much current at the time of Benjamin writing this text, and in the context that Raunig describes. Both projects sought to create art that was popularist (in opposition to what they considered the widely elitist cultural alternatives), had a social role – with the Constructivists stating their intention to bring ‘art into everyday life’ – and paid close attention to form. Benjamin obviously has in mind the Dadaist relationship to language, as well as the impact of new modes of production and dissemination of art, when he writes, ‘But as soon as the criterion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionised. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics’. Benjamin concludes that text, ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility’: ‘Such is the
aestheticising of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicising art.\textsuperscript{65}

These statements point to two influential ideas. Firstly, that the work of art has, for Benjamin, an ‘aura’ – linked to its past religious function – established via its authenticity as an original (with a non-reproducible nature, where reproductions of it are considered fakes), and this in turn establishes its autonomy. The rise of the ability to mass-reproduce art means it can be disseminated further, at the expense of the authenticity and aura, with the work of art no longer fulfilling a ritualistic function but a political one. The second concept is that politics is already aestheticised.

These concepts are taken up by Boris Groys, including at length in his book \textit{Art Power}, which features a number of essays with titles riffing on the title of Benjamin’s text, some 74 years later. On the importance of autonomy to the conception of art’s agency, he writes:

\begin{quote}
The autonomy of art has been denied in many recent art-theoretical discussions. If these discourses are right, art cannot be a source of any resistance whatsoever. In the best case art could be used merely for designing, for aestheticising the already existent oppositional, emancipatory political movements – that is, it could be at best merely a supplement to politics. This seems to me to be the crucial question: Does art hold any power of its own, or it is only able to decorate external powers – whether these are powers of oppression or liberation? Thus the question of the autonomy of art seems to me the central question in the context of any discussion on the relationship between art and resistance. And my answer to this question is: Yes, we can speak about the autonomy of art; and, yes, art does have an autonomous power of resistance.\textsuperscript{66}
\end{quote}

Groys argues that artwork cannot be simultaneously a commodity and be politically effective, cannot in fact be politically effective at all unless it is itself ‘direct political propaganda’.\textsuperscript{67} There are many counter-positions to this, not least Adorno’s conception of an art that is wholly resistant to social function, that the distance between it and society (the Capitalist social to be more precise) determines its worth. ‘What is social about art is not its political stance, but its immanent dynamic in opposition to society. If any social function can be ascribed to art at all, it is the function to have no function’.\textsuperscript{68}

Adorno, like Groys, is arguing for the primacy of art’s autonomy to the social (‘freedom of art from religious, political, and other social roles’ for Adorno\textsuperscript{69}); if it is to hold any
opportunity for ‘resistance’ for both writers it needs first to resist commodification. Their next steps however, diverge and run directly counter to one another, Groys in his assertion of ‘direct political propaganda’ and Adorno in his stance of an art that retains critical distance from the world. This describes well what Andy Abbott has termed the ‘crisis’ facing socially engaged art: ‘a pull between the direct but recuperative everyday and a pure but exclusionary criticality’.\(^7^0\) It is a ‘crisis’ in that a situation of indivisible tensions has been established between oppositions: form and content, which we have already seen Benjamin formulate, direct functionality (Groys) versus functional refusal (Adorno), between the embedded social practice and the distanced critical artwork.

This sense of crisis, some claim, has also been exacerbated by a sense of hopelessness within the contemporary moment, mirroring that of the historical moment(s) of the Frankfurt School. At the time Adorno wrote of this sensation:

> The prospective fascist may long for the destruction of himself no less than for that of the adversaries, destruction being a substitute for his deepest and most inhibited desires ... He realises that his solution is no solution, that in the long run it is doomed. Any keen observer could notice this feeling in Nazi Germany before the war broke out. Hopelessness seeks a desperate way out. Annihilation is the psychological substitute for the millennium – a day when the difference between the ego and the others, between poor and rich, between powerful and impotent, will be submerged in one great inarticulate unity. If no hope of true solidarity is held out to the masses, they may desperately stick to this negative substitute.\(^7^1\)

Peter Thompson draws on this quote in a recent article reflecting on the relevance of the Frankfurt School today. He goes on to highlight how the two stages of the Frankfurt School – the ‘attempt to explain and understand fascism as it was arising during the Weimar Republic’ and the revival of their theories ‘by the 1968 movement as a way of explaining away the apparent passivity of the working class’ – took place against two distinct social backdrops. Thompson contends that today conditions comparable to both are in fact taking place at the same moment, contributing to this sense of inexorable crisis. He compares the economic ructions felt during the Weimar Republic with those felt through the bankruptcies of European countries and the damage of the Global Financial Crisis. At the same time ‘here is a supine centre-left which is tied into the neoliberal agenda, while a fractured and fragmented “communist” movement (for want of a better word) has failed to put together a convincing alternative’, both of which are feeding into the rise of the far-right, as in the historical moment of 1968. He writes:
But perhaps even more seriously, the planet itself can no longer afford the constant expansion required by capital. We have the technological and financial means to solve pretty well all of the basic problems of humanity. What we don't have is the political will. But that is only missing because even our hopes for the future have become privatised and commodified. Our dreams have been bought up and sold back to us as glittery tat and royal weddings. It has often been said that it is easier now to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine a better one.\textsuperscript{72}

This sense of crisis both shapes this research project and is at its core; specifically, the research seeks to address this crisis in its consideration of art's operation today within the social and political spheres, as described in the following chapter.
Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity

In considering art’s operation in relation to social and political change, it is useful to consider first what constitutes the public, discursive sphere.

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and in particular their book *Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics* (1985), presents a model of the democratic ideal and space that all of the projects curated as part of this research project ‘describe’. Laclau and Mouffe’s work, as political theorists, utilises the conception of subjectivity, as split and decentred, to underscore their democratic project which is based on antagonism as a resistance to hegemony. Hegemony in a political system is where ‘a particular social force assumes the representation of a totality that is radically incommensurable with it’,\(^{73}\) which they contend has the potential for totalitarianism. This is later refined by Mouffe in her book *The Democratic Paradox* as an ‘agonistic’ model, inferring a greater respect of another’s political position (*agon* referring in ancient Greece to a contest or competition, and the debates between characters in a play).

While largely outside the scope of this research project, such is its contested complexity, the concept of an agon is at the heart of Immanuel Kant’s theory of interpretation, which arguably has shaped modern theories of aesthetics more than any other. Kant’s agon of judgement is called *sensus communis*, a shared discursive space of participation, and conceptual generation, contingent on mental projection of other’s perceived judgements:

> ...by the name *sensus communis* is to be understood the idea of a public sense, i.e., a faculty of judging which in its reflective act takes account (a priori) of the mode of representation of everyone else, in order, as it were, to weigh its judgement with the collective reason of mankind, and thereby avoiding the illusion arising from subjective and personal conditions which could readily be taken for objective, an illusion that would exert a prejudicial influence upon its judgement. This is accomplished by weighing the judgement, not so much with actual, as rather with the merely possible, judgements of others, and putting ourselves in the position of everyone else, as a result of a mere abstraction from the limitations which contingently affect our own estimate. This, in turn, is effected by so far as possible letting go the element of matter, i.e., sensation, in our general state of representative activity, and confining attention to the formal peculiarities of our representation...\(^{74}\)
As a foregrounding of what is to be explored in this and later chapters, while the art discussed takes place within the agon of the public sphere, and the judgement of such projects takes place within a discursive, abstract field, I will argue that it is precisely sensation and the specifics of contingent contexts and subjectivities at the heart of understanding art’s operation in relation to the social and political change, and the production of a sense of agency and ownership.

The notion of conflict producing a better democracy is central to art historian Claire Bishop’s use of Laclau and Mouffe’s ideas in subsequent chapters in which she outlines her own evaluation of socially-engaged practice. Bishop summarises that they ‘argue that a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared, but one in which new political frontiers are constantly being drawn and brought into debate – in other words, a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased’. There are some interesting aspects of the project of Mouffe and Laclau which relate to the instability of relations in their democratic model, which also relates to a progressive, relational notion of ‘place’, which I will return to later in this chapter:

A radical democracy, or, in other words, ... a form of politics which is founded not upon dogmatic postulation of any ‘essence of the social’, but, on the contrary, on affirmation of the contingency and ambiguity of every ‘essence’, and on the constitutive character of social division and antagonism. Affirmation of a ‘ground’ which lives only by negating its fundamental character; of an ‘order’ which exists only as a partial limiting of disorder; of a ‘meaning’ which is constructed only as excess and paradox in the face of meaninglessness – in other words, the field of the political as the space for a game which is never ‘zero-sum’, because the rules and the players are never fully explicit.

This call for meaning to be ‘constructed only as excess and paradox’ bears a close relationship to the operation of Jacques Rancière’s aesthetic regime of the arts, which will be the subject of later chapters and forms a crucial part of this research project. Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of the ‘ground’ and ‘order’ is also a critique of Jürgen Habermas and his work The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962, translated into English 1992), which was concerned with bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He summarises it thus:

The bourgeois public sphere may be conceived above all as the sphere of private people come together as a public; they soon claimed the public sphere regulated from above against the public authorities themselves, to engage them in a debate
over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatised but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor. The medium of this political confrontation was peculiar and without historical precedent: people’s public use of their reason.\textsuperscript{77}

The public sphere of civil society stood or fell with the principle of universal access. A public sphere from which specific groups would be \textit{eo ipso} excluded was less than merely incomplete; it was not a public sphere at all. Accordingly, the public that might be considered the subject of the bourgeois constitutional state viewed its sphere as a public one in this strict sense; in its deliberations it anticipated in principle that all human beings belong to it.\textsuperscript{78}

Critiques centre around Habermas’s proposal of using the bourgeois public sphere as an ideal within a democratic model today. The public sphere here is presented as singular and comprehensive, which throws doubt on its capacity as a model to provide egalitarian basis at all. Nancy Fraser has identified the singular nature of the model as a fundamental, and problematic, characteristic in her in her influential essay ‘Rethinking the public sphere’:

Let me begin by recalling that Habermas’s account stresses the singularity of the bourgeois conception of the public sphere, its claim to be the public arena in the singular. In addition, his narrative tends in this respect to be faithful to that conception, casting the emergence of additional publics as a late development to be read under the sign fragmentation and decline. This narrative, then, like the bourgeois conception itself, is informed by an underlying evaluative assumption, namely, that the institutional confinement of public life to a single, overarching public sphere is a positive and desirable state of affairs, whereas the proliferation of a multiplicity of publics represents a departure from, rather than an advance toward, democracy.\textsuperscript{79}

Without adopting a more plural nature it is impossible today to see how this public sphere could be truly open and accessible to all. Without this, the fundamental structure of this ideal’s operation – that is reaches its singular ‘public opinion’ in a broadly consensual fashion in order to be representative – seems far-fetched given the breadth of competing interests and positions, many of which may be mutually exclusive. ‘Moreover,’ Kevin Everod Quashie writes, ‘the Habermasian idiom of the public sphere depends on the ability to imagine oneself as the universal ideal, as the exemplary modern citizen. This expectation is a further exclusion, since it is nearly conceptually impossible for a racialised or gendered subject to be at once a symbol of difference and'}
universality.’ Fraser notes as well as the subjective impossibility of the model’s ideal, its cultural impossibility writing, ‘This conception assumes that a public sphere is or can be a space of zero degree culture, so utterly bereft of any specific ethos as to accommodate with perfect neutrality and equal ease interventions expressive of any and every cultural ethos.’

While Habermas refined his position, he never renounced this ideal. Mouffe, whose conception of first an ‘antagonistic’ and then ‘agonistic’ model of political public space, still considers his position untenable:

To be sure Habermas now accepts that it is improbable, given the limitations of social life, that such a [rational] consensus could effectively be reached and he sees his ideal situation of communication as a ‘regulative idea’. However, according to the perspective that I am advocating, the impediments to the Habermasian ideal speech situation are not empirical but ontological and the rational consensus that he presents as a regulative idea is in fact a conceptual impossibility. Indeed it would require the availability of a consensus without exclusion which is precisely what the agonistic approach reveals to be impossible. Fraser’s critique of Habermas’s idealised model extends to arguing for one capable of supporting a wider plurality, in the form of embracing, for instance, ‘subaltern counterpublics’. The establishment of a counterpublics isn’t merely an amelioration of tensions however, rather than ghettoising a stable counter position, there is a complex dynamic that takes place within the counterpublic itself, and between it and the ‘public-at-large, Fraser argues:

I am emphasizing the contestatory function of subaltern counterpublics in stratified societies in part in order to complicate the issue of separatism. In my view, the concept of a counterpublic militates in the long run against separatism because it assumes an orientation that is publicist. Insofar as these arenas are publics they are by definition not enclaves – which is not to deny that they are often involuntarily enclaved. After all, to interact discursively as a member of a public – subaltern or otherwise – captures well this aspect of the meaning of publicity when he notes that however limited a public may be in its empirical manifestation at any given time, its members understand themselves as part of a potentially wider public, that indeterminate, empirically counterfactual body we call ‘the public-at-large’. The point is that, in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On the one hand, they function as spaces
of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides.\textsuperscript{83}

Thus here the \textit{specificity} of the public, within a discursive and fluctuating public sphere, rather than its \textit{ideal} or \textit{universal} nature, is identified by Fraser as the crucial quality in its capacity to act as a platform for individual agency.\textsuperscript{84}

\section*{Relationality}

The work of geographer Doreen Massey has been influential on my thinking regarding the importance of specificity and the intertwining of public, social and political spheres in terms of ‘place’. In her text ‘A Global Sense of Place’, 1991, Massey argues for a more progressive, contemporary notion of place than was prevalent at the time of its writing (and perhaps than that in wider use today). Place here is described as a process, not as a fixed location but as interrelations. That place is an experience of both one’s history and identity practiced in relation to other conditions and actions:

What gives a place its specificity is not some long internalised history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. If one moves in from the satellite [view of the world] towards the globe, holding all those networks of social relations and movements and communications in one’s head, then each ‘place’ can be seen as a particular, unique, point of their intersection. It is, indeed, a meeting place. Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.\textsuperscript{85}

It is an approach that resonates with Miwon Kwon’s critique of community art and new genre public art in her 2002 book \textit{One place after another}, in which she too rejects notions of ideal and coherent community that formed the basis of much earlier thinking on art in the social and political sphere:

Such fantasies of transparent, unmediated, and transcendent knowing, Young notes, participate in the “metaphysics of presence” or “logic of identity” (theorized by Theodor Adorno and Jacques Derrida) that overlooks difference between subjects and denies difference as a constitutive element in the process
of subject formation. Moreover, “the desire for social wholeness and identification” through mutual affirmation, closeness, and reciprocity as expressed in the ideal of community obscures the extent to which it “generates borders, dichotomies, and exclusions.” ... In short, the ideal of community finds comfort in the neat closure of its own homogeneity.\textsuperscript{86}

Kwon adopts Homi Bhabha’s concept of ‘relational specificity’, in order to emphasise the same concepts of relationality that Massey articulates, drawing on Bhabha’s quote to illustrate this contemporary condition: ‘The globe shrinks for those who own it; for the displaced or the dispossessed, the migrant or refugee, no distance is more awesome than the few feet across borders or frontiers.’\textsuperscript{87}

Today’s site-oriented practices inherit the task of demarcating the \textit{relational specificity} that can hold in dialectical tension the distant poles of spatial experience described by Bhabha. This means addressing the uneven conditions of adjacencies and distances \textit{between} one thing, one person, one place, one thought, one fragment \textit{next} to another, rather than invoking equivalences via one thing \textit{after} another.\textsuperscript{88}

Thus there is an emphasis on the importance of contingency in the relationship between objects, people and spaces. Thus our experience of place may be equally thought of as shaping, defining and spatialising it. This way of perceiving the place we move through – inscribing it and being inscribed upon by it – as decidedly relational, and unfixed, is a characteristic that could lend itself to being a source of anxiety, and constantly linked to a loss of identity in the context of globalisation. In fact, while it is often understood to be a desire for a fixed notion of place, I would argue that the desire is better described as one for specificity of place. Thus an artist operating in this arena of relations could also be arguably considered a sculptor of place, in a complex and nuanced way.

Massey’s description of relations in terms of a constellation relates also to sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s model of the social, cultural and political sphere in \textit{The field of cultural production} (1992). Bourdieu’s approach has its basis too in a constellation of relationality – the sphere constituted as a dynamic field by the taking up, and interaction, of opposing positions of competing agents within it:

The space of literary or artistic position-takings, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field – literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc. – is inseparable from the space of literary or artistic positions
defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. The literary or artistic field is a field of forces, but it is also a field of struggles tending to transform or conserve this field of forces.89

This is clearly differentiated from the singular, ‘objective’, projection proposed by Kant, describing a fluid context for cultural production; in the case of this research project, the presentation and apprehension of artworks and exhibitions.

In further articulating the changed nature since Kant of the context for art, or indeed that it responds to, Boris Groys has written:

In the modernist tradition, the art context was regarded as relatively stable – it was the idealised context of the universal museum. Innovation consists in putting a new form, a new thing, into this stable context. In our time context is seen as changing and unstable. So the strategy of contemporary art consists in creating a specific context that can make a certain form or thing look other, new, and interesting – even if this form has already been collected. Traditional art worked on the level of form. Contemporary art works on the level of context, framework, background, or of a new theoretical interpretation.90

Given these changes, artists have responded with projects that are conceived from the beginning as directly engaging with the context (socio-economic, political, cultural and historical) of a place and its community. A project such as this might be thought of as context responsive, context specific or place specific in that it responds to the unique stories and histories of the local community, the physical nature of the site and area, the context (historical, contemporary, and projected future) of the place.

I saw great potential in this approach to artistic practice as a curator interested in art’s engagement with social and political issues. In 2006, I undertook a self-initiated, Australia Council for the Arts funded, research trip throughout the United Kingdom interviewing critically engaged, independent art commissioning organisations. Returning to Australia and synthesising the research in late 2007 I founded a non-profit organisation called Satellite Art Projects with the mission to commission and curate projects of a context-specific nature beyond the gallery or museum. The first two of the three projects in this research project were undertaken through this framework.
Claire Doherty, curator and founding director of Situations, one of the organisations I met with, has contributed a great deal to the discourse around context-specific projects and has engaged too with the modalities of curating such projects. In her text 'Curating Wrong Places... Or where have all the penguins gone?', she succinctly describes the process the curator goes through prior to the selection of artists, indicating the difference of approach compared to that employed for a more traditional museum or gallery exhibition:

In contrast to the responsibilities of the curator-producer of the artist/concept-led solo project, the curator of the context-specific international exhibition has to engage with a progressive notion of place prior to the selection of artists. The components of the biennial—short-term residencies, research-based investigations, scattered sites and distribution mechanisms, interdisciplinary collaborations, urban interventions and critical platforms—ideally follow from a rigorous consideration of the basis of the invitation—place as an intersection of mapped location, urban mythology, power dynamics and social interaction.

This correlates with the curatorial approach I have employed in curating and commissioning the first two projects. This has involved conceptual mapping of the territory—physical, historical, social and political—to inform a projection of the potential engagement with the context. This potential is considered in three key parts, each linked and contingent on the others: the potential subject (matter) of engagement by the artist; the potential for audience engagement and the kinds of activation possible within those audiences; and, the possible artists who could respond in generative ways to realise those potentials (taking into account the wider context of exposure of opportunity, size of artist fee and project budget, proximity to the context etc.).

The following chapter will outline this process with respect to the first of the three curated case study projects, a permanent public artwork situated in Melbourne’s Docklands.
Chapter 4: *Civil Twilight End*

**Goods Shed North**

In February 2008, Natalie King and I were appointed by property development company Equiset as co-curators of an urban art commission, as part of the redevelopment of a dilapidated, nineteenth century industrial building in Melbourne’s Docklands.

**Percent for art**

The commission formed part of Equiset’s Integrated Urban Art contribution for Goods Shed North, an obligation within the Docklands precinct that accounted at the time for 1% of the Total Development cost of each development. This was overseen by VicUrban (now Places Victoria), the Victorian Government’s sustainable urban development agency, which received part of the 1% for managing the regulatory oversight of the program. Their policy relating to Integrated Public Art and its commissioning is useful to draw attention to, as it informed the strategy document and subsequent processes:

**Purpose of the art programme**

- To create a unique and significant arts destination where art is part of the fabric of the landscape, buildings and the life of Docklands.
- To create a ‘sense of place’ in Docklands and a spirit of innovation, creativity and reflection of key relevant themes such as water.
- To commission art of such quality and significance that people will want to return to Docklands again and again to experience the art environment.
- The commission must be designed for the location and have a life of at least 25 years.\(^92\)

**Strategy**

This opportunity for commissioning was reliant on many different stakeholders and their support, so clear documentation of a proposed approach was crucial. These stakeholders included the client and their heritage consultants, VicUrban, the City of Melbourne (who had municipal responsibility for Docklands at the time while VicUrban held planning responsibility), the project’s architects Elenberg Fraser, and heritage
architects Lovell Chen, along with Heritage Victoria as the building on the site was a historic one (classified by the National Trust and on the Victorian Heritage Register). King and I first developed an urban art strategy specific to the site to respond to the demands of the Integrated Urban Art policy. Along with outlining an execution of the budget, timelines and other logistical matters, the strategy included a contextual analysis that incorporated the findings of the heritage interpretation report, the physical site and planned development, and the aspects of contextual response outlined in the previous chapter.

Site

The Goods Shed North site is enclosed by Bourke and Collins Streets and two new roads – Village Street and Aurora Lane. Goods Shed North is roughly one half of a heritage building of historical significance, a red brick building that was, on its completion, the longest building in the country. Built in 1889, the shed was used to load cargo trains that would distribute goods from Melbourne to country areas throughout Victoria. Typically, goods were placed on platforms in front of one of the numerous arched doorways that related to the rail destination of the goods. The largest and most architecturally elaborate nineteenth century railway goods building in Victoria, for many years the building was the busiest dispatching shed in the Victorian Railways system. With the discovery of gold and growing population of the colony, the goods shed became a commercial clearing house – processing and funnelling products and materials to the furthest corners of the state. The building was split in two with the extension of Collins Street from the CBD into Docklands in the early 2000s creating the Goods Shed North site.93

In order to retain the unique heritage aspects of the site and draw attention to its original function, Lovell Chen proposed the following as part of their Heritage Interpretation Strategy:

- Retain section of track at northern end of building.
- Rebuild external platform areas.
- Retain original or early signage.
- Retain sight lines and visibility through building as an open structure.
- Didactic or welcome signage establishing a sense of place via a form of visual chronological record with small amount of text.
- Commissioned artworks that may involve an interpretive element.
Along with these recommendations we also noted that, at the time, Docklands featured a series of predominantly large three dimensional sculptural objects commissioned to enliven the precinct, that had generally been criticised for their lack of sophistication. We submitted that the Goods Shed North Urban Art Program offered an opportunity to commission a site-specific artwork integrated with both the historical and contemporary aspects of the building.

**Curatorial approach**

King and I noted in the strategy that Goods Shed North is a unique site given its history, development approach that highlighted sustainability, and place in an ongoing vision for a sustainable Docklands precinct.

We proposed that a permanent commission, as part of addressing all three unique and significant elements, engage with the former usage and history of the site as a mercantile hub, while considering the contemporary context of the building, surrounding area, and mutable publics that might congregate. This was directly informed by the thinking around place, as defined by Massey, which allowed us to tease out specific characteristics of this site as part of a curatorial brief for artists to respond to. Through a period of research and elaboration, we concluded we saw latent potential in extending a richer notion of place around the historic building if we could encourage the development of a project that would reaffirm the site as a place of exchange, journey, and trade, historically and into the future. An opportunity for the work to be an attractor of visitors was also noted, with the site a thoroughfare for workers and visitors of the surrounding areas (including the waterfront, the large corporate headquarters situated further along Collins Street, and the audience for the neighbouring stadium). This provided an opportunity for artists to engage at a pedestrian level, from a distance, and with a transient audience.

The concept of seeking a particular response to the physical site formed the basis of the commission, which along with a selection process and logistical plan was approved by all stakeholders. This approach formed the basis for a curatorial strategy document which we felt, once adopted, would ensure that a project engaging robustly with the curatorial concept could meet the needs of the commission, and ease the potential for being undermined with so many diverse stakeholders.
Process

VicUrban, as the authority overseeing the Docklands ‘percent for art’ commissioning, had previously established various benchmarks and protocols for running the process of selecting artists or a project for commissioning, which we had managed to incorporate but amend in important ways. There was to be a two stage process that was seen as a ‘limited competition’: a small number of artists would be identified and invited to submit concepts in response to a brief (concept stage); followed by one being selected, and proceeding to further refine their project (design development stage); and that once the design was approved by the various stakeholders, the work would be created (delivery stage). This process roughly mirrors those employed for awarding construction contracts, or major architectural design jobs, and so it is familiar to government authorities and property developers. In the agreed strategy we had established a number of key considerations that were significant in ensuring a positive outcome from an otherwise formal and bureaucratic process, the most important being that we as the curators would not take an arms-length approach during the concept stage, as might otherwise be the case, but would work closely with the invited artists to develop and refine their ideas, following the active and imbricated mode of curation outlined in ‘Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial’. The curatorial brief was provided to five artists we selected on the basis that each had an aspect of their past practice that resonated in a different way with the potential directions we had identified – some more research-based, others more sculptural, some working with text and language. Receiving a fee, each of the five was invited to respond with a concept, on the basis for which the commission would be awarded.

Collaboration?

The sequence of steps and documentation outlined above gives a brief glimpse into the complex workings of a public art commission within a ‘percent for art’ program which structurally can be likened to a public-private-partnership of the kind used to build infrastructure (which is ostensibly what most of the aforementioned bodies and companies do as their ‘day job’). It is a process designed to minimise cost and increase transparency (often through anonymity in the case of architectural designs). The curator’s role here, if they are to be effective in operating in the self-reflexive, critical manner outlined in ‘Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial’, is to ameliorate the impact of a process and system on the cultural, social and political currency of the artwork in question. We believed that while one of the key opportunities to do this was through the
initial selection of the five critically-engaged artists, the greater opportunity, often lost, was to work in close consultation with them to ensure their concepts remained as open, experimental and critical as possible. It is easy to envisage an artist proposing less complex ideas perceiving it may give them a greater chance to secure an opportunity. The curator’s role in this process was to ensure this didn’t happen, that each concept presented was as rigorous as possible, which we believed would push the large number of stakeholders, with their competing interests, towards an outcome that would engage in a meaningful way with the full potentialities of the site and context.

Considering again the discussion of authorship in ‘Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial’, it is clear here that working in close consultation with the artist is a relationship that is more like stewardship. The role of the curator is to be a critical companion during the studio visit and in recursive examination of the concept, while retaining a fidelity to the latent potentialities identified in the site and context (by the curator), and throughout being subtly attuned to the capacity of the process to realise the concept.

**The artists**

The process of selection, concept development led to the commission being awarded to collaborating artists Kate Daw and Steward Russell, with a proposal for a work entitled *Civil Twilight End*.94

The artist duo had been invited to respond to the opportunity after King and I identified merit in a previous collaborative work *A simple act*, 2007. Created over a period of two and a half years of research, *A simple act* explored the involvement of Australian champion sprinter Peter Norman in the 1968 Olympic Games. Having finished second in the 200m sprint final, Norman took the medal dais alongside African American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos. The image of Smith and Carlos with black-gloved, clenched fists raised in one armed salutes of Black Power solidarity, a protest for civil rights which was supported by Norman, himself pictured wearing the 'Olympic Project for Human Rights' badge in the iconic images. Norman later commented that the protest cost him his athletic career back in Australia.95 Aware of the images, and curious to the identity of the Australian athlete, the artists to their surprise discovered Norman was still alive, contacted and interviewed him, though he passed away in late 2006 before the resulting work was exhibited. Daw and Russell have declared they were inspired by Norman’s ‘simple act’ and that the artwork embodied many things they care deeply about including social justice, politics, memory and the question of courage.
This project was included in the inaugural Basil Sellers Art Prize and presented in the associated exhibition at the Ian Potter Museum, University of Melbourne in 2008. The prize was established as an acquisitive award for artwork engaging with the theme of sport. Daw and Russell’s project led them to be selected as artists-in-residence at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for the period of one year. While in residence they envisaged a project that would link two places – the MCG and Yuendumu – via the story of Melbourne Football Club footballer Liam Jurrah. Jurrah, a Warlpiri man, is the first initiated Aboriginal man, and first Indigenous player from a remote community, in senior football in the Australian Football League. He was drafted and debuted for Melbourne in the 2009 season, while Daw and Russell were in residence at the MCG, his club’s home ground. The artists initially conceived a project, which they communicated to me throughout its development, where they might intervene sonically in the ambience of the arena. They proposed, unsuccessfully, to the MCG to introduce the sound of birds recorded in Yuendumu into the aural soundtrack that plays throughout the ground’s public address system throughout the day, while also altering the scripts of official tours of the stadium to include reference to Jurrah’s achievement, both interventions acting to link the ground to his country and community. Finding resistance to this initial idea they did further research and discovered that the physical footprint of the MCG playing oval had been replicated at the Yuendumu football ground – unusual, as it is a rounder shape than most football grounds – but while the Melbourne ground was covered with manicured turf, the ground in central Australia was made up of the iconic red sand of the surrounding desert. Around this time they arranged a group consisting of Jurrah’s relatives and grounds-keepers of the Yuendumu football ground to visit Melbourne and attend a game at the MCG, where I met the group. The artists hoped to explore the idea that these ground-keepers might work with the MCG staff to design a pattern then cut into the grass playing-surface for the annual Dreamtime game, one that celebrates Indigenous players and involvement in the AFL. In Yuendumu a drawing in the sand of the football ground would be made, based on traditional Warlpiri markings, with MCG ground-keepers travelling there to record the design and then replicate it in Melbourne on the grassed pitch.96

In these projects, and during the dialogues around them, I identified the artists’ keen use of narrative to engage with social history, as well as their nuanced relationship to an understanding of place. The poetic, yet political nature of each previous project indicated their potential to engage some of the opportunities King and I had identified in the context of the Good Shed North project. Importantly, Daw and Russell were working in ways I was drawn to through my recent research, foregrounding responsiveness to the history and finding new way to manifest connections between the past and the present. Their selection as artists would bring a creative practice that resonated clearly
with the concepts of relationality of place articulated by Massey and Bhabha’s ‘relational specificity’ (as detailed in the previous chapter).

**Concept development**

Once the artists were engaged, King and I were in contact regularly with Daw and Russell throughout the period of concept development. They had two initial responses, very notional, having visited the site a number of times during the day and evening. The first was an idea of a performative act that revolved around marking time: that each day someone could come out onto the balcony that the building plans indicated was going to be constructed looking north towards the stadium, and at a certain time when day gave way to night, would set off a small firework. This would relate to the idea of the end of the working day in a site purpose-built for the manual labour of manufacturing and trade (both in relation to the building but also the waterways and docks in Docklands precinct itself, which are largely man-made) and would inject a daily visible and aural activation into the site. The second idea was the notion of creating a beacon at night, a light that would cast a more intimate, welcoming light than the harsh street lighting, affording a place to sit and to meet.

Through feedback sessions and discussions together, various difficulties with the practical realisation of both ideas were identified but the key qualities of each idea appealed to us greatly as curators. The artists responded with an idea that incorporated many of those qualities, a proposal to construct a bell tower on the site which would ring once everyday, at the end of twilight. Russell could recall a secular bell tower in a suburb of Glasgow, where he was born and raised, symbolising something significant for the artist coming from a place of deeply-held religious segregation. For Daw, having been born and raised in Perth, there was a strong link to the St. Martins in the Field bells in the city’s Swan Bell Tower. Those twelve bells, gifted to the city on the occasion of the Australian Bicentenary in 1988, dating back to the fourteenth century, are the only set of royal bells known to have left England and were recorded as having been rung as Captain Cook’s voyage left English shores, subsequently ‘discovering’ Australia. This version of the artists’ concept would maintain the introduction of a performative intervention while simultaneously acting as a meeting place and ‘beacon’. Additional feedback encouraged the artists to further develop the narrative and aspects of the project. The final proposal also contained a set of plaques, resembling heritage plaques, that would line the side of the Goods Shed North building on Village Street, with text relating to the project and to various references of bells in literature (see ‘Appendix A: Plaques accompanying *Civil Twilight End*, Kate Daw And Stewart Russell’).
Wrote Daw and Russell in their proposal:

This project attempts to bring a sense of community, resonance, reverie and rhythm to the Docklands precinct. It introduces the sound of tolling bells to the surrounds of the Docklands at a regular time on a daily basis.

A number of accompanying text works explicate the potential meanings, histories and narratives of the bell.

*Civil Twilight End* strongly references the historical, industrial meanings of the site. The working nature and history of the Goods Shed, with the arriving and departing trains, cargo of merchandise and loading/unloading functions and rhythms has led to an artwork that has its roots in the notion and experience of the working day. The title refers to a time of day where the sun is no longer visible and the sky is still illuminated – a time where the day’s work might come to an end.

Our artwork commemorates both the close of the working day and the unfolding of the coming night.

Figure 1: image provided by the artists to support their proposal, *Civil Twilight End*, 2009.
Development and realisation

With the selection of the work complete, King stepped back from the project and I continued to work closely with the artists to further develop the project.

The design and development stage was a particularly strenuous one, in which I was closely involved in all facets, including hiring and managing a range of contractors for the project. I include here a selection of examples of the steps that required development and negotiation.

Geoffrey Barton of Lovell Chen was engaged as the architect to design the tower for the artists. As part of that process a particular bonding was designed, specific to the tower, to accentuate its link to the goods shed with its ornate brick detailing. The bricks that remained from the demolition of the original goods shed (with the extension of Collins Street) were located and proposed to use in the building of the tower. This decision and the planned height of the tower of seven metres (to line the top with the architraves of the building), resulted in VicUrban refusing to endorse the plans, fearing the structure might be read as a faux heritage building and that it would be too high.

Figure 2: west elevation of proposed bell tower and Goods Shed North by Geoffrey Barton, Lovell Chen Architects, 2010.
The question of revised materiality set the project back around seven months for alternative plans to be drawn up, with poured concrete an option explored. However, after much negotiation, stakeholder support was granted for the original concept. The question of scale required arranging for the delivery of a scissor lift to the building site whereby Russell and I, using a fabric roll from his screen printing business and gaffer tape, created a 1:1 mock-up of the tower in situ to resolve the discussion.98

![Figure 3: mock-up of proposed bell tower height, Goods Shed North, 2010.](image)

Originally there was a desire by the artists that an existing bell be procured, with a history that might inflect the reading of the project further, though it proved impossible to find one at the scale required that was not either beloved by a community or bricked into a former bell tower. Commissioning a new bell was reasonably straightforward, contracting Dr. Anton Hasell, the designer of the Federation Bells at Birrarung Marr, to produce a bronze bell, with a 70cm mouth, cast at Billmans Foundry, Castlemaine. Finding a robust system that could ring at the correct time each day and interface with Hasell’s particular kind of electronic striker, proved more difficult. The end of civil twilight is a time used throughout the world for events such as streetlights turning on, but it is an astronomical event, occurring when the sun reaches a point 6° below the horizon, not a fixed clock time. Translated into clock time this happens at a different time each day of the year, and is dependent on the longitude and latitude of where one is situated physically, as the time itself is relational (and also subject to the construct of daylight saving time, obviously). After extensive research, I worked with a Polish
company producing solid state, software controlled, electronic relays for home automation, to customise one of their products for the southern hemisphere to allow the end of civil twilight to act as a trigger for the bell ringer.

Figure 4: bell maker Dr. Anton Hasell with completed bell, 2011.

With the complexity of constructing a building in the public sphere, and the web of stakeholders affecting many parts of the process, the curatorial role was situated for long periods within the administrative realm described by Storr and Delany in 'Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial'. A key part was to bring patience and determination to the table with people whose commitment to the project might be on the verge of waning, and to remain diligent in being critical during decision making with the key concepts in mind. With respect to time frame, from the first meeting on 11 March 2008 to appointment of curators took five months, from appointment to strategy approval took a further twelve months before proceeding to invite the shortlist of five artists to respond to the curatorial brief. Daw and Russell were formally appointed at the beginning of September 2009, with design development taking until late May 2011. Construction and installation commenced immediately and the work was completed in October 2011.
Interpretation

The curatorial role involved discussing the artwork and its framing in the public sphere throughout the development stages via a publicity campaign and through public talks and presentations.

While the project had very many positive aspects to it – including adding poetics into an area largely devoid of life at that stage of its development, and indeed acting as a meeting point upon its completion opposite the stadium – I consider the project a critique of the loss of community generally and of poor attempts to manufacture one in the Docklands precinct.

The tower and bell are manifestly physical and their scale was established in relation to the body. An adult is able to wrap their arms around the bell and each of the tower’s faces is less in width than the average arm span. The height of the tower was determined so that the bell would be visible at the top (lit at night), in a way can be seen in close proximity as well as from afar. The aspect of the project I publicly framed prominently, in the media and in talks on the work, was the bell ringing. In that aspect the crux of the artwork is resolutely dematerialised. The sound of the bell in fact engaged far wider publics and spaces than the physical aspects in their fixed positions. As I wrote in the previous chapter, our experience of the city also shapes, defines and
spatialises the city. As such, the bell tolling works in the symbolic mode, each time sculpting space anew. As David Harvey writes, in a reading of Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*, ‘Space and the political organisation of space, express social relationships but also react back upon them.’

In a new overly designed and built-out precinct, as Docklands is and was at the time of commissioning, art provides an opportunity – as a use-less (or use-resistant) vehicle to consider Adorno’s model – to introduce ambiguity into the urban, into a scenario of increasing homogenisation (including that of thought via concentration of media ownership and the flattening of knowledge produced by the accessibility of information via the Internet, and homogeneity of city, for instance via the local shopfront giving way to large chains and brands). To elaborate further, art gives agency to introduce into an urban fabric objects, acts or events whose social function is ambiguous, allowing the projection of one’s own experience, understanding, or even need, onto them, thus encoding the place of interaction with a specificity, a unique, localised, unfixed quality. This is not to suggest the artwork itself is without craft, form or intention, but that it can be effective when the artist hangs a range of signifiers around the work, and we are asked to navigate to our own conceptual destination within the semiotic cloud it invokes.

The ambiguous social function of *Civil Twilight End* is to mark time, not clock time, but a natural rhythm, marking an astronomical moment – the end of twilight. This reflected the changing complexion and use of the precinct, the move from industrial to a more convivial social engagement with the place. It also symbolically suggests linking an entirely manmade precinct back to nature (Melbourne’s Docklands was formerly wetlands and swamps; all the docks were built by hand from the late 1880s, and the Yarra River rerouted). The experience of being in the world when day gives way to night is a universal, global one. However this moment, the ring of the bell, is wholly local – the resonance of the bell literally describing a physical site, the arc of all the people who experience the work, individually, and simultaneously collectively, depending on where they are in relation to the bell, and depending on whether they hear it (ambience, attention and hearing all coming into play). As an astrological event, the moment of Civil Twilight ending is defined in terms of the specific physical place on the globe of the Earth, in relation to the sun, and this moment changes if one moves to a different point on the globe, as the relationship of that point to the sun at that moment is different. Thus also, the time the work tolls changes as days get shorter and longer with the passing of seasons, with no two nights the same. The place the works inscribes then is a temporal place, but also one that relates only to that exact physical spot or small area in the entire world, as the end of twilight occurs either before or after that moment everywhere else.
This epicentre of place is also marked by the presence of the tower, itself implying stillness and solidity; in fact within the artists’ conception of the project it exists largely as a prop, facilitating the ringing of the bell, and counter to its concreteness – the inscription of a temporal, unfixed, subjective experience of place and sense of community.

Interestingly, it’s also not only hearing the bell toll, but the awareness, or hope, of others hearing it at the same time that gives the singular, individualised and temporary moment of place the sense of connection – like a familiar voice on the radio that talks directly to you, but also connects you to the community of other listeners to the same voice and the same words. It is this sense of connection that is longed for, but mythologised by talk of the imaginary fixed and knowable places – towns and cities – of days long past.

Figure 6: *Civil Twilight End* plaque installed on Goods Shed North, 2011.

In fact this work is successful in promoting and exemplifying a progressive notion of localised place within an ambiguous, destabilised public sphere. The work taps into a nostalgic sense of community, through productively leveraging the cognitive associations of bells tolling with collective celebration and reflection. In every celebration however there’s an inherent critique. The celebration of a natural time rhythm quietly rebukes the mono-culture of capitalism and the hold clock time has over
The strengthening of a sense of connection within the local area of Melbourne’s Docklands via this project also underlines the previously weak sense of community, something the rendering of invisible boundaries – those of sight lines to the tower, or earshot to the ringing of the bell – seeks to impart.

This case-study had a strong focus curatorially on establishing a unique specificity of place through research into the context (informed by Massey and the concepts articulated in the previous chapter), and this remained central in discussions during the development and realisation of the work. In considering the outcome, and the ways in which it succeeded, it was clear to me there were key aspects of how the piece functioned that required deeper investigation. The friction between the new and old, familiar and unfamiliar, was not accounted for in the underpinnings of this place-based thinking, and the amelioration somewhat of issues or shortcomings of the precinct didn’t coalesce with the productive tensions that I continued to recognise when the artwork was in situ and ‘performing’. This sense of a moment of performance, and the intrinsic yet often accidental public inscribed and constituted through hearing the bell, struck me as fundamentally relational; both in the language Massey uses (places as ‘articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings’) and in relationship between the temporality and the nightly accidental public.

This led me in the next stages of the research to turn to the commentary around relational practices, and to consider how these arguments might be used productively with respect to artworks more generally. Intuitively I felt there was a connection at the heart of Bourriaud’s claims for relational interaction with dematerialised practices as I was witnessing with this case study despite its decidedly concrete nature.

In the following chapter I review in brief Bourriaud’s proposition for understanding the dematerialised artwork through his book *Relational Aesthetics*, the critiques levelled at his position, and the tension around judging a critically and socially engaged artwork in light of the issues raised in ‘Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity’.
Chapter 5: Relationality, judgement and artistic strategies

In ‘Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity’ I described the changing nature of judgement within a contemporary context that Groys defines as ‘changing and unstable’. This chapter will review ways of conceiving the operation of art in these contexts and some critical positions around how to effectively make judgements about them. Throughout it should be noted the position of the critical individual subject of the audience member is taken as the universal point of departure by each critic. This is a historical departure as discussed previously, and aligned with the development of some of the curatorial approaches outlined in ‘Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial’, where I noted the importance in recognising Szeemann’s curatorial focus on the role of the interior world, or subjectivity of the audience.

Contestation and the public sphere

Rosalyn Deutsche has argued that the public sphere remains democratic only insofar as its naturalised exclusions are taken into account and made open to contestation: ‘Conflict, division, and instability, then, do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are conditions of its existence’. Claire Bishop’s text ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics’ provides a bridge between Laclau and Mouffe’s theorisation of the public sphere raised in ‘Chapter 1: Curating and the curatorial’ and the introduction of ambiguity as a technique that can sustain conflict (a strategy referred to in the previous chapter with respect to Civil Twilight End).

The text is largely a rebuttal of the claims made in Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics, and of specific interest to this research are the aspects concerning: art’s autonomy (from ‘life’); the work of art in relation to aura; the critique of the political and emancipatory claims for participation with or in an artwork; a focus on form or formalism; the power of disruption as an artistic strategy; and, the relationship of an audience member’s subjectivity to the work of art.

Under the heading ‘Artwork as social interstice’, as the introduction to his theory Bourriaud writes, ‘The possibility of a relational art (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space), points to a radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art’. Whether one agrees
with Bourriaud’s conclusion regarding the extent of radicality, it is clear that much contemporary practice is concerned with the realm of human interactions and their social context. Certainly all art conceived for presentation or enactment outside a gallery or museum context – symbolic spaces in Bourriaud’s schema – could be said, in greater or lesser ways, to be engaged directly with this.

Bishop elaborates on this, drawing a somewhat absolutist conclusion from Bourriaud’s text:

In other words, relational art works seek to establish intersubjective encounters (be these literal or potential) in which meaning is elaborated collectively rather than in the privatised space of individual consumption. The implication is that this work inverses the goals of Greenbergian modernism. Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and audience.  

It’s important to note how Bishop subtly sets up Bourriaud’s position, in order to establish a counter-position – one that underplays the philosophical argument that underpins Bourriaud’s text. His argument references notions of subjectivity that Guattari argues for in his essay ‘The Three Ecologies’, subjectivities that are produced within and between relational fields. In this text Guattari rejects an understanding of the self that is a structure imported from elsewhere, and instead insists that it is actively generated, over time. Guattari argues that relationship to context is crucial in the development of a practice of life that takes in the enormity of the contemporary world, its issues, power structures and the desire to do and be better. In what he terms an ‘ecosophy of life’, he identifies environmental, social, and subjective registers as three intertwined fields of relations that need to be engaged with together. Here engagement with ‘the rest of the world’ and with the active production of subjectivity is fundamental: ‘Instead of clinging to general recommendations we should be implementing effective practices of experimentation, as much on a microsocial level as on a larger institutional scale’.  

Instead of the radical individualism that Bishop invokes via the reference to Greenberg, Bourriaud, through Guattari, is suggesting a link between relational art practices and a reimagining of subjectivity today, which, if it is to be radical, emancipatory, and engage freedoms, requires a small evolution, an ‘ethico-political articulation’, towards
individuation in groups and communities, rather than strict individuality. As Guattari writes: 'Now more than ever nature cannot be separated from culture; in order to comprehend the interactions between ecosystems, the mechanosphere and the social and individual Universes of reference, we must learn to think “transversally”.'

Turning to how the work of art might elicit shifts in subjectivity, Bishop draws on Umberto Eco’s text ‘The Poetics of the Open Work’ (1962), in which Eco cites a passage from Maurice Merleau-Ponty in defining what he means by an ‘open work’:

How could I gain the experience of the world, as I would of an individual actuating his own existence, since none of the views or perceptions I have of it can exhaust it and the horizons remain forever open? ... This ambiguousness does not represent an imperfection in the nature of existence or in that of consciousness; it is its very definition.

Bishop writes, 'It is Eco’s contention that every work of art is potentially “open”, since it may produce an unlimited range of possible readings ... Bourriaud misinterprets these arguments by applying them to a specific type of work (those that require literal interaction) and thereby redirects the argument back to artistic intentionality rather than issues of reception'. Bishop argues that in the judgement of works, the 'criteria we should use to evaluate open-ended, participatory artworks are not just aesthetic, but political and even ethical: we must judge the “relations” that are produced by relational artworks... But how do we measure or compare these relationships? The quality of the relationships in “relational aesthetics” are never examined or called into question ... all relations that permit “dialogue” are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good'.

This is the crux of the argument against the theoretical framework of Relational Aesthetics, that the subjectivity of the audience member, the ‘issue of reception’, has not been fully grasped and how a work operates in relation to subjectivity is not properly explored. Bishop, as a critic and art historian, is fixated particularly on the evaluative judgement of an artwork, not in the considerations of creating, or laying the groundwork for creating, an artwork that operates in an effective, meaningful way for an audience (member). The ‘environmental scanning’ described in the previous chapters at work when considering a context, and which artist(s) might be selected to create a work within it, is not of concern to the critic, though for a curator is surely is. How an artwork works, or operates, in this field, and how it works on someone, is of central interest.
There is use to be made of Bishop’s introduction of contingencies to the relationship of
meaning and worth of relational artworks, as a starting point for considering a
theoretical stance of art’s operation. We could in fact reform a key sentence of Bishop’s
text to extend it to art that engages directly with (a non-art gallery/history) context, and
we would have the starting point for describing an approach. The original sentence
reads, ‘Rather than a discrete, portable, autonomous work of art that transcends its
context, relational art is entirely beholden to the contingencies of its environment and
audience’. This might be productively tweaked to ‘a work of art that is not completely
autonomous or transcendent of its context, rather which is directly engaged with the
contingencies of its environment and audience’ which echoes the quote from Groys in
‘Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity’.

In ‘Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity’ I raised the notion of conflict and
antagonism being at heart of Bishop’s use of Laclau and Mouffe’s ideas. This for Bishop
is precisely at the heart of her opposition to Relational Aesthetics, not simply due to the
nature of the process (conflictual), but also in its duration: that there isn’t an
emancipatory end point in sight. Bishop describes the practice and a number of works
by artist Santiago Sierra in order to challenge the de facto positivity of the Relational
Aesthetics artists. She writes that Sierra’s ‘“actions” have been organised around
relations that are more complicated – and more controversial – than those produced by
the artists associated with relational aesthetics’. These she sees operating in a more
disruptive and ‘harder-edged’ way, skirting as they do between exploitation of
marginalised people and revealing the inequities in their marginalisation. This is a
complex and, as Bishop mentions, controversial, strategy, that has emerged over the
past two decades in a range of guises. In Sierra’s practice it relies on creating a situation
that is so wildly unethical, that the audience is compelled to infer that what is
represented is not just the initial exploitation of the human subject by the artist in the
artwork, but the exploitative conditions which allow the artwork to exist at all (ie.
global-capitalism, nature of the art world, the museum or biennale hosting the work et
cetera). Needless to say, as they are engaging or witnessing it, the work relationally
asserts that the audience member is also implicated. This sense of implication in the
exploitation fosters guilt, unease and other negative emotions in the ‘progressive’
audience member, creating a gulf between their implicit subordination of the person at
the subject of work and their belief in being an ethical (political) subject. Into that void,
in order to reconcile this tension, an ethical content or message is projected onto the
work in lieu of any being asserted *prima facie*.

A quote from Sierra that Bishop relates confirms that the artist doesn’t consider his
approach to be an emancipatory or transformative project, although its political nature
is surely impossible to deny: ‘I can’t change anything. There is no possibility that we can change anything with our artistic work. We do our work because we are making art, and because we believe art should be something, something that follows reality. But I don’t believe in the possibility of change’.113 This artistic strategy was the focus of a symposium held in 2006 at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam under the title ‘Cultural Activism Today: Strategies of over-identification’. Led by the Rotterdam collective BAVO,114 the symposium resulted in a published anthology of the same name. As editors, BAVO propose the work of Santiago Sierra in the opening paragraph of the introduction (along with Jens Haaning), as being emblematic of this approach, which has come to be termed ‘over-identification’:

The art of over-identification offers an uneasy answer to the question of artistic resistance ‘after’ the end of history. It asks artists to ignore society’s pathetic demand for small creative acts and, inversely, to uncompromisingly identify with the ruling order itself and to act of its logic in its most extreme, dystopian form. To be sure, confronting society in this way with its own closure demands of artists to stop being the good guy who protects society from what it wants or offers it some artistic relief – as should be clear by the actions of Sierra and Haaning referred to above. Instead, they should turn society into the worst version of itself in order to confront it with the impossibility of its desire. The aim of this strategy of over-identification should thus be clear: by sabotaging society’s tendency to delegate its task of resistance to the safe haven of art, it no longer grants society any escape from its own, immanent laws, but forces it to start subverting itself.115

Within the artist Liam Gillick’s extended response to Bishop’s essay, is a critique of Bishop’s adoption of Laclau and Mouffe’s antagonism, which spurs Bishop on to make further clarification through the letters pages of Artforum. Gillick writes:

Mouffe has carefully outlined a useful critique of the irresolvable tensions inherent in Western constructions of liberal democracy. While it is tempting to try to layer a broad outline of her ideas onto artists engaged in contemporary practice, the artists chosen by Bishop fail to be useful subjects in this instance. All are more or less working in a tradition of individual production and reception that is presented within an established art context. Mouffe is not calling for more friction within some of the structures proposed within such a context, but is elaborating an argument against the kind of social structuring that would produce a recognisable art ‘world’ in the first place. … The implication that Hirschhorn and Sierra upset more people than Tiravanija and I do does not
mean that they are closer to Mouffe’s notion of antagonism; rather, all four of us are, at best, engaged in an ongoing sequence of arguments in relation to one another and the broader culture that, when taken as a whole, is a limited yet effective demonstration of the potential of a new recognition of tensions within established models of social relations.116

Bishop counters to say that her essay is focussed on critiquing Relational Aesthetics and in it Bourriaud’s ‘claim that relational art is a politicised mode of artistic practice’, by which we can assume she means that, in and of itself, this claim for a work is not determined purely by its form. She continues that the essay ‘sought to find a new method for evaluating “political art” – namely, by considering the role and experience of the viewers. Steering focus away from authorial intention to take account of audience reception is appropriate given relational art’s emphasis on collaboration, dialogue, and spectator activation. The essay also tried to introduce the term “viewing experience” as a way to pressure the opposition of political content versus politicised form’.117 Bishop does not actually use the term ‘viewing experience’ at all in her essay, but it relates to the notion mentioned earlier in this chapter of the importance to the curator of reception. The inclusion of the term here allows Bishop to introduce an important concept which she will extend in a later essay ‘The Social Turn: collaboration and its discontents’: ‘Rather than suggesting that the only good art is political art, the essay was moving toward what I understand Rosalind Krauss to mean by “recursivity” (i.e., a structure in which some of the elements of a work produce the rules that generate the structure itself)’.118

Gillick contends that Bishop has been simplistic in her utilisation of a theoretical project that is concerned with reconsidering the structural, meta operations at play in the socio-political field, rather than the individual processes and actions of the actors within this field (as he puts it, applying it ‘to marginally different approaches to engaging with the multiple participant/audiences for contemporary art’).119 Interestingly, while this case may be argued, and prima facie Gillick is correct, Mouffe herself, in writing about what she sees as the role of an artist or artwork within her political schematic in a 2007 essay entitled ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’, advocates precisely the kind of artistic-activist practices that can be characterised as belonging to the conceptual strategy of ‘over-identification’. In fact Mouffe only mentions one artist (group) specifically, the collective the Yes Men,120 who are mentioned in detail in Cultural Activism Today: Strategies of over-identification (and who, along with Sierra and Hirschhorn, are considered exemplars in that volume). Mouffe describes at length the ‘very effective satire of neo-liberal ideology’ that their projects concerned with the World Trade
Organisation exhibit. She makes a clear point to establish a relationship between this approach and her political theory of the ‘agonistic struggle’,

The real issue [rather than attempting a distinction between political and non-political art] concerns the possible forms of critical art, the different ways in which artistic practices can contribute to questioning the dominant hegemony. Once we accept that identities are never pre-given but that they are always the result of processes of identification, that they are discursively constructed, the question that arises is the type of identity that critical artistic practices should aim at fostering. ... According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus, that makes visible what the dominant consensus tends to obscure and obliterate. It is constituted by a manifold of artistic practices aiming at giving a voice to all those who are silenced within the framework of the existing hegemony [of consensus]. In my view this agonistic approach is particularly suited to grasp the nature of the new forms of artistic activism that have emerged recently and that, in a great variety of ways, aim at challenging the existing consensus.

To summarise, using Bourriaud’s book as a counterpoint, Bishop has proposed a theoretical approach by which a work of art can be considered both ‘good’ and be politically effective. The elements for her model include: considering the role and experience of the viewers, while steering away from authorial intention; asserting an artistic autonomy (perhaps via authorial intention); embracing the potential for antagonistic relations to be produced between work and viewer (it isn’t clear whether this is completely at the expense of the usefulness of positive relations, though it certainly is for Mouffe); rejecting the idea that form itself generates either antagonistic or positive relations; the need for a work to question its ‘imbrication’ with its context; the importance of being rigorous in scrutinising any claimed transformation of, or within, that context; and, the assertion that the elements of the work, the questions of form, subject matter and effect on the viewer, operate recursively, activating and ordering one another in turn.

The next chapter details the second case study in the research project. This case study consists of three relational artworks, presented in the public sphere. The approach was to continue a decidedly place-based curatorial framework, but in order to further the research shift in these key qualities, most clearly materiality and temporality, as a point of contrast to Civil Twilight End. Each employs different registers of ambiguity, disruption, mediation and participation, and they are used to further consider the different factors that influence an audience member’s experience. In subsequent
chapters I will look in detail at the formation of the artwork and the relationship between form, content and context and their role in influencing the experience of an audience member, in order to understand more fully the operation of a work in the public, relational sphere.
Chapter 6: [en]counters

Following the completion of Civil Twilight End, and the research detailed in the previous chapter, I accompanied Daw and Russell to New Delhi in January 2012, together with fellow Australian artists Emily Floyd and John Meade and curator Vikki McInnes. In conjunction with artist Shuddhabrata Sengupta, of RAQS Media Collective, I hosted an evening on 21 January at SARAI, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. I presented on the Civil Twilight End project, and gave some local context, before the artists presented on their practices.\textsuperscript{124}

During the trip I conducted a studio visit with RAQS Media Collective where I met curator Elise Foster Vander Elst, founding director of Mumbai organisation Asia Art Projects. Having both established organisations as curatorial organs, and working independently outside the gallery and museum context, we decided there was the potential for future exchange and collaboration. We undertook to continue a remote dialogue with the plan to develop an opportunity to present some Australian artists in India. In 2012 the International Cultural Council of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) announced a festival of Australian creative arts to be held in multiple cities in India between October 2012 and February 2013, called Oz Fest.\textsuperscript{125} This activity motivated us to focus on at that window of time to leverage the momentum of Australian cultural events taking place in India. After a number of Skype conversations throughout early 2012, Foster Vander Elst suggested a potential opportunity to partner with an existing event, [en]counters, a program of temporary public art projects in Mumbai.

Established by Mumbai independent arts organisation Art Oxygen, [en]counters had been held three times previously, since 2010, mostly along the seafront in the Mumbai suburb of Bandra. The ambition of the organisers had grown the program from its inaugural iteration of five local artists to a mixture of local and international artists in 2011, with C&G ArtPartment (Hong Kong) and Fondazione Antonio Mazzotta (Italy) curating artists from their respective locations. Artists were invited by the group to present work that would respond to a theme, set by ArtOxygen, which would have some environmental relationship to the city.

Foster Vander Elst and I established that she would act as an interlocutor between me and the organisers, working directly with me to facilitate the India-side arrangements, while I would select and invite some Australian artists and seek the funding to cover the expenses of their travel and presentations. Foster Vander Elst, through Asia Art Projects,
importantly undertook research and site visits, directed firstly by me in the development period, and then on behalf of the Australian artists once engaged. This process included providing photography and contextual information, which facilitated the identification of key locations, and subsequently informed the development of the projects. The sites included: Gateway of India; Marine Drive; Chowpatty Beach; Hanging Gardens; Bhau Daji Lad Museum and grounds; Carter Road Promenade; Juhu Beach; Pushpa Narssee Park; Banganga Tank; Joggers’ Park Colaba; Dadar Beach; Worli Fort; Bayside Promenade on Sea-Link; Mahim Nature Park; Sanjay Gandhi National Park; Horniman Circle; and, the steps of the Asiatic Library. Information was gathered on each potential site, including historical information, current usage and user groups, accessibility, and the status of the ownership and likelihood of permissions being granted to utilise the space. Mumbai is a city with very little public amenity, with space heavily privatised and those spaces that are accessible by the general public are managed by local associations with varying degrees of transparency.

Once the relationship was established, the organisers outlined their aims for the overall project: to provide a new platform for public art interventions; be a catalyst for new cross-cultural visual arts projects; allow young artists to be inspired, and develop their practice; to connect with the general public; and, celebrate the city of Mumbai. They then provided a conceptual framework for the program in correspondence with me, via an email from Vander Elst on 11 April 2012:

We would like to focus on the theme of light in the city of Mumbai and its various declinations. In the context of an evolving Mumbai landscape, we need to consider its developmental dynamics in terms of the environment, industrialisation, urbanisation, economic growth, increasing wealth and poverty.

Within the framework of an uncontrollable city, how do we reduce wastage and conserve our energy resources in an environment where oil, gas, fuel is depleting? We propose to relook at our city’s everyday and the issues that will define its social environment.

As an outsider looking at this context, it seemed crucial to respond to the lack of public space, especially public space with accessibility encouraged across a range of classes and castes, which appeared an obvious way in which the program itself could contribute to social discourse. The concept of ‘power’ in terms of autonomy, and ‘energy’ in terms of interconnection, both seemed to offer up more interesting possibilities and problematics than working with the term ‘light’. With this, and the aims of the organisers with their own commissioning in mind, I fashioned a vision statement that
would allow both sets of curatorial impulses to run parallel, though somewhat independently:

The project invites artists to interrogate the city in terms of energy, with a focus on the relations and connections between people. Against a constantly altering cityscape where social relations are being disfigured by a newly rising vertical landscape, this program invites artists to engage with ideas of energy, power and light in the city of Mumbai, where its evolution is assured, not by policy makers, but by its people. The artists will explore this grey area of relations and create new points of intersection in spaces still reserved for leisure, amusement and connection. The project will illustrate that public spaces can be used as active areas with a positive function for change and new ways of living and relooking at our everyday.

Along with this, I suggested that, from a curatorial perspective, I would interpret the theme not from a strictly ecological or environmental perspective, as seemed to be the organisers’ intention, but more broadly and critically. This was accepted by ArtOxygen, who then worked largely autonomously, while Asia Art Projects continued to work closely with me.

During my visit to New Delhi Vander Elst and I both attended a night of performances organised by the non-profit KHOJ International Artists’ Association entitled KHOJLIVE12. The event was held on January 27 2012 at blueFROG in Mehrauli and consisted of thirteen live art works by artists Subodh Gupta, Vivan Sundaram, Pushpamala N. & Mamta Sagar, Amitesh Grover, Diya Naidu of the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts, Eryck Abecassis & Sonic Tree Natives, Hemant SK, Inder Salim, Neha Choksi and Rashmi Kaleka. Through this event, and discussions with the artists and organisers, I realised the depth of the critically engaged live art scene within their contemporary context. In light of this I intended for [en]counters to invite a number of Australian practitioners who could engage a general public and invite curiosity, and in some cases, participation, building on the already impressive live art practice in India. The artists would be invited based on their capacity to develop projects that would extend the somewhat uncritical aims and reductive ideas of the organisers into new conceptual territories. All of the elements detailed in the site research factored into the process of identifying where opportunities might lie for contextual responses by the artists along these lines. Along with my own research into the country’s history and, through a range of conversations with Indian artists and curators about the present situation, I had a growing sense of what opportunities might exist, which informed the selection of artists and how I would brief them to elicit their projects.
Artist and project selection

To synthesise the research I had been undertaking since the development of Civil Twilight End into an approach for the program in Mumbai, I first considered the range of forms the works might take. I was interested in extending the relational aspects of the previous project into an inter-personal interaction, and was drawn to the rigorous contemporary artworks I had seen on the previous visit to India that had employed performance to critique the social and political context. Because of these two related factors, I quickly settled on wanting to present works that had a performative engagement, where the artists, or their agents, would be physically present for the enactment of the work. These approaches could also involve the public as participants, and might involve some kind of installation or sculptural element, or a combination of those. The ‘live art’ nature I felt was key however, to bring the Australian artist in direct physical relationship to the audience in this context, and allow me concrete examples of relational projects taking place in a very different temporal envelope to Civil Twilight End.

Thinking about the conceptual framework, and the different ways each theme could be interpreted, I decided the programming structure would consist of three artists, using three different methodologies of performative engagement. This would allow me later to reflect on the range of different modalities at work and consider how audiences had received the artworks in different ways (a triangulation of sorts). The idea firmed for me that in order to fully realise the potential of multi-faceted resonance within the Indian context, each project would need to: consider a different concept or issue related to energy or power; engage a different performative register; manifest in a different physical way between pure bodily performance and sculptural practice; and, provide a ‘way in’ for a diverse Indian audience, whether that be through representations of the familiar or everyday, the use of humour or absurdity, or the incorporation of spectacle.

Having developed this as a guiding curatorial framework, I first invited PVI Collective to enter a conversation with me to test the waters around their participation. Through a series of Skype conversations between Melbourne and the artists’ base in Perth we explored the possibility of staging a work I was already familiar with, Resist. PVI Collective is an art collective founded by Steve Bull and Kelli McCluskey to produce interdisciplinary projects that often take place in the public sphere and regularly employ performance, participation and technology. Importantly, they also use humour within their politically engaged practice, which has an ‘activist’ philosophy underpinning it. Resist had been staged in a number of different places and situations since 2008,
including in Santiago and on a rolling train. The work takes the form of a tug-of-war that the public are invited to participate in, one at a time, against a member of the PVI Collective team. The contest is notionally held over issues that affect the local community where the performance takes place, with PVI Collective members consulting general public through surveys, and experts, politicians and activists through meetings, that take place in the weeks leading up to the event. The artists provided this statement to explain the background to the project in 2012:

Resist in its original form was developed whilst on a residency in Santiago in 2006. Inspired by the ferociously active political history of Chile and witnessing the currency of public protest in the city, we were keen to respond by devising a work that tested the notion of people power in contemporary society, investigating how different modes of collective behaviour can generate social change. Having researched the history of tug-of-war, we were interested in its origins as a legally binding contract between citizens that took place as a public activity. We began to explore tug-of-war as a kind of grass roots participatory democracy and wanted to see how we could bring it into a contemporary context in order to imagine how it would fare as a replacement for current systems of governance.

I had never seen Resist performed live but the documentation of previous iterations led me to believe it could be successfully staged in Mumbai, and would feel like an ‘event’, which would help it cut through and act as an attractor in a busy public sphere. It was also appropriately didactic in terms of its political engagement, while imbuing the encounter with humour and absurdity if done properly. Finally, the meetings with Bull and McCluskey assured me that they themselves were robust and up for the task of further developing and staging a work in India, which was a consideration underpinning the artist selection process.

Having addressed ‘power’ in terms of political power through the inclusion of Resist, in a direct and didactic manner, I felt the second project needed to subvert this reading. I held a studio visit with Veronica Kent and Sean Peoples to discuss their ongoing collaboration The Telepathy Project. I had first come across their collaboration during the 2008 Next Wave Festival where the two artists performed in the shop windows of the Forum Theatre, Melbourne. The program description for their project stated:

The Telepathy Project consists of a series of intimate telepathic exchanges performed publicly.
For four hours over five evenings, artists Sean Peoples and Veronica Kent will isolate themselves from each other in the front windows of the Forum Theatre, with no way of communicating, other than telepathically. Every 15 minutes the artists will write down the outcome of their most recent telepathic exchange on time-coded Post-It notes. These will then be stuck on to the glass window for the passing Flinders Street audience to read. This growing archive of notes will be written in a stream-of-consciousness, unguarded, honest and confessional style. The notes will be on display 24 hours a day for the duration of the show and will form text for a printed publication to be produced at the end of the season.

While maintaining separate artistic practices they had continued to develop their collaborative practice over the years, having first established it as a quiet resistance to being told they had to collaborate while undertaking their undergraduate degrees at the Victorian College of the Arts. They had decided they would only communicate through telepathy for the class collaboration, but quickly found it to be a creatively rewarding and surprising platform for their imaginations, and an absurdist methodology which resulted in poetic outcomes. They later also included dreaming as a way of image generation and communication, regularly employing performance in the creation of works together.

The idea of artists proposing telepathic power as a communicative tool was appealing to my conceptual programming model, and as an alternate pole to Resist, from both the perspective of the work engaging invisible, rather than the overtly physical, force or energy, and engaging on a poetic rather than political register of content. The fact that Kent had travelled extensively in India previously, together with their being a duo to support one another while there (like PVI Collective) was a positive for the planning of the logistics of the project, ameliorating concerns about the capacity of the artists to realise their projects in a new and challenging environment. A number of meetings and studio visits resulted in a decision to create a new performance work that would use the presence of the artists in India as a catalyst for dreams and incoherent telepathic communications which they would then mine. The outcome would be a public performance which would play out the dreams they would record each night and morning while in Mumbai, spending the days creating or sourcing scenography, props and costumes for articulating the dream content.

In response to the research on the different sites, The Telepathy Project artists were particularly taken with the poetic resonance of Mumbai’s proximity to the Arabian Sea, with two of the sites, Bandra foreshore and Juhu Beach situated on the Sea. Arabic poetry is the oldest form of Arabic literature, with the earliest in the form of rhythmic or
rhyming poetry, with 'the meters of the rhythmical poetry ... known in Arabic as “seas” (buhūr). The measuring unit of seas is known as “tafīlah”, and every sea contains a certain number of tafīlas which the poet has to observe in every verse (bayt) of the poem.'127 The artists developed a proposal for a new project, entitled *Dreaming the Arabian Sea* to take place on the shore as the sun set over the Arabian Sea (as the beach faces due West), on the closing day of the *[en]counters* program. The artists wanted to simultaneously activate the local situation in Mumbai with an invisibly connected audience around the world, and enlisted past collaborators in The Netherlands, France and Spain to be waiting beside connected bodies of water to receive the images and sounds of *Dreaming the Arabian Sea*:

The performance will be given to real and imaginary audiences both in Mumbai and on the other side of the Arabian Sea. The Sea is proposed as a medium that we hope will carry our performance from India to our friends waiting beside bodies of water in Europe to receive and draw our performance.

The question of class and caste in relation to labour in India, that I had encountered on the previous visit, continued to interest me. The profound and visible discrepancies in access to different work options and questions ultimately of autonomy and emancipation, was conceptual ground that I wanted the third project to engage with, as another articulation of the thematic ‘power’. This was particularly pertinent I felt given where contemporary art is situated within the cultural context of the country, Indian contemporary art having been heavily collected by institutions and collectors outside the country in the decade of the 2000s, leading to what the local community described as an art boom in the country. Despite an increased level of visibility within the country, the pursuit of being an artist, and those engaged with art discourse, remained largely contained within the upper classes, which struck me forcefully in undertaking studio visits and meeting students and researchers at SARAI. The *[en]counters* program was one of a small number of initiatives situated outside museum and commercial gallery networks that intended to engage broader publics (along with the biennial Focus Photography Festival, an initiative of Asia Art Projects and Foster Vander Elst, which was to launch in 2013). For this reason I decided it was imperative to explore this territory. I decided that the third artist could be someone with less experience than PVI Collective or The Telepathy Project in working in the public sphere, so that the opportunity might also represent one of professional development. I proceeded to consider various emerging artists that had demonstrated an interest in working with labour and power relations as artistic content, and identify past projects that might act as precedents for a newly situated work.
During this research there were two projects that stood out for me, both by artist Kay Abude. I had encountered these works at student exhibitions at the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), where she had been a former student. In her work *Foreign Object Intervention*, 2007, presented at the School of Art Graduate Exhibition that year, Abude had recreated the steel shelving of a supermarket, complete with goods lined on them. Between the products were cast, featureless, versions of the same objects in plaster. The scale of the installation was impressive, and I found out it stemmed from her part-time job stacking shelves in a supermarket. Subsequently, the supermarket became a site she used throughout 2008, staging installations of goods between the aisles and then presenting the documentation, both in the supermarket with staff as an audience, and in art spaces in video and photographs.

In 2010 she presented *Production Line (Family)*, 2009, in her Master of Fine Art graduate exhibition at VCA. Again looking at manual labour, this performance installation involved setting up a quasi production line in which members of her family together performed discrete actions in a chain while seated at the same long table constructed by the artist. The person at the first station takes a sheet of A4 plain paper and using a stencil marks where the paper is to be cut and places the marked-up paper in stacks within handmade cardboard shelves, before repeating the process. The next station in the line cuts along the long marks, placing them in stacks in the next shelves. The third station cuts along the short marks, resulting in a number of equal sized leaves that are the size of an Australian $100 note. The final station takes the stacks of cut sheets from their shelves and counts them into bundles and seals a featureless currency band around them, created from the offcuts of the first stage, placing the finished bundle in the final stack of cardboard shelves. This mundane, but highly ordered, sequence is played out for hours on end by the family members with intense concentration, as they ‘make money’. Each of the four, Abude among them, wears a matching unisex uniform, white with a blue collar, designed by the artist. This version of the project – the version I had seen performed – references Abude’s working class upbringing, as a child the family would turn their home into a makeshift factory, making things together in sequence in their family time, as an additional income stream after their emigration from the Philippines to Melbourne.¹²⁸

I approached Abude and introduced the idea to her of undertaking a site and context responsive project as part of the *[en]counters* program, and suggested a reconfiguration of *Production line* as one option to consider. A number of studio visits ensued where we discussed the possible locations and the resonances each had in relation to the concept of labour and opportunity, and an idea firmed whereby the *Production line* installation could incorporate local textiles instead of paper, and the size of the note reconfigured to
the size of a local note, while the actions would remain the same. This would relate the project to the economically significant textile industry in Mumbai, which I identified for Abude as symbolically integral in the political context of the country. While a British colony, India would have their cotton bought at cheap prices and shipped to England, where it would be spun, woven and then manufactured into clothes and sold back to the country at very high prices. As part of his campaign of non-cooperation to undermine British rule, and to tackle the effects of the cotton and clothing trade, in the 1920s Mahatma Gandhi advocated the exclusive use of clothing made from locally hand-spun and -woven cotton or **Khadi**, by Indian people. This advocacy, which amounted to a boycott of foreign cloth and clothing, became a social movement, and the handmade aesthetic of clothing became the signature look of the Swadeshi Indian independence movement, and remains iconic today.¹²⁹ We considered further the siting of the project, taking into account potential audiences for the project and its durational nature, and I suggested an economic link could be made through proximity to Mumbai’s seafront. I had identified through my research that the local fishing industry was also a significant to Mumbai’s development, and that one of the main sites identified for the [*en*]counters program, the Bandra foreshore, was situated next to the Koli fishing village.¹³⁰ Further, the foreshore was used from twilight by the middle and upper class residents of Bandra to take evening walks, once the heat and humidity had lifted and the sea breeze arrived. The usually invisible manual production line, labour that powered the industries of the city, could be made visible through this situation, while the location brought additional contextual resonance. Abude developed the project in discussion with me and Foster Vander Elst to also incorporate the opportunity to design uniforms for the participants, to be fabricated while in India through the local industry, and that the options for participation by this passing, non-working class audience would be encouraged and facilitated. Further Foster Vander Elst would assist in finding a core group of ‘workers’ for the performances, who would be paid by Abude as part of the transactional nature of the project.

Once these three projects were notionally confirmed, I secured support for the project from the Australia Council for the Arts (Visual Arts Board: Presentation & Promotion), Arts Victoria (International), towards flights, accommodation, artist fees and project costs. I also secured, through Foster Vander Elst, a studio and accommodation for Kent and Peoples at Last Ship, a newly formed studio residency program in Bandra.
Development in Mumbai

Each of the artists required proximity to the context for further refinement in Mumbai, and critical time was allocated to each of the artists to develop their projects in their own way. All artists arrived on 2 January 2013, and resided in either Bandra or Juhu, neighbouring suburbs situated along the city’s northern seafront.

Scoping out the physical site of the presentations for each project, and incorporating the variations and specificities of the contexts that would serve as the backdrop, was the immediate task. PVI Collective had selected Juhu Beach in the lead up to the trip, identifying the beaches as, in their minds, the only ‘democratic’ public space in the city. Most public parks, of which there are few, are fenced off and closed in the evenings, to prevent people from setting up camps in them, while the beaches were always accessible, and regularly used by publics from all walks of life. Unlike Bandra seafront, which is rocky and used as a fishing harbour, Juhu has a sandy shoreline and a shallow drop into the water, affording casual paddling. It attracts large groups of people daily looking to cool down, given the relatively few local people who can swim. The artists confirmed their interest in Juhu in particular due to a great diversity in the people gathering there, and the wide sandy beach being perfect for staging a tug-of-war with minimal safety equipment. Key aspects of their project to develop locally included the consultation stage, surveying local community at the beach and around the neighbourhood, and speaking with activists, politicians, police and other community members about the issues facing the residents of Juhu and neighbouring Santa Cruz, as well as their possible solutions. This resulted in a list of ten issues that could be promoted for participants to compete over, each with options for addressing the issue and the next steps to be made, based on the outcome of the tug-of-war. The ten issues were presented under the headings: the people versus garbage; the people versus the police; the people versus Eve-teasing; the people versus the judiciary; the people versus cover ups; the people versus space; the people versus water; the people versus spitting; the people versus community; and, the people versus play.

This consultation process led to the artists coming into contact with a wide cross-section of people and they realised a crucial consideration needed to be the spoken and written language with which the project communicated, to facilitate engagement with different community and language groups. This included the need to recruit not just two additional people to work with them as their team to tug-of-war against the public, but someone who could simultaneously act as the announcer, narrating in real-time across the three mainly used languages of the area, English, Hindi and Gujarati. With the help of
Alekha Engineer, Programs Assistant at Asia Art Projects, the artists identified Ishita Vasa, a young woman fluent in all three and well practiced at managing events. Vasa is a local radio presenter and ‘anchor’ (a for-hire master of ceremonies for events and launches), popular in the lucrative and excessive wedding industry, which is largely situated along the beaches of southern Mumbai. After meeting and briefing her on the project, which she immediately understood, the PVI Collective artists engaged Vasa to act as host on the day. She also assisted them in translating the text describing the activity of the tug-of-war, and of each issue and potential solution, in order to develop signage in all three languages for the event. Like Abude, PVI Collective had uniforms made locally for the performers and anchor, based on those used by the taxi-drivers of the area, with resist in three languages embroidered on the back.

The Telepathy Project, like PVI Collective, identified Juhu Beach as somewhere along the Arabian Sea shoreline that could accommodate what they intended to be a sprawling performance. For them, the diverse language groups using the beach meant the potential for even more ambiguity, which appealed to them given the impossibility of communication is at the heart of The Telepathy Project itself. Kent’s daughter Mia Tinkler, who had joined the trip to participate as narrator, would read or sing the dreams as Kent and Peoples performed them. The artists had intended to introduce music into the performance, bringing a guitar for Tinkler to play between dreams, but spending time in the city the artists were exposed to the constant music of Bollywood in every shop, restaurant and taxi, and they decided to increase the musical content and began attending local musical performances. At one concert they met an American musician JJ Gregg, a sitar player undertaking an intensive year-long mentorship with Ustad Usman Khan, under whom he had studied for over ten years. Gregg was enlisted, along with Tinkler and Foster Vander Elst (to narrate a section in French), to accompany the artists in the performance on the closing night. The remainder of the lead-up was spent on day-long searches for obscure objects that had appeared in their dreams, painting signs and masks to wear featuring the faces of people they needed to perform as, and creating costumes, alongside their daily habit of meeting each morning and recounting the night’s dreams to one another in order to develop the content of the performance.

Abude and I undertook site visits along the Bandra foreshore with members of Asia Art Projects and Art Oxygen. We concluded to present Abude’s project on the same evenings and over the same duration as the other projects that were planned and that it would be situated on Carter Road Promenade, one of the main pedestrian thoroughfares used by locals for their evening walks. We established that Abude would present two three-hour participatory performances, 5pm to 8pm on Friday and Saturday evenings. Undertaking
the site visit at this time of day it became clear that Abude would need to incorporate independent lighting into the her installation somehow, as the street lighting would not provide enough light to work under. The visit to choose her exact position led Abude through the Koli fishing village, where an architectural language of provisionally constructed bamboo structures was apparent in the huts that are used to dry fish and temporarily store items while fishing. Abude decided to incorporate this architecture into her installation, sourcing lengths of bamboo to create a makeshift structure like a market stall, to support fluorescent lights under which a long table and four chairs could be situated to complete the installation. Once she had sourced three local people to perform alongside her each evening, Abude spent time visiting textile factories that Engineer had identified and contacted, in order to source her off-cut fabrics. She also spent days experimenting with the bamboo to refine a design she could build and erect on-site, and evenings making the cardboard shelving to hold the material for each of the stages of production.

**Mediation**

Prior to the selection of any artists, the partner organisations had also agreed to a scope of public program and outreach activities for the project that would be undertaken leading up to, and alongside, the presentation component of the program, with a view that the Australian artists would also be afforded opportunity to participate where possible. These included a series of preparatory presentations in colleges in Mumbai, informing students of the nature of the artistic practices presented within the program, aimed at building momentum. These were facilitated by Art Oxygen, and took place in early January.133

While assisting the artists leading up to their presentations, I undertook media interviews that had resulted from the campaign Foster Vander Elst and I had established. I realised that while the other organisers had some plans for off-site promotion, through posters and flyers at local cafes and art venues, they crucially hadn’t planned any on-site signage at any of the dispersed events. It was obvious this meant that should an audience member encounter a work and want to know more about it (including the name of the artist responsible for it), or learn about the context of the program, they had no way of doing so. Using The Telepathy Project’s studio at Last Ship, I set about designing and fabricating enough light-weight wooden A-frame signs to be situated at each of the presentations in the program. For each I produced a printed panel with contextual details of the artists’ performances and installations, including
biographies and information about \textit{en}counters, and distributed them to present alongside the projects.

After the launch of the artistic program we partnered with Columbia University research laboratory Studio X, a global network initiative of the Graduate School of Architecture, Planning & Preservation, to present a discursive program over the opening weekend. A workshop with all the participating artists and curators was held on 13 January, where each presented on their practice, and discussion around exchange and collaboration was initiated. This was followed by a public evening of talks and panel discussions with the artists, whom I grouped together around approaches to practice and issues, that I facilitated at Studio X on 15 January, along with installations and performances by some of the artists. Finally a public workshop and discussion, with industry and Non-Government Organisation representatives invited to participate, was held on 16 January focussed on the experience and community of the Mankhurd district slums, one of the foci of \textit{en}counters artist Sharmila Samant.

\section*{Realisation}

The presentation of each of the three projects took place as planned, PVI Collective’s \textit{resist} on Juhu Beach, Abude’s \textit{Production line (Mumbai)} twice on the Carter Road Promenade on the Bandra foreshore, and The Telepathy Project’s \textit{Dreaming the Arabian Sea} also on Juhu Beach on the final day, each engaging a different public. Returning to Sheikh’s assertion detailed in ‘Chapter 2: Art and social change: a crisis’, the projects clearly formed their own distinct publics and different public spheres, through their performance. The two projects presented on Juhu Beach formed crowds with some, though comparatively few, audience members having sought out the \textit{en}counters program; mainly the artworks organically formed publics from passers-by around the sprawling spectacles that each enacted.
PVI Collective, with their announcer facilitating, generated a throng of people who had gathered impromptu at the sight of them setting up. The enthusiasm became palpable as Vasa encouraged them to participate, and very quickly there was atmosphere akin to that in a sporting arena, three or four people deep all around a roped-off rectangle of space to situate the tug-of-war. Over the course of an hour there developed a friendly us-versus-them fan base as the crowd loudly cheered on the members of the public in their battle against the PVI Collective team. Two young local assistants, one man and one woman, took it in turns tugging against the public over one issue at a time, with joy being expressed in many instances – a memorable win for the crowd was when three boys together managed to overcome the PVI opponent – and disappointment on a few occasions. The most vociferous was when, after a long and physical struggle a woman lost against the male PVI Collective opponent over the issue of violence against women in the public sphere. The casting of the PVI Collective members into the roles simultaneously of villain and facilitator was completely unexpected for me, and after the final tug-of-war many in the crowd wanted to celebrate with them in the same way a group of fans might with a sporting team after a win. In the days following the performance McCluskey and Bull typed up the results of the battles over each issues, along with the suggested solutions that had been fought over by the public and the artists (see appendix ‘Resist: Mumbai list of issues, approaches and initiatives’). They delivered this document to Sitaram Kunte, the Municipal Commissioner of Mumbai, the role they had identified, with the assistance of the activists and civic leaders they had
interviewed, as having the greatest power and responsibility for civic wellbeing in the
city. This last act again complicated the relationship between the project operating with
poetic and practical political ends in mind.

Abude’s project operated in an altogether different atmosphere, which changed
markedly over the course of its presentation. As evening and darkness took hold, the
promenade was busy with walkers from the upper class Bandra suburb. Abude’s project,
which initially appeared from a distance as something sculptural and strange to be
engaged with silently and from afar, would quickly become a site of intense discursive
engagement, as people stopped to inspect the activities. Such was the level of curiosity,
the artist was often forced to give up her place in the production line to answer insistent
questioning by the audience. It was not unusual to have a crowd of people surrounding
the work curious and vocal in their opinions, which in turn appear to attract more
people. Foster Vander Elst and I spent hours with these ad hoc groups of people
discussing the project and its intentions and social and political significance.
Interestingly there was also a good deal of participation in the performance by the
public, with people, including children, taking turns in the production line. One man,
who on the first night came across the project and asked to participate, did so until close
that night and turned up at the beginning of the next day and worked all the way
through, as though it was a formal job. The spectacle of a self-illuminated sculpture by
the sea was transformed through these engagements into a site of relational exchange
and discourse, mimicking the ways in which a production line itself is a site of social
interaction and community-forming within the industrial complex.
Prior to *Dreaming the Arabian Sea* closing the program, the presence of The Telepathy Project on the beach became a platform for community engagement. The two artists and Kent’s daughter met with a group of around forty children who were from a care facility in Mumbai, for children of parents dying of HIV/AIDS. Working with them in an outdoor workshop setting, the artists discussed with them ideas of telepathic communication and, splitting the group into pairs, facilitated some good humoured attempts between the children to send imagery. Providing them with drawing materials, the artists had them draw the images they were ‘receiving’ from their friends and following the display of these pictures to the rest of the group, the group produced drawings that depicted their dreams.

The performance itself, approximately twelve vignettes of Kent’s and Peoples’ dreams, was undoubtedly incomprehensible to the audience, and consciously no broader framework or explanation was provided, in stark contrast to the other two projects. Instead, a kind of Dada-esque slapstick vibe developed over the course of the performance, with the audience growing ever bigger and more rowdy, particularly taken with Peoples’ absurdist and physically committed performance. The music and narration communicated to the audience a narrative arc, even as the specificity of the content remained elusive. An intensity grew in the audience and they jockeyed for position, pressed together tightly as a mass and getting ever closer to the artists as
Foster Vander Elst and I attempted to hold them back from breaching the makeshift, roped-off stage. At the conclusion of the performance the feeling spilled over: as soon as it was clear the performance had finished, the ‘stage’ was rushed, with a throng of people jostling around the artists. The artists offered the props and scenography to the crowd, keeping only the paintings (in the form of masks and signs that represented the characters from their dreams). The artists had to leave under a police presence which itself was becoming increasingly vocal to keep the crowd in check. This volatility in the audience generated by the work was not exactly hostile, but excitable to the point of near-riot. It came as a complete surprise to us all, and seemed to be manifest with no relationship to any discernible content of the performance itself.¹³⁴

Figure 9: Kent and Peoples performing in The Telepathy Project, Dreaming the Arabian Sea, 2013.

Reflection

Each of these projects engaged and provoked audiences in varied yet highly specific ways. In reflecting on the works in relation to the research, I realised there was a gap within the accounts of Kwon, Bourriaud, Bishop, Lind, and others that could account for the relationship between meaning (the successful reception of a message, for instance) and the audience response. All three projects were complex enough to be read in different ways, and different kinds of discursive relationships were fostered by their enactments. Yet the intensity of reception of the projects I had witnessed was
surprising. This was particularly evident where discernible content had made way for obscurity and ambiguity in *Dreaming the Arabian Sea* – or, indeed, via the tension inherent in the idea that political change (though presented didactically) might manifest as play in *Resist: Mumbai*. It seemed there had been an inversion of understanding and intensity in these instances that required further investigation in the next stages of my research.

This stood in direct contrast to the terms in which much of Bishop’s critique of Bourriaud and Bishop’s subsequent debate with Kester, positions they further articulated after their exchange in the pages of *Artforum*, each producing books (*Artificial Hells* and *The one and the many*, respectively) that extrapolate their positions along these same lines: with a different stance on the autonomy of the maker, the role of collectivism and collaboration, the position of the audience member in a power dynamic; but with both unclear about the *experience* of the audience member in relation to the artwork. Their arguments amount to a disagreement of a preferred method for ‘achieving insight’ – either through rupture or consolation, pedagogic or participatory art projects or collaborative labour.

Writes Kester, introducing his ideal projects:

> Several of the collaborative projects that I'll begin discussing in the following chapter challenge this discursive system [the position Bishop argues for that Kester claims has achieved ‘near canonical authority’]. They are, by and large, concerned with the generation of insight through durational interaction rather than rupture; they seek to openly problematise the authorial status of the artist, and they often rely on more conciliatory (and less custodial) strategies and relationships (both with their participants and with the affiliated movements, disciplines, etc).

Bishop in her introductory chapter explicitly announces a different approach:

> The central project of this book is to find ways of accounting for participatory art that focus on the meaning of what it produces, rather than attending solely to process. This result – the mediating object, concept, image or story – is the necessary link between the artist and a secondary audience (you and I, and everyone else who didn’t participate); the historical fact of our ineradicable presence requires an analysis of the politics of spectatorship, even – and especially – when participatory art wishes to disavow this.
Whether one took more didactic meaning out of an 'antagonistic' or a 'collective' experience, both accounts stopped short of a full articulation of what one experienced and how acutely in relation to the content and form of the artwork. The questions raised from the outcomes of the Mumbai presentations thus opened up a new direction of research. The following chapter will consider the relationship between the production of sensation or affect and the apparent schism of its relationship to the content of an artwork.
Chapter 7: Experience

Form, content, reception

In the chapter ‘Percept, Affect, Concept’ in *What is Philosophy*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose that a work of art has an autonomy stemming from its preservation: ‘it preserves and is preserved in itself’, linked in the first instance to its materials, and the potential that it can outlast both the viewer and its maker. They assert further: ‘If art preserves it does not do so like industry, by adding a substance to make the thing last. The thing became independent of its “model” from the start’, to suggest that the idea that a work of art denotes, connotes or implies, is itself autonomous from the material work itself at the moment of formation (the work of art as model of its ‘content’ in Bishop’s schema). In this they stress the artwork’s autonomy from its maker, and lay out their alternative conception of its constitutive elements:

It is independent of the creator through the self-positing of the created, which is preserved in itself. What is preserved – the thing or the work of art – is a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects. Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. ... The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself.

This is an exciting and generative notion: that the artist, through the act of making a work of art, imbues within it a range of ways the work of art will be potentially engaged with – seen, sensed, touched, perceived, spoken about – and affects the audience member encountering it. Indeed, because the work of art is autonomous to the maker, and all who engage with it for its ‘duration’, it contains within it, at its point of creation, all (future and forever) potentialities for its influence and power, consideration and status, embedded with every possible outcome of affect and percept. To use the language of Deleuze and Guattari, every work of art is a bloc of potential, awaiting its activation through finding different ways, places, contexts and times within which to present or engage with the work, in order to unleash these potentials.

This idea prompts a number of initial questions. The first is to consider this in light of performative, ephemeral or temporal works – of the kind described in the previous
chapter – given the introduction of the idea of materiality being linked to autonomy. This is elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari in the subsequent passage:

> How could the sensation be preserved without a material capable of lasting? And however short the time it lasts, this time is considered as a duration. ... What is preserved by right is not the material, which constitutes only the de facto condition, but, insofar as this condition is satisfied (that is, that canvas, color, or stone does not crumble into dust), it is the percept or affect that is preserved in itself. Even if the material lasts for only a few seconds it will give sensation the power to exist and be preserved in itself in the eternity that coexists with this short duration.\(^{140}\)

There is a link here to artist Krzysztof Wodiczko’s description of the ‘after-image’ effect of his large-scale, politically charged, public projection projects. Wodiczko suggests that in projecting temporary imagery onto monuments, not only are these monuments ‘seen’ again by a public, but they also ‘reveal and expose to the public the contemporary deadly life of the monument.’\(^{141}\) In 1985, while working in London on a commissioned projection on Nelson’s Column, Wodiczko turned a projector towards South Africa House, which faces onto Trafalgar Square. In a gesture of support to the anti-apartheid movement – including the groups who were picketing the embassy at the time – he projected a swastika onto the pediment on its façade. Although it was shut down after two hours by police, Wodiczko has described the work’s lasting effect: ‘Many people told me that even though they hadn’t seen the actual projection (i.e., they had only seen media images of it), somehow when they look at the pediment the swastika is seen as missing, as a kind of afterimage’.\(^{142}\) This effect is the subject of a text by Luiza Nader where she extrapolates this relationship between Wodiczko’s projection and memory further, including ‘how the concept of the fleeting serves as a vital mnemonic device that is integral to strategies of memory and remembrance’.\(^{143}\)

Deleuze and Guattari discuss the approach the artist must take to successfully generate the affect and percept found in the work of art, and it relates to Benjamin’s argument from ‘Chapter 2: Art and social change: a crisis’ (and following, Bishop’s in ‘Chapter 5: Relationality, judgement and artistic strategies’) – namely, that this opportunity is found in the precise nature of form of the work, rather than the perceived content. ‘[I]n all of the arts] style is needed – the writer’s syntax, the musician’s modes and rhythms, the painter’s lines and colors – to raise lived perceptions to the percept and lived affections to the affect’.\(^{144}\) They continue:
Composition is the sole definition of art. Composition is aesthetic, and what is not composed is not a work of art. However, technical composition, the work of the material that often calls on science (mathematics, physics, chemistry, anatomy), is not to be confused with aesthetic composition, which is the work of sensation. Only the latter fully deserves the name composition, and a work of art is never produced by or for the sake of technique.\textsuperscript{145}

Deleuze and Guattari also consider the operation of art when conceived in these terms, which I link to the arguments thus far presented: ‘Art undoes the triple organisation of perceptions, affections, and opinions in order to substitute a monument composed of percepts, affects, and blocs of sensations that take the place of language’.\textsuperscript{146} ‘Becoming’ is a crucial concept and operation for Deleuze and Guattari in \textit{What is Philosophy} and throughout their work. It is linked to the plane they call ‘the virtual’, where all of the potentialities of affect, percept and sensation reside, which find form in ‘the actual’ via the dynamic relationship between these planes (that together, in a blunt summary, constitute ‘reality’). ‘Is this not the definition of the percept itself – to make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become?’\textsuperscript{147} they write, articulating a framework whereby the artwork and more precisely the experience of it brings the imperceptible to light.

Brian Massumi extends the arguments made by Deleuze and Guattari in his essay ‘The Autonomy of Affect’. In it he takes a number of scientific studies as a basis for examining the operation and ontology of affect, and as an argument for its autonomy. Close reading of Massumi’s text, I argue, recalibrates the poles of indivisible tension upon which earlier theoretical schemas are founded, such as those raised in the chapter ‘Art and social change: a crisis’. The text provides an alternative understanding of art’s relationship to its context, and the audience member and their subjectivity. There are manifold implications for this research project of the essay in considering the way in which art has, and can have, an effect in the social and political realms, the strategies one might employ in conceiving and producing such projects, along with their appraisal.

Massumi analyses a study consisting of a group of nine-year-old children watching three versions of a children’s television program in which an animated snowman melts. While they are watching, their skin reactions are monitored, and scientists later ask them to recall their emotional responses. In each version only the sound component, the voiceover, was altered – the versions being termed silent (no voice-over), factual, and emotional by the researchers based on the sonic content. A summary of the results revealed that ‘the factual version was consistently rated the least pleasant and was also the worst remembered. The most pleasant was the original wordless version, which was
rated just slightly above the emotional. And it was the emotional version that was best remembered’. The scientists were also monitoring the skin response of the subjects as they watched, their autonomic response, the results of which were: ’factuality made their heart beat faster and deepened their breathing, but it made their skin resistance fall. The original nonverbal version elicited the greatest response from their skin’.149

Massumi writes, ’[The scientists’] only positive conclusion was the primacy of the affective in image reception. Accepting and expanding upon that, it could be noted that the primacy of the affective is marked by a gap between content and effect. It would appear the strength or duration of an image’s effect is not logically connected to the content in any straight-forward way’.150 Massumi goes on to extrapolate a relationship of content to effect, delineating two attributes from the study that allow him to consider their operation. The content of the video, determined by how (accurately) the voice over relates (semiotically) to the image, is given the term ‘quality’, and the ‘strength or duration of the image’s effect’ the term ‘intensity’.151

Massumi contends there is a relationship between ‘quality’ and ‘intensity’, that works on (at least) two levels, with the discrepancy between the reactions to the videos leading Massumi to characterise their operation quite differently. Although he notes both occur immediately: intensity in purely autonomic skin/surface reactions; quality (form/content) in depth reactions, but also involving autonomic functions such as heartbeat and breathing. These follow different logics:

There is an immediate bifurcation in response into two seemingly autonomous systems. One, the level of intensity, is characterised by a crossing of semantic wires: on it, sadness is pleasant. The level of intensity is organised according to a logic that does not admit of the excluded middle [the ‘emotional’ content was remembered the best, despite being in the middle for ‘pleasantness’ and skin reaction]. This is to say that it is not semantically or semiotically ordered. It does not fix distinctions. Instead, it vaguely but insistently connects what is normally indexed as separate. When asked to signify itself, it can only do so in a paradox [sad becomes happy; happy, sad; version that didn’t elicit most sad or happy reaction yet best remembered]. There is disconnection of signifying order from intensity – which constitutes a different order of connection operating in parallel. The gap noted earlier is not only between content and effect. It is also between the form of content – signification as a conventional system of distinctive difference – and intensity. The disconnection between form/content and intensity/effect is not just negative: it enables a different connectivity, a different difference, in parallel.152
Massumi is explicitly making a case, in interpreting this scientific test, for the link between the importance of form to the degree of intensity, the degree to which something has an effect on us, which also has a durational quality in that we retain the memory of it. Through his analysis, he arrives at the following conclusions: that quality (e.g., happy-sad) reactions are associated with ‘expectation, which depends on consciously positioning oneself in a line of narrative continuity’, a ‘conscious-autonomic mix’; intensity is ‘a nonconscious, never-to-conscious autonomic remainder’, ‘outside expectation and adaptation’, ‘as disconnected ... from narration, as it is from vital function’. It is ‘narratively de-localized, spreading over the generalized body surface’. He characterises the relationship of form and content to quality and intensity in terms of resonance or interference. In the example of the video, the voiceover of literal explanation ‘dampens’ intensity, and the emotive version ‘amplifies’ it. Here language, that is the ‘accurate’ semiotic relationship between the image and the word, acts ‘differentially’ to intensity. When the voice over is factual, it doubles the events on screen, dampening the intensity, interferes with it.

Massumi does not simply accept the simple binary of form/content however, and he focuses on the implications of these versions, and of the reactions of quality/intensity, being linked to expectation and the sense of narrative progression, or its lack:

Linguistic expression can resonate with and amplify intensity at the price of making itself functionally redundant. When on the other hand it doubles a sequence of movements in order to add something to it in the way of meaningful progression – in this case a sense of futurity, expectation, an intimation of what comes next in a conventional progression – then it runs counter to and dampens the intensity. Intensity would seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback which momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future. Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is static-temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It’s like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativise it. It is not exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically) toward practical ends in a world of constituted objects and aims (if only on screen).

These different temporal arcs of expectation and suspense are engaged simultaneously in the encounter with an artwork, to different degrees based on their form/content. The degree to which each is activated is not simply via the use of ‘emotional’ versus
‘descriptive’ language content because, as Massumi points out, emotion is used in many contexts as a narrative drive or element itself. However, it amplifies intensity ‘to the exact degree to which it is in excess of any narrative or functional line’. To the exact degree then, that it ceases to be ‘narrativisable’ content, we cease to ‘make sense’ of it.

For Massumi, it is redundancies (caused by the earlier ‘doubling’ of language to image) in the form/content, that determine the activation of these states. As such, where these two parallel lines result in a redundancy of signification – literal meaning – expectation is activated, and the response becomes more linear. Conversely, where these lines resonate with intensity, suspense is activated, with the response being superlinear in its nature, remaining with us longer.

Massumi contends there are two aspects at work here. The first is the structure (a semiotic level that includes considering the relationship of form/content semantically: ‘linguistically, logically, narratologically’), in which ‘all eventual permutations are prefigured’, and linked to our concept of an emotion (happy-happy, meaning-mean). An emotion, Massumi argues, is qualified within these systems, that is, it is self-narrativised, reliant on the processes of semiotic differentiation with other emotions in order to recognise and define it. This sense of ‘definition’ brings to mind concepts which have found form about art’s ‘power’ being a work’s ability to be ‘beyond language’, that is art that combines signifiers or operates in a way that exceeds or confuses our linguistic structures of definition. This effect has been referred to recently by Jan Verwoert as an ‘ontological riot’; and by Julia Kristeva as being a ‘Freudian metapsychological triad [that] frustrates both “representation” (as it rather involves taking in instinctual pressures) and the “word”.’

The alternate aspect to structure relates instead to suspense and refers to the event, where structured distinction (happy-happy) collapses into intensity, and its rules into paradox. In the example of the snowman video these paradoxes are evident as the pleasant becomes unpleasant, and the version least (able to be) qualified – as either pleasant or unpleasant – becomes the most remembered. Intensity, as it occurs in the event, Massumi equates to affect.

Affect is most often used loosely as a synonym for emotion. But one of the clearest lessons of this first story is that emotion and affect – if affect is intensity – follow different logics and pertain to different orders. An emotion is a subjective content, the socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into
semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativisable action
reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and
recognized. It is crucial to theorise the difference between affect and emotion.\textsuperscript{162}

The particular formation of ‘affect’ in Massumi comes via Deleuze and, as Massumi
mentions, via Baruch Spinoza before him, who defined it as an 'affection of (in other
words an impingement upon) the body, and at the same time the idea of the affection'.\textsuperscript{163}

The notion of affect being situated in the body is one that is explored in the sections that
follow in Massumi’s essay. Massumi uses the results of another two scientific
experiments to produce an argument about volition being situated autonomically (in the
brain) but outside consciousness, with one of the researchers, Benjamin Libet, quoted as
saying that this ‘proposes that we may exert free will not by initiating intentions but by
vetoing, acceding or otherwise responding to them after they arise’.\textsuperscript{164} In Massumi’s
eyes, this is an argument in support of a plane of the virtual in which multiple
potentialities are present all of the time, pushing to be made actual, with ‘will’ and
‘consciousness’ operating to limit the potentiality, as opposed to the concept that they
actively generate this. In this way then, will and consciousness can be seen as
‘subtractive’: ‘They are \emph{limitative, derived functions} which reduce a complexity too rich
to be functionally understood’.\textsuperscript{165} This, for Massumi, is at the heart of announcing
affect’s autonomy, as it is present in all its virtual forms, independent of whether or not
it is allowed to manifest in the real world – which happens when one opens the
drawbridge or floodgate that consciousness holds closed between the boundless realm
of possibilities of the virtual, and their finding form in the actual.

\textit{Affect is} the whole world: from the precise angle of its differential emergence.
How the element of virtuality is construed – whether past or future, inside or
outside, transcendent or immanent, sublime or abject, atomised or continuous –
is in a way a matter of indifference. It is all of these things, differently in every
actual case. Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to
which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent
to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of
virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where
potential, actually, is found.\textsuperscript{166}

This approach of Massumi’s shifts the ground substantially away from appraisal of
socially-engaged art projects in terms of both the empirical figures, used by community
art and government bodies, that Bishop argues against – and the legacy of a range of
media-based reception theories – and into a realm where affective response is
generated by the artwork in relation to our own prior experiences and subjectivity, in the unique situational aspects of the engagement. Further it suggests an agency that is ever-present, should will or consciousness allow the potentially emancipatory potentialities to be made manifest in the world.

The following chapter will focus on the third project in the research project, employing another mode of curatorial practice in creating a single artist, retrospective museum exhibition, *David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me*, informed by the ideas in this chapter. In considering the social and political change that occurred in the years after the death of the activist artist, as a case study it acts as a bridge to consider the way in which art can operate to make visible to the audience member the possibility of change. The opportunities to manifest emancipatory potentialities are discussed in this and the subsequent chapter in terms of a rupture, or a moving-beyond limits of what can be seen, done and said at a given time.
Chapter 8: *David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me* 

'Remember Me'

'I never saw art as being a safe thing. I know that exists but that's not something that involves me.' David McDiarmid, 1993

Over the course of 2013 and 2014, as Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), I worked with Sally Gray, the executor of the David McDiarmid Estate, to develop and co-curate a retrospective exhibition of the artist’s work. Entitled *David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me*, the exhibition was presented from 9 May to 31 August 2014 at NGV Australia.

David McDiarmid was an Australian artist, designer and activist born in Hobart in 1952. McDiarmid was a pioneer of gay liberation in the 1970s, and a participant in the art, music and gay cultures of New York in the 1980s, who made a significant contribution to the international dialogue around the HIV/AIDS epidemic and related cultural politics before his death of AIDS-related conditions in 1995. McDiarmid was Artistic Director of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras from 1988 to 1990 and was a central figure in Australia in what the artist described as ‘an extraordinary time of redefinition and deconstruction of our identities from camp to gay to queer’.

The decision to undertake an exhibition on McDiarmid had been made many years before at the NGV, but the exhibition had languished for over a decade while various administrations dragged their feet, perhaps put off by the explicit sexual nature of the work and fear of public reaction. My opportunity to develop and realise the exhibition, it must be acknowledged, came after years of frustrated struggle by others to do the same. This chapter will focus on the content, layout and activation of the exhibition, including my curatorial decisions made to extend the exhibition’s capacity to elicit the intensity of affect described in the previous chapter.

**Concept**

‘Art, politics, fashion, music, design, relationships and community were all enmeshed for artist and gay activist David McDiarmid’, Gray has written in the introduction of her essay ‘When this you see remember me: David McDiarmid’s life as art’. His relationship to the wider world – the legal, political and social orders – through his art, and desire for his practice to contribute to change within it, engages directly with the
central concern of this research project (including its process of creation, presentation, enactment, reception and dissemination) having an effect over agency in social and political terms.

McDiarmid’s life mirrors so closely the significant changes occurring within his community in Australia over twenty years, and his position in the art world in the decades after his death, that he could arguably be considered an archetype. Aspects of this, I would argue, include sexual identity, politicisation, emancipation, his embodiment of the changing aesthetics of gay male identity, and the relationship between the ‘mainstream’ publics and institutions to self-identified gay and queer communities. Interestingly along with these there are aspects of his art practice that mirror changes that would occur more broadly over this time, in terms of both methodology and content. These include McDiarmid working across media (drawing, collage, installation, and media-arts practice), disciplines and discourses (art, design, craft and community art), through collaboration, his use of quotation and appropriation, and the artwork having an overt relationship with identity politics.

Moreover, McDiarmid was a ground-breaking figure, being the first person in Australia arrested at a gay liberation rally protesting for gay rights, the first out-gay artist exhibiting work about gay male sex in the country, a leading figure in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras during its most political and confrontational period, and, tragically, dying of HIV/AIDS having made work specifically about the social, physical and spiritual effects of the virus, becoming himself symbolic of its destruction.

Considering these perspectives, we established that we would incorporate material in the exhibition detailing the social history that was taking place through and around McDiarmid as well as the political and art historical context that informed his work. That said, as this was the first solo exhibition of McDiarmid by an Australian institution, we felt it important to present his work itself as of primary importance, that he should be considered first as an artist in his own right and then in relationship to the contextual aspects. How this manifested will be described further in the ‘Exhibition’ section later in this chapter. The activist mantra of the time ‘The personal is political’, we felt was clearly embodied within the works themselves, and the approach was to judiciously create a range of interpretive offerings people could access alongside the works.

The exhibition was timed to coincide with the World AIDS conference, held in Melbourne in July 2014, which brought 22,000 delegates to the city. It was also arranged to be a keynote presentation of the Arts and Culture program of the conference, which enabled us activate the exhibition through an assortment of public programs during the
opening weekend and then during the conference itself. These activities are detailed in
the Programming section, and were supported through many tours and events I
conducted and hosted, media interviews Gray and I gave throughout the exhibition, and
the availability of a substantial exhibition catalogue for sale widely but also in the space
itself for reading.

Content

The exhibition presented all significant bodies of McDiarmid’s artwork and included
examples of his cross disciplinary practice, with an extensive presentation of posters he
designed for various Gay and Lesbian events over the years, and examples of his fashion
design through collaborative pieces with Linda Jackson.

McDiarmid developed a visual language that was refined throughout his career. It was
one of icons and imagery borrowed and then ‘queered’, to create a new iconography that
was specific to his community. His Secret Love collages, 1976–78, contain landmarks and
streets marking the intersections and boundaries of Sydney’s renowned gay areas
(especially Kings Cross and its El Alamein Fountain). The mainstream leading men that
feature in these artworks were soon replaced by the ‘clone’ imagery of the Trade
Enquiries lithographs of 1979 – figures sporting similar haircuts and facial hair, clothing
and coded placement of accessories – archetypes reflecting the male gay community’s
true objects of desire rather than the earlier adopted heterosexual iconography. The
work again speaks to the hidden and mercantile nature of male–male sex (both between
gay and ‘straight’ men, the latter of whom were to be McDiarmid’s clients when he
worked as an escort). The influence of Tom of Finland is apparent, but quite unique is
McDiarmid’s adoption of the craft techniques commonly associated with women’s
hobbies, homemaking and folk traditions seen in the suspended works of the Australian
Dream Lounge series, such as My Sydney, 1977–78, and the harder-edged Men curtain,
1978, and Man quilt, 1978. My Sydney comprises a pink plastic sheet, resembling and
hung like a shower curtain, with a clear plastic sheet on top that the artist has stitched
the lyrics of the Doris Day song ‘Secret Love’ (1953) as multi-coloured text into.
Between the sheets sit thirteen portraits of men, mostly promotional head shots of
celebrities, the objects of desire. Only a short time later the images of men in
McDiarmid’s work are no longer the mainstream objects of desire that appeal to straight
women. Made only a year later Men quilt sports the clone imagery of Trade Enquiries
and Tom of Finland drawings of male–male sex, as well as replacing the earlier coloured
plastics for leather and bandana material. Held to its suspension rail with chain, the
material culture of gay male community is foregrounded and on display in this work.171
Judy Chicago’s *The dinner party*, begun in 1974, was also completed and publicly presented in 1979, a major work seen as ground-breaking in its use of crafts traditionally associated with women, an approach described on the didactic panel introducing the work on permanent display in the Brooklyn Museum, New York, as being ‘virtually unprecedented in artistic production at that time’. The discordant nature of McDiarmid incorporating the material processes of ‘women’s work’ – in the nascent stages of their feminist reclamation – with the emergent hard-edged clone imagery of the gay male community in *Man quilt* is exactly the semantic ‘crossing-of-wires’ that Massumi describes in his account of affect, one that results in sensation performing a kind of resonating feedback in our minds and bodies, where the messages are difficult to resolve and loop back on us, continuing their affect into the future. (The experience of a work ‘staying with us’ is a ‘superlinear’ effect that results from this excess of function.\(^{172}\)) The political power resides in this inability for the meanings to be easily compartmentalised, as the work continues to nag and gnaw at our unconscious.

Inspired by the creativity he was seeing in the subway and on the streets while living in New York, McDiarmid’s series of acrylic paintings, made between 1983 and 1984 on bed sheets, are inspired by subway graffiti and include men’s names – lovers, objects of desire or tricks, we’re left unsure which – inscribed all over them and contrasting their large-scale with the intimate, domestic nature of their use.\(^{173}\) This use of names (both personal and emblematically anonymous) would later reappear inscribed on the body of the male figure, like tattoos, when creating works about HIV/AIDS. The discordant sense that the names could symbolise any and all of the lives of those whom the virus had already claimed, those infected, or those that may have infected the depicted figure, results in an eerie representation of how the virus haunted love, loss and longing during the time of the AIDS crisis.

After his HIV-positive diagnosis in 1986 and return to Sydney in 1987, McDiarmid exhibited a body of collage works *Kiss of light*, in Sydney in 1990 that employed these ‘tattoos’ on some of the works. Using self-adhesive plastic wrap, in a range of finishes, he made mosaic-like images, employing in these works silvery reflective foils. The series memorialises those already lost and highlights McDiarmid’s own impending mortality with characteristic visual excess and glamour. The imagery included depictions of the male body as muscular, imposing and highly sexualised, fighting against the more common representation of HIV positive men. Images that pervaded the media at the time invariably showed men in hospices, dying ‘alone’, emaciated and covered in legions, far from objects of sexual desire.\(^{174}\) The combination of specular materiality, iconography from various religions and mythologies (a phoenix rising from flames for instance), HIV positive men as muscular, virile and sexually active, speaks again to the
dissonance of the works with the construction of the wider, straight-mainstream, social narrative.

The visual language that McDiarmid continued to evolve is a crucial part of the emancipatory political stance that underpinned his life. His lauded Safe Sex posters for ACON (AIDS Council of New South Wales, Sydney), created in 1992, continued the project of semantic discord, disrupting the invisibility of the strong and sexy HIV-positive male figure. They were a fundamental component of what is considered the first successful safe sex and injection campaign, by and for the gay community, anywhere in the world. Brightly coloured, the posters depict naked, muscular men in the same style as the earlier Kiss of Light body of work, with the figures embracing one another and engaging in safe sex, with slogans written on their bodies like tattoos. The Safe Sex posters went global, reaching an enormous audience beyond the art world, but it is arguably McDiarmid’s ‘HIV Living’ float for the 1992 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras that spoke to his largest non-art, non-gay audience during his lifetime. The exhibition featured a large floor-to-ceiling image of the float, an enormous Day of the Dead-inspired papier mâché sculpture of a crowned figure with fluorescent features, flowers for cheeks and mirrored star-shaped eyes on its *calavera* head, all framed by a spectacular headdress hanging down the length of its torso. The sculpture wore an ‘HIV LIVING’ necklace, and images show some of those parading with it wearing similar necklaces, while others wear painted cubes over their heads, referencing the iconic box-head gouaches by McDiarmid featured in the ACON posters (a selection of the original gouaches, that had inspired Don Baxter to offer McDiarmid the AIDS Council commission, were also exhibited alongside). This hyper-visible, performative celebration of living life while HIV-positive was presented to a largely straight audience (the case for most Mardi Gras parades, McDiarmid himself has noted\textsuperscript{175}, in all its taboo-shattering glory. The complexities of this work operating in such a loud-and-proud celebratory atmosphere before a straight and gay audience (‘Death controlled by a rowdy menace of beauty contestants’\textsuperscript{176}), and its emancipatory qualities, simultaneously disruptive and empowering, are particularly interesting.
McDiarmid’s work of the 1990s consolidates all of the creative and political concerns of his career: it responds to and comments on his own mortality, the twenty-year period of gay history he had lived through and the ongoing conditions of the AIDS epidemic, as he continued to employ arresting colour, collaged appropriations and shiny commercial materials. The 1994 serial digital prints known as the Rainbow Aphorisms are arguably his best known artwork. An early adopter of computer desktop publishing technology in making art, McDiarmid taught himself Photoshop and Illustrator on an Apple Macintosh IICX (which he called the ‘$22,000 dream machine’) purchased by the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras office when he was its art director in 1989. The intertwining of the high-key colour of the gay rainbow flag with greeting card platitudes and the bitchiness of the cult television comedy series Absolutely Fabulous in the Rainbow Aphorisms series again introduced dissonance into expected – and accepted – tones, meanings and representations of mortality, particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS. This dissonance is amplified further with the introduction of glittering surface and cartoon-style text in the Ren and Stimpy Aphorisms works, 1994. Darker still are the reworked magazine cover works Tired and bitchy, and Plagueboy, both 1994, which introduced new levels of caustic humour with lines such as ‘POSITIVE QUEEN FEELS NEGATIVE Goes shopping’ and ‘QUEER RITES NOW – Funeral special’, reflecting the divisive and now infamous obituary McDiarmid wrote upon the death of his dear friend and collaborator Peter Tully in 1992, headed ‘MOODY BITCH DIES OF AIDS’. In Standard bold condensed, 1994,
McDiarmid responds to the mass-media vilification of the gay community at the time of the AIDS crisis by appropriating tabloid headlines. By deliberately employing inflammatory, pejorative and derogatory language used by some sectors of the media at the time, McDiarmid reclaims and turns it back on the social institutions disparaging gay and HIV-positive communities. The work was produced late in McDiarmid’s life as he too faced the discrimination that came with living with AIDS, at a time when homophobia and fear of sexuality prevailed in the face of the wider AIDS crisis.

His final works were for an exhibition at Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne, and McDiarmid worked on these until very shortly before his death on 25 May 1995, sadly prior to the fabrication of the artworks. The series consists of pictograms relating to his own death. Deceptively and endearingly they are a distilled closing chapter of his biography, an optimistic personal memorial to an AIDS-annihilated and obliterated self.

**Exhibition**

In keeping with a desire to privilege the works themselves, we adopted an exhibition layout that was largely chronological, with some key breakout moments. Using the chronology of the works to our advantage would also give the audience the opportunity, throughout the exhibition, to chart the changing social and political context, using the works as a backdrop. Simply including a commentary within extended artwork labels and didactic panels, and grouping these developments room-by-room, allowed one to experience this narrative textually and within the works.

The most important decision with this in mind was the approach to the first introductory room. In this space we focussed on McDiarmid’s biography and personal history and experiences, creating an immersive room with wallpaper floor to ceiling. This included images of David throughout the years of his adult life: with collaborators (such as Linda Jackson, Peter Tully and Brian Sayer); with various ‘looks’ as the aesthetics of gay culture changed (for instance in the 1970s with long, fuzzy hair, drop out, psychedelia inspired clothing; 1980s adopting a ‘clone’ look of cropped haircut, facial hair, aviator sunglasses and tight jeans); and at rallies, clubs and Mardi Gras. Working with the Australia Lesbian and Gay Archives (ALGA) and the McDiarmid Estate to source images, we also created an animated video slideshow of still photography taken at the rally outside ABC studios, Sydney, a peaceful protest against the channel’s refusal to show a segment on Gay Liberation in 1972 at which McDiarmid was arrested. Vitrines lined the walls containing sketchbooks and illustrations, gay liberation magazine covers by McDiarmid, items of fashion and jewellery, mixed tapes, artist
books, the signed contract for the ACON poster commission, and various personal and professional correspondence. The approach to this space was in contrast to the following galleries where work was presented somewhat ‘autonomously’, standing on its own rather than in dialogue with the social and personal documentation.

Figure 11: audience members inspect vitrines in the first room of David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014.

Importantly, for the choreographed experience of the exhibition we adopted a layout where this was the first, but also the last, room by having only one door in or out of the exhibition. This meant the audience would experience in the first room, if they looked carefully at the images on the walls and images and items in the vitrines, the entire arc of subjective and social change covered by the rest of the show. Then seeing the exhibition unfold chronologically through the works (as they become more accomplished, righteous and ambitious), they then would have to return back through the exhibition and be reintroduced to the material. This acceleration and deceleration of experience, followed by the opportunity to delve deeper into the materials, we hoped would offer an opportunity to gain further insight and greater appreciation into the role McDiarmid played, as an artist, agitator, organiser and facilitator.

Where possible we recreated some exhibitions McDiarmid had held, amassing nearly in entirety the works that made up the ground-breaking Secret love exhibition of 1976, largely made up of works McDiarmid had given to friends. Documentation of the
collaborative exhibition *The Australian Dream Lounge*, made with Sayer in 1977, was shown on screens alongside a selection of surviving elements of the show, with the original mise en scene mimicked with a handful of elements: a table, suspended screen and wall-based works creating a tableau.

We also created some discursive clusters in the exhibition across timeframes to reinforce important aspects of his practice, with one room dedicated to McDiarmid’s graphic design and work in community art with gay and lesbian groups. A selection included Gay Liberation newsletters and posters in the 1970s, Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras posters, posters for numerous parties during the 1980s and 1990s and his World AIDS Day and safe-sex campaign posters of the 1990s. Having these together in their own areas described over the decades his love of the print, the multiple, and presenting them sequentially highlighted his technical experimentation with a mix of computer and hand cut or coloured techniques as the technology evolved. This section recognised his pioneering spirit in community art projects and included as a backdrop a floor-to-ceiling scene from Mardi Gras featuring the HIV Living float, created with a group of HIV positive men and women, standing in as a hyper-visible, performative symbol for the many projects he ran as a community artist.

Figure 12: audience members surrounded by wallpaper of McDiarmid’s HIV Living Mardi Gras float in *David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me*, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014.
Another space was dedicated to a recreation of a speech, with accompanying slideshow, which McDiarmid presented in April 1993 at the AIDS forum *HIV: Towards a Paradigm* in Melbourne. Entitled ‘A short history of facial hair’ the talk set his personal story of grooming, fashion and adornment against his sexual and political history. The piece was presented in a small viewing room to allow people to engage with the text without distraction and to afford a more intimate experience.

Two bodies of work were produced posthumously for the exhibition, overseen by Ron Smith, with the participation of the David McDiarmid Estate. In 1992 Peter Tully had an exhibition in Paris, immediately prior to his death there of an AIDS related condition. The exhibition included sculptural works resembling totem poles made of anodised aluminium crockery, items that were ubiquitous in Australian homes, for a period. Tully, like his close friend McDiarmid, had explored throughout his career the possibilities of queering the colourful, riotous, materiality and aesthetic of Australian mainstream suburban kitsch. For Tully’s wake, held by his friends rather than family, Ron Smith and McDiarmid created three totems using the same approach. The three men were the first artistic directors of Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, Tully (1982–86), Smith (1986–88) and McDiarmid (1988–90). The presence of the pieces at the wake transformed them into a kind of funerary totem. When McDiarmid died Smith found more crockery and combined with the older pieces made five additional totems for McDiarmid’s wake, thereby creating a tradition amongst that group of friends who referred to one another as a family – and thus insinuating into the void of traditions belonging to religions, or families that rejected them or were rejected by them. Smith worked with the NGV installation staff to recreate these totems using the original items and they were presented in the final room of the exhibition as a kind of memorial. On the way back out of the exhibition, high above the entrance/exit on a shelf was situated McDiarmid’s work *Maquette for funerary monument* 1995, a small version of the same totem form, held in the collection of Heide Museum of Modern Art.
The pictogram works that McDiarmid was working towards fabricating when he passed away were made for the exhibition by a road sign company, arranged and paid for by NGV with Smith engaged to liaise with them to ensure they were made with the artist’s original intentions in mind. Smith had nursed McDiarmid in the last period of his life and been present during the preparations to create the works originally. The new works were presented alongside original works by McDiarmid, with the context of their production noted in a label accompanying them.
We employed a series of immersive manoeuvres at different moments throughout the exhibition. The first room of social history and the community art wallpapers wrapped the spaces. The bed sheet paintings were hung double height, utilising the seven metre high ceilings to their full potential. At the point in the exhibition where we situated McDiarmid's first work made about being HIV positive (*So I walked into the theatre*, or *First AIDS work*, 1984–85), we had a central smaller aperture to walk through and into a blackened space with spotlighting on the *Kiss of Light* works, to resemble a nightclub, before opening into a large, bright room where the messages of the *Rainbow aphorisms* rose up over the audience, dwarfing them. These we printed large-scale, as exhibition prints, using the original computer files from the Estate, rather than the smaller prints McDiarmid had sold to the NGV in 1994.
Finally, throughout the exhibition, we had a sound system installed in the floor grates that played a musical playlist by Steven Allkins, a friend of McDiarmid’s and one of his favourite DJs. This playlist significantly shifted the mood throughout the spaces as it played in dialogue with the works themselves, at times celebratory and uplifting, intense, moving from light to dark, from the street to the club, and back.

**Programming**

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, there were tours throughout the exhibition, with the main activities of the public programs held during the opening weekend of the exhibition and to coincide with the World AIDS conference. These were developed along with Deborah Ratliff from the NGV public programs team.

On Saturday of the opening weekend we held a floor talk series entitled ‘A Friendship with David McDiarmid’. Gillian Minervini was the first female Festival Director of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (1990–1992) and she gave a talk that focussed on McDiarmid’s contribution to Mardi Gras, his posters, the parties and the power of community celebration, entitled ‘Parties, Parades, Politics and Passion’. The work of artist William Yang moved from photographing flamboyant parties to documenting the effects HIV/AIDS had on the community. David McDiarmid was the first out gay artist
that Yang ever met and his talk, entitled ‘Secret love’, explored David’s influence on him and on the gay community in general. These talks were followed by a performance in the spaces by Low Rez, a Melbourne-based all-male choir that aims to unite men from diverse cultural backgrounds through the joy of singing. The choir performed songs from the 1980s and 1990s that reflected McDiarmid’s ethos, work and struggles. The following day we staged a symposium in the NGV Australia theatrette, entitled ‘The Spirit and Spark of David McDiarmid’. Individual presentations were given by Gray, Ted Gott, NGV Senior Curator of International Art, Anne Marsh, Professor of Art and Theory at the Victorian College of the Arts, and Alkins. This was followed by a panel discussion involving Dan Rule, writer, editor, publisher and visual art critic and design columnist for The Age, Nikos Pantazopoulos, artist and lecturer in photography at RMIT University and myself discussing the contemporary currency of McDiarmid and his influence over younger generations of practitioners. A performance by Pantazopoulos entitled Private View and Occasional Performance was then staged in and around the NGV Australia building, before coming to rest in the David McDiarmid exhibition spaces. This intervention involved a phalanx of performers carrying large-scale, framed photographs by Pantazopoulos (who also contributed a text to the catalogue reflecting on McDiarmid’s influence, artistic and political, over out-gay contemporary artists in Australia today) of the architectural spaces of gay clubs and saunas, the kind of places where McDiarmid’s ACON posters can still be found today. Making these spaces of sexual encounter and private intimacies public, the images were displayed to passers-by and traffic on Flinders Street outside the gallery before being paraded through the foyers and permanent collection galleries of NGV Australia, and finally stacked together as a photographic, sculptural installation which audience members were able to browse as a quasi-archive in the gallery throughout the day.

During the World AIDS conference in June 2014, we staged a queer history walk in the city, led by Graham Willett, writer and President of ALGA. Further floor talks were held in the exhibition spaces by McDiarmid collaborator Linda Jackson, fashion and textile designer, a talk reflecting on friendship by Smith, and I gave a number of curatorial floor talks. A free film program ran weekly on each Sunday throughout July in the NGV Australia theatrette. Low Rez reprised their performance in the exhibition space, and the highlight was a moving talk involving former High Court Judge, Hon. Michael Kirby, and Lyle Chan, a Sydney composer and an AIDS medical activist in the 1990s, followed by a performance by the Acacia Quartet of two extracts from Chan’s AIDS Requiem. Chan had set up and run an illegal program supplying experimental drugs to treat AIDS sufferers, a Sydney equivalent to that depicted in the 2013 film Dallas Buyers Club (directed by Jean-Marc Vallée), and I invited the speakers to reflect on the role of grassroots activism in medical progress. Kirby was the first out-gay sitting Justice of the
Australian High Court, having come out publicly in 1999. The talk and performance were particularly emotional in light of the recent deaths of six AIDS researchers on their way as delegates to the Melbourne conference, travelling on Malaysia Airlines MH17 when the plane crashed in Ukraine, killing all passengers. Both the conversation and performances were staged surrounded by the works of McDiarmid, offering the audience an opportunity to listen while also reading the large-scale lettering in the *Rainbow Aphorisms*, written twenty years before – capturing a different and no less tragic moment.

![Figure 16: Kirby (left) and Chan in conversation as part of the public programs in David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me, National Gallery of Victoria, 2014.](image)

In this chapter I have outlined the content and approach to the exhibition staging, the choreography of audience experience, in relation to the research outlined in the previous chapter. The following chapter will discuss the next phase of theoretical research and reflection prompted by the David McDiarmid exhibition, to further develop a framework for considering the operation of art in relation to social and political change.
Chapter 9: What can be said, done and seen

In the previous chapter, I outlined some of the works on display in David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me and some of the artistic strategies employed by the artist to tackle social issues around sexual identity and emancipation. One can certainly draw parallels between the dissonance and 'bitchy' humour described in many bodies of work made while HIV positive, and the calls for a disruptive or antagonistic approach described by Mouffe and Bishop in earlier chapters.

A pervading current within McDiarmid’s artworks, writing and life was a keen engagement with sensation, which can be identified for instance in his use of the iconic Kings Cross El Alamein Fountain (and war memorial) to stand in for hook-ups and orgasmic encounters in his first exhibited collages; the tactility of My Sydney, suspended pieces, with their plastic piping needlework and rubbery acacia flowers protruding in spiky pinks; the glinting light from the mylar and foil of the Kiss of Light works, their hues shifting with one’s movement in the room; or the hushed awe in McDiarmid’s voice as he recalled the enveloping bass tones of the Paradise Garage nightclub in New York that so entranced him.181

This may seem from the outset a simplistic, even flippant, observation when considering an oeuvre that so often deals explicitly with sex. It could even be seen as dismissive and, thus, as adopting a common strategy towards artwork that challenges orthodoxies and hegemonic structures of power and taste in order to diminish its threat and render it powerless. However, this notion of sensation – or affect – is not raised simplistically, but rather in order to locate McDiarmid’s serious and enabling body of work within a discourse that recognises the crucial role the affective plays, as I have outlined in earlier chapters.

As noted, Gray has made particular claim in her catalogue essay that for McDiarmid, life, art, politics and community were ‘enmeshed’.182 The idea of dissolving the separations between art, life and politics immediately brings the work into dialogue with the twentieth-century avant-garde art movements mentioned in ’Chapter 2: Art and social change: a crisis’, Russian Constructivism and Paris Dada, that intended to introduce political change, as well as the Italian Futurists and the Situationist International. Each of these was determined to change the very structure and operation of the society and political system whence they emerged, and each sought to create art that was popular, in opposition to what they considered the elitist cultural alternatives. The
Constructivists famously stated their intention was to bring ‘art into everyday life’ rather than simply see it presented in theatres and galleries.

For these movements, art had a central role in changing the social conditions and political horizon by mobilising a public the protagonist saw as stultified and ignorant of the truth of their political reality. It is tempting to draw parallels between these movements, and their ‘collapse of art and life’, with the ways in which McDiarmid sought to affect political and social change via his art and design, particularly given that his work is often considered shocking or disruptive. However, McDiarmid’s politic is altogether different from those underpinning each of these avant-garde movements, in which there was a desire to transform a mass audience into an ideal subject – the nature of which typifies the project of modernism that sees artistic, social and political progress as successive, with each movement, order and ideal subject replacing the next, producing a singular version of history, identity, experience and subjectivity.

As discussed in the introduction and ‘Chapter 2: Art and social change: a crisis’ of this research paper, it was in relation to the avant-garde artistic movements that serious theoretical attempts were made to describe art’s relationship to the political by the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School, most notably Benjamin and Adorno. While I have noted that each held different positions, particularly in relation to art’s separation from life, Nikos Papastergiardis has pointed out:

they nevertheless developed a dialectical understanding of the transformative and redemptive role of art in everyday life. Art’s crucial role was defined in terms of how it could reconfigure the relationship between the particular and the universal. Art’s critique of the dominant forces was always ‘immanent’ to its object, that is, it was not above but emerged from within its own circumstances.

These positions laid the groundwork for a number of thinkers who proposed an understanding of art and subjectivity that recognised multiplicity and the nuance and specificity of context, an approach that reflects McDiarmid’s own bodies of work and his belief that the political underpinned every facet of his life as an artist and gay man. *Expansion chamber*, 1971, was an early intervention on Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne, where the shopfront facade of the share house he lived in was transformed via its signage into a promise for an expansion of consciousness, social mores and, possibly, anatomy. The visual and textual pun (a skill at which McDiarmid was to excel) reveals that a desire, at the heart of McDiarmid’s politic, to make visible that which is
hidden, give voice to that which is silenced and recognise that which is denied within a ‘normalising’, hegemonic conservative culture.

The debate around art and politics that the Frankfurt School theorists engaged in often focused on the need for art’s autonomy from everyday life in order to have agency over it. This problematised relationship has continued in much contemporary theoretical discourse, which is introduced in chapter two as a ‘crisis’. As noted, Andy Abbott describes the tension as ‘a pull between the direct but recuperative everyday and a pure but exclusionary criticality’. This tension represents a ‘crisis’ in that a situation has been established between indivisible oppositions: between ‘form and content’ (Benjamin), direct instrumentality (Groys) and functional refusal (Adorno), between embedded social practice and distanced critical artwork (Abbott).

The inescapable paradox of art and politics is summarised well in an essay by Justin Clemens and Max Delany, published following the censorship of the work of artists Michelle Ussher and Helen Johnson in the Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces project room at Melbourne Art Fair 2006:

Since the late eighteenth century, art and politics have been unhappily married. Art is always already political, in one way or another ... Art must identify, expose and criticise, even practically undo political injustices. If it doesn’t, even if only a little, it’s not really art at all, but mere decoration. Any denial that art is essentially political is itself a political act.

On the other hand, art is always already apolitical too. To the extent that it conveys any political message worthy of the name, it rapidly becomes kitschy or contemptible, that is, not-art. If art joins the revolution, it can only be at the price of its de-generation into propaganda or entertainment.186

This is where an understanding of the centrality of affect in art allows us to move beyond a purely paradoxical relationship between politics and aesthetics and also to gain further insight into the ways in which many of the works of McDiarmid continue to operate so effectively within both realms. The situation Clemens and Delany describe is what Rancière has designated the ‘aesthetic regime of the arts’, in which ‘art’ only appears insofar as it is at once political and extra-political.187 Rancière argues that the expression of art is understood in relation to a broader context of what is visible, sayable and thinkable at a particular time. Each regime described by Rancière is a kind of shared concept of what art is in that epoch: the modern, or ‘aesthetic’ regime, in contrast to the classical, ‘ethical’ and ‘poetic or representational’ regimes of art. In each,
art is understood quite differently but always in relation to ‘the political underpinning of social perception’. Each regime is a meta-category taking into account the world itself; what is meaningful and significant in the world; language or text as the discursive articulation of meaning; image (in a broad sense) as a medium or artefact that expresses meaning; and the community to which an artist expresses themselves (both real and ideal).

Given art’s utter complicity with its context, its autonomy for Rancière lies not in its separation from politics and the social, but rather exists within the sensory experience of art:

It is therefore as an autonomous form of experience that art concerns and infringes on the political division of the sensible [the sensible for Rancière being that which is ‘capable of being apprehended by the senses’]. The aesthetic regime of art institutes the relation between the forms of identification of art and the forms of political community in such a way as to challenge in advance every opposition between autonomous art and heteronomous art, art for art’s sake and art in the service of politics, museum art and street art. For aesthetic autonomy is not that autonomy of artistic ‘making’ celebrated by modernism. It is the autonomy of sensory experience.

The primacy of sensation for which Rancière argues is supported by the research in previous chapters, and this represents a coalescing of my theoretical framework. Taken together, the operation of Rancière’s ‘aesthetic regime of the arts’, an understanding of the ontological importance of affect as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, and Massumi’s account of the production of this intensity being based on the relationship of an artwork’s content to the context of its subjective reception, moves us out of the bind and crisis described above.

Within Rancière’s schema the term ‘aesthetics’ is not a substitute for ‘art’, but, as mentioned, is a meta-category under which politics and art are identified. It is a ‘regime of identification’, that allows us, at a given point in time and in a specific context (which includes the political), to perceive art as art, that is, art is dependent on the regime for its constitution. In the essay that Bishop includes in her edited anthology Participation (and that she in fact translated for it), ‘Problems and Transformations of Critical Art’, Rancière mentions these tensions:

Aesthetics has its own politics, or rather its own tension between two opposed politics: between the logic of art that becomes life at the price of abolishing itself
as art, and the logic of art that does politics on the explicit condition of not doing it at all. The difficulty of critical art is not that of having to negotiate between politics and art. It is having to negotiate the relation between the two aesthetic logics that exist independently of it, because they belong to the logic of the aesthetic regime itself.\textsuperscript{191}

There is further elaboration by Bishop of this at work, in her response to Grant Kester’s critique of her essay ‘Collaboration and its discontents’. Kester raises the issue of autonomy in one of his arguments against her position:

For Bishop, art can become legitimately ‘political’ only indirectly, by exposing the limits and contradictions of political discourse itself (the violent exclusions implicit in democratic consensus, for example) from the quasi-detached perspective of the artist. ... Without the detachment and autonomy of conventional art to insulate them, they are doomed to ‘represent’, in the most naive and facile manner possible, a given political issue or constituency.\textsuperscript{192}

To which Bishop responds:

The framework for my essay was Jacques Rancière’s articulation of the relationship between politics and aesthetics. In his schema, a political work of art disrupts the relationship among the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as a vehicle. It transmits meanings in the form of a rupture, rather than simply giving us an ‘awareness’ of the state of the world. As he writes in \textit{The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible}: ‘Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the introduction of a double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification’. According to this perspective, we can no longer speak of old-fashioned autonomy versus radical engagement, since a dialectical pull between autonomy and heteronomy is itself constitutive of the aesthetic.\textsuperscript{193}

Here Bishop is referencing Rancière’s denial of traditional autonomy, in favour of an autonomy in the experience of art, which he has elaborated in the quote earlier this chapter from \textit{The emancipated spectator}. To use McDiarmid’s work as an example for the central role of affect, we can return to Massumi’s account from ‘Chapter 7: Experience’ in considering the way in which language and meaning relate to form and image in the production of intense responses, or affect. In Massumi’s description, the intense sensation felt through an encounter with a work of art, its affect, is a result of
experiencing something with a semantic meaning we find discordant, something difficult to relate to previous experience, something that confounds our expectations—something, we might say after Rancière, that challenges what we have assumed as ‘visible, sayable, and thinkable’. This feeling is something that is difficult to place in the spectrum of emotions we have learnt from other experiences and stored away as a set of learned responses (for instance, on spectrums such as happy–sad; titillated–annoyed; fascinated–repulsed). Emotions are, as Massumi puts it, narrativised affect and the more difficult the sensation is to classify the more intense the affect and the longer it will remain with us.

This thinking allows us to develop a more nuanced understanding of art as operating in a contingent field of contexts, spaces and publics, and I would argue is precisely articulated through a reflection on the work of McDiarmid with the distance of just over twenty years since his death. This framework affords greater insight into the enduring qualities of his work, namely its disruption of what was sayable and doable within the social and legal order of 1970s Australia; what was visible and doable within the climate of fear during the AIDS crisis; what is visible and sayable when living with HIV; and, the way these works test and reconfigure our emotional landscapes. As McDiarmid himself once remarked, in relation to this ‘reconfiguration of the sensible’ through his art making: ‘I wanted to create a language that would speak directly to us without us having to subvert existing (hetero-sexual) forms’. The language that McDiarmid developed throughout his career has been outlined in the previous chapter, but to reiterate it was ‘one of icons, imagery and attitude borrowed and then queered, and of newly created iconography that was specific to his community’. The complexities of his language operating in a loud-and-proud celebratory way while channelling a righteous anger, and taking place against an atmosphere of fear and death, holds within it its emancipatory qualities, being simultaneously disruptive and empowering. Rancière discusses emancipation from imposed orders at length and is at pains to point out that this does not result from someone passing acquired knowledge on to us (in the case of theorising around the traditional avant-garde), but in the reconfiguring of our internal context of knowledge and experience through an iterative process of interpretation. This is the process outlined in ‘Chapter 5: Relationality, judgement and artistic strategies’ that Guattari described as ‘individuation’ in The Three Ecologies and Rancière argues that between artist and audience member a third thing exists, transmitted between the artist’s ideas and the spectator’s comprehension. Thus it is not affect in and of itself that determines a work of art’s efficacy, but its resonance within the lived context of its reception, and its reconfiguration, through its discord, of what we are comfortable experiencing and neatly compartmentalising, which correlates exactly to the intensity of
affect described by Massumi. It is through reflection, ideation and experience that the work of art operates in relation to the ‘active’ audience member as Rancière describes:

Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions. The spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She links what she sees to a host of other things that she has seen on other stages, in other kinds of place. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her. She participates in the performance by refashioning it in her own way by drawing back, for example, from the vital energy that it is supposed to transmit in order to make it a pure image and associate this image with a story which she has read or dreamt, experienced or invented.197

In the following section I will summarise the research project and outline my conclusion.
Conclusion

Over the previous nine chapters I have outlined the steps taken in creating three curated projects, each resulting in different manifestations, temporalities and publics. The self-reflexive curatorial practice, which generated the framework and discursive envelope that each project operates within, itself has been used as a methodology to consider the way in which art operates within a social and political context, and its potential for generating agency and ownership in the audience member.

To describe this, I have shown through various chapters how the concept of affect is central to the reception of an artwork by its audience. The centrality of affect for Deleuze and Guattari extends to the latent potential of affect being the very essence, a constituting component, of art’s ontology. Massumi’s account of the operation of affect has been used to address the relationship of content to affect, and the relationship of lived experience to both the temporality and intensity of affect generated. Massumi’s description of semantic dissonance can be related to both Bishop’s call for ethical disruption in relation to socially engaged art practice, and the operation of art itself within Rancière’s ‘Aesthetic realm’, by which art is identified in relationship to Mouffe’s ‘the political’. Through this operation, of art and of political, is a challenge to what is sayable, doable and visible at any given time, that is, a testing of the boundaries that limit individual and collective thought, action and mutual visibility as these manifest.

Sheikh’s account of the public sphere, like that of Laclau and Mouffe, stands in contrast to that of Habermas, with Sheikh arguing that publics, and the public sphere itself, can be thought of as being produced by the artwork, and the discourse around it, describing a wholly imbricated relationship of context to artwork. Through the arguments of Massumi, we can see this imbrication extending to the content and meaning within the subjective realm. As elaborated in ‘Chapter 7: Experience’, context, content, and form all must be both resonant and dissonant in order to elicit an intensity of sensation, as the work is apprehended by an audience member. This dissonance in particular requires attention – as the irreducibility of art to specific meaning, and its affects to specific emotions, lies at the heart of the accounts by Massumi, Bishop and Rancière in different ways, a quality I will return to later in this conclusion.

I will note two critiques to this line of thinking. Hal Foster has argued against the emancipatory possibilities of art and its operation as described by Rancière, with its agency to redistribute what can be said, done or seen (Rancière’s ‘sensible’). Foster writes: ‘At least for the time being, any redistribution of the sensible through
contemporary art is a mirage and, when pitted against the capitalist “transformation of things into signs,” it is little more than the opiate of the artworld left. In her recent thesis ‘Critical Form: On Proceeding as a Painter’, artist Helen Johnson has adeptly countered Foster’s critique of Rancière:

In his introduction to *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983) Foster criticises aesthetic experience because as he understands it, it ‘exists apart, without “purpose,” all but beyond history.’ Here Foster assumes an absolute disconnection between aesthetic experience and criticality that is, as I have sought to argue here, a falsehood. In response to Foster I would propose a conception of aesthetic criticality as an open position of refusal rather than a dogmatic pursuit of rational conclusion, embracing ambiguity as a means of resisting the proliferation of interpretable signs. In this way art might call attention to political ideas without falling prey to didacticism, or becoming a demonstration of its own inefficacy as art that seeks to engage in politics so often does.

Johnson’s evocation of ambiguity is precisely the discordant operation of affect in relation to content, producing a shifting ‘meaning’, that has become apparent through this research project and that I have sought to elucidate. (From previous chapters this could be articulated as a constellation of possible relations, with which a work produces an intensity in its reception, when there is an excess or gap in the production of meaning.) The agency for art here is its resistance to a process of normalisation and classification (emotional or otherwise) of the affect it produces, and, in Johnson’s framing, the resistance to instrumentalisation within an economy of signs.

Another critique of this theoretical framework has come via Andrew Benjamin, in a seminar placing the significance of art’s political potential in the mediation, rather than operation, of it. Following my description of *Civil Twilight End* through the parameters of a nascent theoretical framework, Benjamin responded:

One way of talking about the political, both curatorially and critically – which I do think can be seen as complementary activities – is that which opens up a space, a space opened by the refusal of the tradition [which Benjamin relates to the writing of Walter Benjamin]. It does seem to me therefore that there is a very polemical argument that the political resides *only* in the act of criticism and the act of curatorial practice. You could curate *anything* and it would be political, or you could curate the same thing another way, and it wouldn’t be political, the content of the art itself that is *neither* political or not-political. So *everything* hinges on the way it is curated, or criticised, or demonstrated. And it seems to
me that is the argument for a type of abstraction or type of ambivalence, or the impossibility of the pure expression of the political. So, the politics of art has nothing to do either with the content or the criticism of a specific work of art, but is political in so far as it demands democracy, it demands an open public sphere in which we can disagree, for what it’s worth, about a particular work of art. That’s the strength of art, its irreducibility to capturing only one proposition, therefore it has to be a site of disagreement. But because it’s a site of disagreement, it necessitates tolerance, not the tolerance of individuals, but it has the tolerance of a public sphere in which we disagree.201

While Benjamin sees the value of ambiguity – and I would agree that mediation is one part of the role of the curator – his portrayal does not account for the effects of direct engagement by an audience with artwork that asserts an influence over them. Different projects within this research project had different levels of interpretive framework available to the audience, the project with the least being Dreaming the Arabian Sea and the most being David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me, however even this project situated the artwork as the primary focus for audience experience. Foster considers the activity of art in a political context as an instrumental one, in which a critique exists where we can’t know concretely that a work has succeeded in its aim of making a social and political change. However, for Benjamin it is only in the act of negotiation, in an inter-subjective realm that mirrors that of Kant, separate to the artwork itself, where the political resides. I believe both to be absolutist and that this research project has set out to describe a more nuanced picture of the contingent relationality at work, not just of art’s operation but within the constitution of the social-political order itself.

In the final act of developing this framework, an analysis of the exhibition David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me is able to show that having distance from the events and a particular political and social historical context allows a greater appreciation of how things did or did not change. The curatorial process of contextualising that past simultaneously for an audience member is significant, but only in order for a second phase or order of affect to be engaged – one in which an audience member projects that context back onto themselves, and dissonance is created and affect produced in relation to the past (in a not dissimilar way to way in which ‘the past’ is employed within Civil Twilight End with a nostalgia for the sound of a bell in the community). I am indebted to younger audiences whom I toured through David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me for providing me with first-hand insight into this process. During these tours, I would recount McDiarmid’s description of an evolving subjectivity, and aesthetic, ‘from camp to gay to queer’, though at the time there
was not the wide-spread understanding of subjectivity, or sexuality, being fluid but rather in a state of fixity. There was an added insight that McDiarmid in practicing his sexuality, as articulated in his art, was acting illegally during a time not in the distant past, but during my (their tour guide’s) lifetime. These dual ideas would invariably confuse the teenagers, many of whom had never encountered the concept that the idea of the self has changed over time, as they have largely grown up in contexts where the self and sexual identity are understood to be actively constructed. It was apparent these insights significantly impacted the effect of the works upon them, in a way not dissimilar to the descriptions by Massumi of affect performing like a kind of resonating feedback.

This simple example – that a generation doesn’t know their present until the representation of the past is presented to them – demonstrates Rancière’s assertion that, through changes in subjectivity, in which art has a role to play, the unthinkable becomes norm. This can be charted through art as an artefact of another time (in the case of the David McDiarmid exhibition), and the idea of the museum as a platform for artists is here paralleled with the idea of an artist’s work historically being a discursive platform or catalyst itself. The artwork then may also be considered a trans-historical document, through which an audience can view both past and present following the idea of contextual projection described in this section and in ‘Chapter 7: Experience’.

Furthermore, we rely on an ongoing historicity in order to understand our own context and place. This active relationship of the audience member to the work of art has been described in the previous chapter through the lens of emancipation.

Embracing the act of curating as a research method has illuminated a productive approach of projecting the potentialities of engagement with and affect of an artwork – while recognising its role as an influence among many others in a relational space – rather than attempting to judge its political effects as if it were operating in a vacuum of direct cause and effect. The elucidation of this theoretical framework offers a recalibration of the nexus between art, the political and everyday life and, in light of this, the ways in which an artwork might be measured and understood. This way of conceiving the relationship and the operation of art allows other qualities to emerge as important, and I hope this research can act as a starting point for future investigations embracing this approach. These include qualities variously described within this research paper as resonance and dissonance, ambiguity, and irreducibility. Rancière has also used the term Mystery, referencing Jean-Luc Godard and montage, to touch on the slipperiness of interpretation that in this conclusion Helen Johnson has described as ambiguity of meaning, and Andrew Benjamin the irreducibility of an artwork to a single meaning.  

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The concept of irreducibility goes further within this thinking however. Irreducibility is also another way of framing Guattari’s call for ‘singularisation’ (discussed in ‘Chapter 5: Relationality, judgement and artistic strategies’), a resistance to normalisation, as used above by Johnson. Within this framework, such resistance can be understood as forming a kind of super-linear, ruptured site of discourse and disruption against which – as one of a constellation of forces\textsuperscript{203} – change is bred as new thinking or a new path is revealed, and the journey along it made possible over time. This change is achieved through the internal challenge to what is assumed to be visible, sayable, and thinkable; a process that allows the audience member, the public, to understand and embrace the malleability of these limiting structures, a recognition that produces a sense of their own agency. If change in this account begins as a subjective impulse, it should be noted that it is then tested between agents in an inter-subjective realm, and this visibility or audibility acts as a further site of rupture and as a beacon of potential resonance (and dissonance), itself forming a public while potentially reshaping its limits. It is in the process of this negotiation that art’s operation can be clearly identified and agency felt.
Notes

2 Reflecting the Latin root of the word curate.
5 Ibid., 10.
6 It should be noted that contemporaneous experimental curatorial activity was taking place alongside Szeemann, by protagonists such by Pontus Hultén at the Moderna Museet, William Sandberg at the Stedelijk Museum, Seth Siegelaub in New York, and Johannes Cladders in Mönchengladbach. Szeemann’s importance here is to describe the change in the position of the curator with the greatest clarity.
9 “When Platitudes Become Form”, ’Sabotage in the Art Temple’, ’Is Art Finally Dead?’, ’Stupidity...’ are just a few headlines found in local newspapers at the time’, Daniel Birnbaum, ’When Attitude Becomes Form: Daniel Birnbaum on Harald Szeemann,’ Artforum, vol.43, no. 10, Summer 2005, 58.
10 When Attitudes Become Form and the following exhibition Friends and their Friends provoked a scandal in Bern. To me, what I was showing were artworks but the critics and the public did not agree. The city government and the parliament got involved. Finally they decided that I could remain the director if I didn’t put human lives in danger - they thought my activities were destructive to humankind. Even worse, the exhibition committee was mainly composed of local artists and they decided that from now on they would dictate the programs. They rejected the Edward Kienholz show and the solo show of Beuys, to which he had already agreed. Suddenly it was war, and I decided to resign, to become a freelance curator.’ Harald Szeemann in Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Lionel Bovier, A Brief History of Curating, (Zurich : JRP / Ringier; Dijon : Les Presses du réel, 2008), 111.
11 Birnbaum, ’When Attitude Becomes Form.’ 58. This is elaborated by Szeemann in an interview with Hans Ulrich Obrist: ’It was during that period that the hostility to foreign workers began to manifest itself; a political party was even founded to lower the number of foreigners in Switzerland. I was attacked since my name was not Swiss but Hungarian. In response, I founded the Agentur fur Geistige Gastarbeit, which was a political statement since the Italian, Turkish, and Spanish workers in Switzerland were called “guest workers”. The agency was a one-man enterprise, a kind of institutionalisation of myself, and its slogans were both ideological “Replace Property with Free Activity” and practical, “From Vision to Nail,” which meant that I did everything from conceptualising the project to hanging the works. It was the spirit of ’68.’ Szeemann in Obrist and Bovier, 111–112.
12 Despite the somewhat mythological status Szeemann holds today for this freelance practice, in reality Szeemann spent only a short time pursuing a practice through his proto-agency. From 1981 he worked for Kunsthaus Zurich as ’Permanent Independent Curator’ and most of the projects he curated between 1981 and 1996 were at this institution, as Fabien Pinaroli notes in a text on the history of the Agency. Even before this Pinaroli writes, his stance shifted from independence from to transformation of the institution and an ideal: ’[Szeemann] created it at the start of the 1970s with the aim of “breaking out of the confines of the museum”; as early as 1972 he announced in the preface to the documenta 5 catalogue that, “An artist’s relationship to museums once again goes without saying, and there are signs suggesting that as soon as we manage to free museums from their dreadful reputation
as places of consecration, they will soon become what they once were, thanks to the artworks themselves.’ Fabien Pinaroli, ‘The Agency for Intellectual Guest Labour,’ in Harald Szeemann: Individual Methodology (Zurich: JRP|Ringier Kunstverlag, 2007), 70.

13 Birnbaum, ‘When Attitude Becomes Form.’ 55.

14 The five-year timeframe was a convention that took hold from Documenta 3, the previous gap being four years.


17 Bishop, ‘What Is a Curator?’ , par. 7.


19 In an insightful later interview, published under the title ‘Teaching without teaching’, Buren looks back on his position and while not relinquishing it, acknowledges Szeemann’s affinity with artists and the irony it was he who was targeted for Buren’s attack given his generally open approach to curating: ‘Wouter Davidts: When Harald Szeemann gave Documenta 5 the subtitle of ‘Bilderwelten’, you didn’t exactly critique him for the fact that he acted like a teacher. In the text ‘Exposition d’une Exposition’, published in the catalogue, you write that he became the master-artist who forced all the artworks into artificial categories and degraded them to postage stamps or mere illustrations of his particular story. Daniel Buren: At that time, I noticed, albeit completely intuitively, something that was at its best. Many of the things I pinpointed were not yet really negative in that particular exhibition. From that point on, however, they became more and more visible in almost any group exhibition. The paradox is that I took that exhibition and Harald Szeemann as the object of my criticism, while, in fact, he was the best in that genre. What we came to see afterwards were all more or less imitators and pupils of Szeemann, who in fact never did as well as he did. Szeemann was certainly not only close to the sensibility of his time but also, first and foremost, close to the sensibility of the artists of his time — and I’m not saying that because, as you know, he started out as an artist himself. But he himself was engaged in a certain creativity, not only in the selection of the people he liked but also — which, to my opinion, is certainly one of the best positions a curator can take — in his taking control of the situation like an orchestra conductor. As a conductor, one occupies a clear position, since what one selects already entails a story in itself. Then it’s only a matter of conducting that thing as best as one can. But Szeemann already was doing more. He was at once advancing a set of categories and establishing within Documenta 5 how not to confuse an abstract painter with a figurative painter when, even at that time, it was already a retrograde phrase. In that respect, Documenta 5 was indeed very didactic. But, at the time, I neither used that term nor spoke about it. It would certainly serve as a good example of the truism that group shows are, by definition, didactic. The curator not only took control of the full exhibition, which is more or less normal since it depends on what you do with this power, but he was also trying to teach a large public about different tendencies in contemporary art, from hyperrealism, through conceptual art, to minimalism and so on. He framed everything so well that there was no way of getting out of this frame. Within a curatorial way of thinking, everything was trapped into a category, and when it was not possible to trap it too well he called it ‘mythologie personelle’ [Personal Mythologies]. The things I wrote in 1972, which were then very timely, have become something that everyone can see today. While I remember very well that when I spoke with Szeemann at that time, he told me that ‘your text’ — because I first wrote a text for the catalogue and then later did a full book on the topic, entitled Rebondissements (Reboundings) — was ‘very interesting and I agree with almost everything. But I am just against the fact you took it out on me, because my way of thinking is absolutely different and I am not at all behaving as if I was anything except someone who distributes the work’. But the funny thing is that, fifteen years later, as you know, Harald Szeemann no longer called himself a curator or director or whatever, but auteur d’exposition. So, let’s say I saw something that I think was already in existence. I did not invent anything. I was maybe touched by it more than any other people in the show at that time.’ Daniel Buren and Wouter Davidts, ‘Teaching without Teaching,’ in Curating and the Educational Turn, ed. Paul O’Neill.
and Mick Wilson, Occasional Table Critical Series (London: Open Editions; Amsterdam: De Appel Arts Centre, 2010), 220–221.


21 Ibid., 208, my emphasis.

22 Paul O’Neill described a decade ago the need for elaboration of this relationship in terms of an urgency: ‘As Benjamin Buchloh identified in 1989, there is an urgent need for articulating the curatorial position as part of art discourse, where practice as ‘doing’ or ‘curating’ necessitated a discourse as ‘speaking’ or ‘writing’, in order for the curator’s function to be acknowledged as part of the institutional superstructure at the level of discourse: ‘The curator observes his/ her operation within the institutional apparatus of art: most prominently the procedure of abstraction and centralisation that seems to be an inescapable consequence of the work’s entry into the superstructure apparatus, its transformation from practice to discourse. That almost seems to have become the curator’s primary role: to function as an agent who offers exposure and potential prominence – in exchange for obtaining a moment of actual practice that is about to be transformed into myth/ superstructure.’ Paul O’Neill, The *Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016).

23 See the chapter ‘Curating as a medium of artistic practice: The convergence of art and curatorial practice since the 1990s’ in Ibid., 87–129.

24 Fowle notes that Smith does not necessarily agree with her summary. It was this exchange that led to the commissioning of the book by Fowle. Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (New York, N.Y.: Independent Curators International, 2013), 8.


26 If not, arguably, a particularly self-reflexive one. See Jens Hoffmann quoted in O’Neill, The *Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, 42.

27 ‘A lot of anxiety had been generated over the fact that creative and critically working curators have, increasingly, been moving into institutions and apparently shifting sides. But if we look at places where this has happened, we see that most of the independent curators who joined institutions have managed to change the institutions more than the institutions changed them… They are all now institutional curators, but they are far from being institutionalised curators!’ Jens Hoffmann, ‘The Art of Curating and the Curating of Art,’ Manifesta Journal: *Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* 5, no. Spring/Summer 2005, Artist & Curator (2005), 185.


29 O’Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, 45–46.

30 Ibid., 46.

31 Ibid., 49.

32 ‘Szeemann himself preferred the down-to-earth *Ausstellungsmacher* (exhibition maker) as his job title. But this modest term hardly conveys a real sense of his curatorial endeavours, whose “controlled chaos” (Szeemann’s phrase) might productively be traced back to his brief career in theatre during the 1950s, which included a renowned transvestite act and an homage to Dadaist Hugo Ball before ending with his egomaniacal one-man production of *Urfaust* in 1956 (yes, Szeemann played all the roles himself).’ Birnbaum, ‘When Attitude Becomes Form.’


34 Obvious but important to note is that when the term *auteur* is used in English, it invariably relates to its use in reference to film directing, in particular the films of the French New Wave and the associated translated criticism of *Cahiers du Cinema*. Its popular usage extends to
theatre making too, to a lesser extent, but arguably never to its literal translation, from the French 'author', as a solitary writer.

35 Beatrice Von Bismarck, ‘Curating,’ in MIB-Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice, ed. Christoph Tannert and Ute Tischler (Frankfurt am Main; Berlin: Revolver - Archiv für aktuelle Kunst; Künstlerhaus Bethanien, 2004), 204.


37 Examples abound, this is a succinct example from curator Max Delany, ‘From a practical point of view, a curator organises, commissions and designs exhibitions; develops, cares for and interprets collections; is a collaborator with artists, sometimes a co-producer of their work; tries to make sense of art objects and art practice, communicating ideas, mediating between art objects and visitors. Curators write, publish, undertake research, and assist others to do the same. Whilst it all sounds glamorous and exciting, curators are also functionaries, administrators, and much of what we do is very unglamorous.’ Crawford, ‘Artists, Know These People.’


41 Hoffmann, ‘The Art of Curating and the Curating of Art,’ 10.


44 O’Neill, The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s), 122.

45 Smith, Thinking Contemporary Curating, 17.

46 See also the editorial for issue 11 of The Exhibitionist, ‘Curating has become a global concern, yet many languages still even lack a steady term for it. Meanwhile, in some circles, “curation” has gained a buzzword-ish currency, signalling taste and discrimination across a dizzying array of cultural activities, from so-called “data curation” to creating playlists and dinner menus. The hope, it seems, is that a renewed connoisseurship might discern value amid the profusions of a global market—separate the wheat from the cultural chaff—even if it means, too, that Kanye West now has as much claim on the term “curator” as Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev or Okwui Enwezor. The more we stretch the word, it seems, the easier it becomes to hijack. It is time for some clarity.’ Jens Hoffmann, Julian Myers Szupinska, and Liz Glass, ‘Overture,’ The Exhibitionist, July 2015, 3.


49 Ibid., 50.

50 This state of ‘being’ with the material of art, immersed in its context and potentialities, been described by curator Walter Hopps: ‘Fine curating of an artist’s work – that is, presenting it in an exhibition – requires as broad and sensitive an understanding of an artist’s work that a curator can possibly muster. This knowledge needs to go well beyond what is actually put in the exhibition... To me, a body of work by a given artist has an inherent kind of score that you try to relate to or understand. It puts you in a certain psychological state. I always tried to get as peaceful and calm as possible.’ Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Hans Ulrich Obrist: Interviews, ed. Thomas Boutoux (Milan: Charta, 2003).

51 Smith, Thinking Contemporary Curating, 20.
It is unclear why to Smith such ‘activist’ intentions should be considered anathema to an ‘art world context’, and in particular museums, which in the case of the final exhibition in this research projects, was engaged with by a large and diverse audience, not in and of themselves, ‘the art world’.


In adopting the terminology ‘publics’, I am also making a clear distinction with the concept of community, and community-based art. Miwon Kwon’s 2002 book *One place after another*, unpacks at length the various complexities associated with community art practice, particularly as it has been understood in the United States over the past thirty or so years, and has been a helpful, if now dated, analysis of a number of early positions with respect to critiquing the political, social and artistic currency generated by artists working with, through and within communities. The more recent critical positions from a number of those protagonists, such as Grant Kester and Hal Foster, are engaged with in this thesis; positions that have been developed subsequent, and partly in response to Kwon’s text. Her conclusion, that it is within a critical (in her terms ‘collective artistic praxis’) rather than community artistic praxis where artists can make the most productive work is, within this thesis, taken as accepted, as indicated by the adoption in the introduction of the term ‘critical possibilities’ to describe this research project. For further detail see, Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).

Although the text states it was presented in Paris on April 27, according to Gershom Scholem the presentation never took place, see Walter Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer,’ in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 2 1931-1934* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1996), 781 n. 1.

The translator of this version of the text, John Heckman, includes the following footnote to accompany the term tendency: ‘Benjamin uses the word Tendenz throughout to mean the general direction a writer or his work takes, whether political or literary. It combines the notions of political line or group with literary school or movement.’ Walter Benjamin, ‘The Author as Producer,’ *New Left Review* 1, no. 62 (1970): 84.


‘Art becomes politically effective only when it is made beyond or outside the art market – in the context of direct political propaganda. Such art was made in the former Socialist countries. Current examples include the Islamist videos or posters that are functioning in the context of the international antiglobalist movement. Of course, this kind of art gets economic support from the state or from various political and religious movements. But its production, evaluation, and distribution do not follow the logic of the market. This kind of art is not a commodity.’ Groys, 7.


Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; towards a Radical Democratic Politics, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 2001), x, emphasis in the original.


Laclau and Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy; towards a Radical Democratic Politics, 193.


Ibid., 85.

Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,’ Social Text, no. 25 (1990): 66.


Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere,’ 67.

Ibid., 67–68.

‘The public sphere, in short, is not the state; it is rather the informally mobilized body of nongovernmental discursive opinion that can serve as a counterweight to the state.’ Fraser, 75.


Kwon, One Place after Another, 149–150.

Ibid., 166.

Ibid., 166, emphasis in the original.


Groys, Art Power, 40.

Claire Doherty, ‘Curating Wrong Places... Or Where Have All the Penguins Gone?,’ in CURATING SUBJECTS, ed. Paul O’Neill (Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007), 104.


The identities of the other four shortlisted artists, and their concepts, remain confidential and will not be elaborated in this research project.


This project has since found a number of different manifestations by the artists, both in Melbourne and Yuendumu, including as Two Homes, Another World, 2016, presented in the 2016 Basil Sellers Art Prize. Jurrah’s own story took a series of tragic turns when he was embroiled in inter-family dispute stemming from a 2010 stabbing death for which one side sought traditional justice, with the law preventing the spearing leading to a violent on-going feud. He was de-listed by Melbourne Football Club in 2012, having played 36 games. For
further detail see Bruce Hearn Mackinnon, *The Liam Jurrah Story: From Yuendumu to the MCG* (Carlton: Victory Books, 2011).

97 Bonding is the term used for the pattern in which bricks are laid.

98 Upon seeing the mock-up the response predictably was concern it might in fact be ‘a bit small’.


102 Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics:’ 53–54, emphasis in the original.


104 Ibid., 43.


106 Two aspects of this quote will be returned to in later chapters: the notion here of constituent ambiguity and paradox; and the notion of inexhaustibility of an artwork, pertaining to interpretation and affect.

107 Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,’ 62, emphasis in the original.

108 Ibid., 64–65, emphasis in the original.

109 Bishop quotes Bourriaud as saying in a later interview, ‘Connecting people, creating interactive communicative experience, what for? If you forget the ‘what for?’ I’m afraid you’re left with simple Nokia art – producing interpersonal relations for their own sake and never addressing their political aspects’. Despite this Bishop claims he doesn’t ask this (enough) of the artists and works that he ‘promotes’ within his theory, and that numerous examples of work lack a rigorous approach to this issue, which is occasionally referred to within a critique of context-responsive practice as being ‘ethnographic’ in its approach. See for instance Hal Foster’s 1995 essay ‘The Artist as Ethnographer’.

110 In the introduction of her subsequent book *Artificial Hells*, which looks in more depth at socially-engaged practices, Bishop acknowledges how her perspective changed after spending more time with artists (and possibly curators) creating such projects. She writes, ‘The hidden narrative of this book is therefore a journey from sceptical distance to imbrication: as relationships with producers were consolidated, my comfortable outsider status (impotent but secure in my critical superiority) had to be recalibrated along more constructive lines.’ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso Books, 2012), 6.

111 Bishop, ‘Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,’ 54.

112 Ibid., 70.

113 Ibid., 71.

114 BAVO was established by architects Gideon Boie and Matthias Pauwels. I am indebted to Paul O’Neill for alerting me to their activities and artistic strategy.


117 Ibid., 107.

118 Ibid., 107.

119 Ibid., 101.

120 Mouffe, ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces,’ 5.

121 Mouffe, 5.

122 Ibid., 3.

123 Ibid., 4–5, emphasis in the original.
Daw, Meade and Floyd would subsequently show works created in India in an exhibition at Seven Art, New Delhi, entitled *Sleep on the Left Side*, 2012–13, curated by McInnes.


A second version, entitled *Production line*, also from 2009, uses the same tabletop infrastructure and procedure, but has Abude working alone, substituting the four office chairs on wheels for a one mounted to steel rails, only allowing a side-to-side slide between each station.


In fact the city’s current name Mumbai derives from Mumba Devi, a goddess of the Koli peoples.

Including tourists, stall holders, local youth, students, drug dealers, map sellers and families as well as interviewing some key civic leaders including: Darryl d’Monte (representing Celebrate Bandra and former editor of *The Times India*); Anandini Thakoor (representing Santa Cruz Residents Association); Reena Kallat (local artist); Julio Romero (representing the Mohalla Committee and former Chief of Police); and, Anna Zaidi (writer and member of Blank Noise Collective); Kelli McCluskey, in correspondence with the author, 15 January 2013.


Involving Rachana Sansad College, Thane College of Arts, IIT Powai, Mumbai University, St. Xavier’s College, St. Andrews College, K.J. Somaiya and Sophia Polytechnic.

Following the performance, Kent also noted the ulterior participation by the other artists based in Europe thus: ‘The Amsterdam contingent led by Matthew Shannon retreated indoors in the face of a snowstorm to perform their drawing event, Remote Space in Barcelona set up camp on Barceloneta Beach and Speech and What Archive braved the snow to make a receiving event on the banks of the Seine in Paris.’ Veronica Kent, in correspondence with the author 15 January 2013.


Ibid., my emphasis.

Ibid., 164, emphasis in original.

Ibid., 166, emphasis in original.

Bringing to mind a quote by Robert Musil from his 1936 book *Monuments*, ‘there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument’.


Form/content is used here in terms of the relationship between the ‘type’ of content and the images.  

This conclusion regarding the consequence of doubling the factual or literal content to intensity and the memory of the videos in the trial is supported by other unrelated research regarding, of all things, business management techniques. The prevalence of Powerpoint assisted boardroom presentations led to a surge of studies in that area to discover the most effective use of text and image on each ‘slide’ to support a presenter’s argument or message. Conclusively, they have shown that if a presenter shows a slide (either graphic, or more acutely, text) and then proceeds to parrot the slide’s content exactly in their verbal presentation while the slide is showing, the information retention is worse for the audience than if the presenter either showed no slide and only presented the information verbally, or did not speak and only presented the information visually. April Savoy, Robert W. Proctor, and Gavriel Salvendy, ‘Information Retention from PowerPoint™ and Traditional Lectures,’ Computers & Education 52, no. 4 (May 2009): 858–867.
providing contributions that consider different facets of McDiarmid’s practice, his influence and legacy, and many that recount personal experiences of knowing and working with him.

Sally Gray, ‘When This You See Remember Me: David McDiarmid’s Life as Art,’ in David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me, ed. Sally Gray (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2014), 1.

Unfortunately Men curtain was vandalized during the first exhibition of the work in An Exhibition of Work by Homosexual and Lesbian Artists at Watters Gallery, Sydney in 1978, and could not be included in David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me. For further detail see John McPhee’s essay ‘David McDiarmid: Fashion Interiors and the Australian Dream Lounge’ in Gray et al. David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me.


McDiarmid worked as a hustler for gay male escort agency Chelsea Men while living in New York, see Gray, ‘When This You See Remember Me: David McDiarmid’s Life as Art’.

Perhaps the most famous example of this kind of imagery was a photograph that ran as the cover of Life magazine in November 1990, the same year as McDiarmid’s Kiss of Light series. Taken by Therese Frare it depicts AIDS activist David Kirby moments before his death in an Ohio hospital, his father cradling his son’s head.

Fiona Cunningham-Reid, Interview with David McDiarmid (Melbourne, 1994). I am grateful to Ted Gott for making this recording available to me.


The talk was recreated as a digital film by Berlin filmmaker Hermano Silva for the David McDiarmid Estate.

The list of music tracks is outlined in ‘Appendix C: David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me soundtrack by Steven Allkins’.

See ‘Appendix D: David McDiarmid: When This You See Remember Me film series’ for a list of the films screened.


Cunningham-Reid, Interview with David McDiarmid.

Gray, ‘When This You See Remember Me: David McDiarmid’s Life as Art,’ 1.

Crucially the practitioners of each of these movements saw themselves as being in possession of particular, special insight into the state of the world, and its potential for betterment, to which their audiences were blind. Each group employed a different approach to ‘awaken’ the audience: the antagonistic Futurist performances that directly engaged their audiences, often to the point of violence; the Constructivist rejection of individually interpreted works of art and experience in favour of singularly authored and choreographed performances privileging collectivist camaraderie and participation; the anarchic, mass-produced performances and interventions of Paris Dada intended to negate language and expectation. For an extended description of these approaches see Bishop, Artificial Hells.


Clemens and Delany, 433.

Jean-Philippe Deranty, Jacques Rancière: Key Concepts (Sydney: Acumen, 2010), 117.

Deranty, 118.

Rancière, The Emancipated Spectator, 32.


Bishop, ‘The Social Turn,’ 183.

Cunningham-Reid, *Interview with David McDiarmid*.


Ibid., 13.


This is most clearly elaborated through Massey’s concept of a context as a field of forces and relations in ‘Chapter 3: Context: place and specificity’ and Massumi’s introduction of the concept of affectual intensity and its production, in ‘Chapter 7: Experience’.

Andrew Benjamin, seminar at VCA, University of Melbourne, 9 August 2012.

Rancière proposes Mystery as one of four schematic modes of engagement and means of suggestion beyond the avant-garde approach of shock, in the follow way: ‘In opposition to the dialectical practice that accentuates the heterogeneity of elements to provoke shock, bearing witness to a reality marked by antagonisms, mystery emphasises a kinship of the heterogeneous. It constructs a game of analogies in which they witness a common world, where the most distant realities appear as if cut from the same sensible fabric and can always be linked by what Godard calls the ‘fraternity of metaphors’. Mystery was the central concept of symbolism. And certainly, symbolism is once again on the agenda. By that I’m not referring to certain spectacular and slightly nauseous forms, like the resurrection of symbolist mythology and Wagnerian fantasies of the total work of art in Matthew Barney’s *Cremaster* cycle (1997–99). I’m thinking of the more modest, sometimes imperceptible way in which assemblages of objects, images and signs presented by contemporary installations have, over the last few years, slid the logic of provocative dissensus into that of a mystery that bears witness to a co-presence.’ Rancière, ‘Problems and Transformations of Critical Art,’ 91.

I have recently identified the concept of inexhaustibility as a means of measuring an artwork within this framework. An inexhaustible quality can be understood as not just the capacity of a work to be held within multiple readings but also that – no matter how much mediation or interpretation it is subjected to – its mystery or ambiguity (or other qualities) continue to offer themselves up, as persistent, inexhaustible sites of potential affect.
Bibliography


Appendix A: Plaques accompanying Civil Twilight End,
Kate Daw and Stewart Russell

1. This Bell records ‘Civil Twilight End’, a term used to describe the conclusion of twilight, so a definition marking the end of that transition period from light to dark.

2. Technically Civil Twilight End is defined to occur when the centre of the sun has descended six degrees below the horizon, out over there, somewhere.

3. The bell marks a natural elemental rhythm overriding calendars or clock time. For most of us the sound of the bell signals the end of day or the beginning of night, I suppose it depends on the individual.

4. Leaving only bells of lightning and its thunder
   Striking for the gentle, striking for the kind
   Striking for the guardians and protectors of the mind
   Bob Dylan

5. While working on the bell tower project, architect Peter Lovell told us how the original Goods Shed was built to ‘float’ on soaked wooden rafters that were embedded in the earth. These huge ancient slabs of wood were put in place to counter the marshy surrounds and stabilise the building. They exist to this day, preserved in water, beneath the building.

6. Randwick bells are ringing
   Must be Saturday
   I woke late in the middle of the day
   Must be Saturday
   Put a blanket on the window
   And come on back to bed
   Paul Kelly
7.
No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.
John Donne, Meditation no. 17 from 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions' (1624)

8.
The echo of the bell
at Yoshimizu --
I am here, too,
in a black robe
set against the white mist.
Otagaki Rengetsu

9.
The Lutine Bell, named after HMS Lutine, weighs 106 lb. and bears the inscription 'ST. JEAN – 1779'. It rests in Lloyd's of London Underwriting Room where it used to be struck when news of an overdue ship arrived – once for the loss of a ship (i.e. bad news, last in 1979), and twice for her return (i.e. good news, last in 1989).
Appendix B: *Resist: Mumbai* list of issues, approaches and initiatives, PVI Collective

These formed the text on the placards for each tug-of-war context, written in English and Hindi, and read out by announcer Ishita Vasa in English, Hindi and Gujarati. A participant could nominate themselves for a dilemma and nominate which solution they were championing. The chosen solution and result has been highlighted in each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The people versus garbage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dilemma:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over 9,200 tonnes of waste is generated in the city each day. 12% is construction debris, 15% is recyclable. In the spirit of human enterprise, garbage is a source of employment for some. For others it is a huge hygiene issue and affects the liveability factor of the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What can we do about this?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people of Mumbai have proposed these two solutions to this dilemma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Seek out champion:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the people lose: Mumbai will continue to be over run by garbage.

If the people win: citizens of Mumbai will get free bus ticket for placing recycled and general waste in the appropriate bins.

If the people lose: Mumbai will continue to be over run by garbage.
## The people versus the police

**Dilemma:**
in 2012 the Maharashtra police were ranked the most corrupt arm of the state government. The average person will bribe up to Rs.11,000 on a given day. Bribes and *haftas* in return for favours have become the norm, but most are not reported as the briber gains too.

**What can we do about this?**

The people of Mumbai have proposed these two solutions to this dilemma.

**Solution 1**
Implement an annual social audit of police practice & publish publically.

**If the people win:**
corruption will be held accountable. there will be an annual social audit of police practice published and for better or for worse you will know which officer accepts bribes.

**If the people lose:**
Mumbai will continue as the most corrupt city in India, with no one policing the police.

**Solution 2**
Reduce the incentive to take bribes by increasing police wages.

**If the people win:**
the police will all receive wage increases and will not feel the urge to accept a bribe in the future.

**If the people lose:**
Mumbai will continue as the most corrupt city in India, with no one policing the police.

---

## The people versus Eve-teasing

**Dilemma:**
women regularly encounter verbal, physical and sexual abuse in public spaces. 2,28,650 cases of crimes against women were recorded in 2011 in India. People who attempt to intervene to assist the

**Solution 1**
Increase number of female officers.

**If the people win:**
female police officers will make up 50% of the workforce and will assist in stamping out the deep-rooted mindset of sexism in this country.

**If the people lose:**
victim are often themselves assaulted. Helplines are available to call, but response times have proven inadequate.

What can we do about this?

The people of Mumbai have proposed these three solutions to this dilemma.

Seek out champion: ‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’

Solution 2: Stare back and reclaim the gaze.

If the people win: women will empower themselves and stare back at any man whose gaze is prolonged and feels uncomfortable.

If the people lose: women will continue not to feel safe on the streets and will have to put up with the harassment.

Solution 3: Pepper spray legalised and issued to all women.

If the people win: pepper spray will be freely available from every Mumbai police station for women to use at their own discretion.

If the people lose: women will continue not to feel safe on the streets and will have to put up with the harassment.

The people versus the judiciary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dilemma: the judicial system is plagued by problems of time efficiency. 30 million cases are currently pending in courts across India. there are only 11 judges.</th>
<th>Solution 1: Increase the number of judges and implement a system of fast courts.</th>
<th>If the people win: the number of judges will be increased to meet the demand. Judge Judy style fast courts will be introduced to deal with minor cases.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

judges per million population. at the current rate, analysts estimate it taking 350 years to clear the backlog.

What can we do about this?

The people of Mumbai have proposed these two solutions to this dilemma.

Seek out champion:
‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution 2</th>
<th>If the people lose: the judiciary will continue to be plagued by ineptitude and a massive backlog of court cases.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>introduce out of court settlements</td>
<td>If the people win: out of court settlements will be introduced allowing family disputes and defamation suits to be resolved outside the courts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two thirds of revenue is spent on staff and less than one third on services.

What can we do about this?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution 1</th>
<th>If the people lose: cover ups, dodgy deals and bribes will continue to run rampant and citizens will</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>transparency of spending – every penny of public money spending is to be printed on walls of public institutions annually</td>
<td>If the people win: the spending of public money will be audited and publically displayed on the walls of schools, police station, parks and community centres for all to see. There will be no place to hide for dodgy spending.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dilemma:
there is suspicion over where and how public money is spent and a lack of community consultation regarding local infrastructure and services. Two thirds of revenue is spent on staff and less than one third on services.

What can we do about this?
The people of Mumbai have proposed one solution to this dilemma. Seek out champion: ‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’

**The people versus space**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dilemma:</th>
<th>Solution 1</th>
<th>If the people win:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>60% of the Mumbai population live in a 10 x 10 sq ft ‘home’. There is no space for the poor in the city. There is not enough space for the cars, for pavements, for sitting down or walking safely. Space is out of space.</td>
<td>to give security of home ownership to slum dwellers and create building jobs from within the community.</td>
<td>each slum dweller will be offered renewable 12 month long rental contracts for their homes and jobs will be created from within each slum to deal with building up, electricity and sanitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What can we do about this?</td>
<td>If the people lose:</td>
<td>there will continue to be only 1 square metre of public space per person in Mumbai.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people of Mumbai have proposed these three solutions to this dilemma.</td>
<td>Solution 2</td>
<td>If the people win:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a vehicle tax introduced to use your car on certain days of the week</td>
<td>vehicle owners will have to pay a road tax to drive their vehicles on certain days in the city leaving more space and less noise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If the people lose:</td>
<td>there will continue to be only 1 square metre of...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the people win:
- There will be a demand for farm labour with crop yields and farm incomes doubling.

If the people lose:
- There will continue to be only 1 square metre of public space per person in Mumbai.

The people versus water

**Dilemma:**
Urban slum residents have illegal and semi-legal connections to clean water because their homes are not 'officially' recognised. Occupants are surviving on water unfit for human consumption.

**What can we do about this?**

The people of Mumbai have proposed these two solutions to this dilemma.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution 1</th>
<th>Solution 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Seek out champion:**
‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’ | **Solution 2** |
| **Solution 1**
Conduct a radical social experiment; for 24 hours all politicians are to live in a slum and experience the urgency of the situation. | **If the people win:**
Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his cabinet will pack their bags for a 24 hour stay in Dharavi, India’s biggest slum, to experience first hand how 60% of the population lives in Mumbai. |
| **If the people win:**
Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his cabinet will pack their bags for a 24 hour stay in Dharavi, India’s biggest slum, to experience first hand how 60% of the population lives in Mumbai. | **If the people lose:**
Clean water will continue to be a privilege of the wealthy and 13% of piped water to Mumbai slums will continue to be contaminated causing nearly 6,000 deaths per year. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Increase water filtration plants to accommodate all citizens.</th>
<th>UV radiation treated bore water will be stored in 10,000 litre bore tanks providing a low cost water supply to slum residents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the people lose: clean water will continue to be a privilege of the wealthy and 13% of piped water to Mumbai slums will continue to be contaminated causing nearly 6,000 deaths per year.</td>
<td>If the people lose: spitting will continue to be a part of Indian culture with citizens running the risk of tuberculosis infection.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### The people versus spitting -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dilemma: spitting is an inherent characteristic of Indians but is one of the biggest causes of tuberculosis. In sunlight the bacteria can stay alive for 6-7 weeks. In 2007 Clean Up Marshalls were appointed to fine anyone caught spitting in public. The initiative quickly lost steam and proved impossible to police by the BMC. What can we do about this? The people of Mumbai have proposed one solution to this dilemma.</th>
<th>Solution 1 - citizen groups to introduce ‘public shaming cages’ for offenders. If the people win: human sized iron bird cages will be installed on street corners and spitting offenders will be locked inside with a tuberculosis pamphlet to read. When they pledge to reform their unhygienic behaviour they will be released.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If the people lose: spitting will continue to be a part of Indian culture with citizens running the risk of tuberculosis infection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seek out champion: ‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’

The people versus community

Dilemma:
Mumbai is a city of extremes; the cinematic world, the advertising world, the Hindu right wing, the poor, the elite and the progressive coexist in an uneasy way.
Opportunities to come together and celebrate diversity are limited.

What can we do about this?
The people of Mumbai have proposed these two solutions to this dilemma.

Seek out champion: ‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’

Solution 1
more democratic open spaces and free festivals that bring people together.

If the people win:
Mumbai will get an abundance of street festivals, music festivals and community events that celebrate cultural diversity.

If the people lose:
citizens will continue to be at the mercy of ineffective local government who don’t prioritise community interests.

Solution 2
community to take ownership of local spaces and manage them collectively.

If the people win:
using the Bandra promenade as a model for community innovation, citizens will take the lead in managing and running public spaces in their own neighbourhoods.

If the people lose:
citizens will continue to be at the mercy of ineffective local government who don’t prioritise community interests.
## The people versus play

| Dilemma: there are not enough places to play in the city. Children are often moved on by police for playing cricket in public. What can we do about this? The people of Mumbai have proposed these two solutions to this dilemma. Seek out champion: ‘Who is prepared to step up and tug for one of these solutions? Who will champion the people?’ | Solution 1: set up a public cricket area on Juhu Beach. If the people win: a large public cricket ground will be established on Juhu Beach will be free for all. If the people lose: children will continue to struggle to find places to play in Mumbai. | Solution 2: fast track a public amenities program that serves the interests of Mumbai’s youth. If the people win: parks, playgrounds, sporting arenas will be at the top of the agenda for each municipality. Children will be spoilt for choice! If the people lose: children will continue to struggle to find places to play in Mumbai. |
Appendix C: David McDiarmid: When This You See

Remember Me soundtrack by Steven Allkins

'Sodomy (Movie version)', Hair Soundtrack
'Secret Love', Doris Day
'The Revolution Will Not Be Televised', Gil Scott Heron
'LOVE', Al Green
'Lovely day', Bill Withers
'What's Going On', Marvin Gaye
'Mardi Gras In New Orleans', Professor Longhair
'Life Is Something Special', New York City Peech Boys
'Happiness (Happy Ending Re Edit)' Pointer Sisters vs Sylvester
'Still A Friend Of Mine', Incognito
'Hit and Run (Joey Negro Dub Sensation)', Loleatta Holloway
'Love Is Here And Now You're Gone', Diana Ross & The Supremes
'Feel Up (Larry Levan Remix)', Grace Jones
'Find A Way', Russ Brown
'The Spirits In It', Patti Labelle
'You Make me feel Mighty Real (Epilogue)', Sylvester
'Walking On Thin Ice (Danny Tenaglia Maestro Version)', O.N.O
'Back To Life (Radio Version)', Soul II Soul
'Optimistic (Album Version)', Sounds of Blackness
'Music man', Rufus & Chaka Khan
'I Need You (Dimitri From Paris Sunday Morning Mix Long)', Sylvester
'If You Should Need A Friend (Original Mix)', Blaze
'Can You Feel It', Mr Fingers
'Get up Stand up', Bob Marley
Appendix D: David McDiarmid: When This You See

Remember Me film series

Sun 6 Jul, 3pm

Rampant, How a City Stopped a Plague (2007)
55 mins

Synopsis

On a warm November afternoon in 1982, a man walked into a Sydney hospital, complaining of simple symptoms – fever, fatigue, sweats. He was from New York. A gardener – young and fit. With a crowded sexual history. And he was gay. The doctors made their diagnosis, the first in Australia: this man had AIDS. He was discharged and vanished into the streets. This is the little known story of how a strange coalition of doctors, nurses, nuns, gays, whores, junkies and politicians pulled off one of the first and boldest defeats of AIDS in the world. Together they broke the law, offended everyone, and saved tens thousands of lives.

Sun 13 Jul, 3pm

Films of William Yang

Sadness (1999)
52 mins

Award-winning photographer William Yang explores issues of grief, family and identity in this adaptation of his acclaimed stage performance, Sadness. Through this mesmerising, poetic montage of storytelling, photography and stylised re-enactment, Yang brings to life the stories of his family and friends. Sadness has two themes; the first involves an exploration of William’s Chinese-Australian identity and family history, while the second centres on his experience of loss during the AIDS epidemic.

Friends of Dorothy (2014)
57 mins

Synopsis

Friends of Dorothy brings us stories of the Sydney queer community. Wild, brave, compassionate and cheeky stories. William Yang saw it all, he came out in Sydney in the early 70s, a period of great social change. ‘I never consciously came out as a gay man, I was swept out by events at the time’. He saw the formation of a gay activist culture in the 70s, the commercialisation of the gay scene in the 80s, and he lived through the devastating effects of AIDS, in the early 90s, losing dear friends including the artists Peter Tully and David McDiarmid.

Sun 20 Jul, 3pm

Feed Them to the Cannibals! (1993)
67 mins

Synopsis

Feed Them to the Cannibals! is a delightful tribute to Australia’s apparently open-minded acceptance of gays, at least within cosmopolitan Sydney. The focus centres on a one-year
period leading to 1992's Sydney Mardi Gras, 'the biggest gay event in the world'. Behind-the-scenes footage glimpses organizational efforts including orchestration of the spectacular, fundraising Sleaze Ball and related AIDS activism.

Most of 'Cannibals' (its title drawn from an early Euro settler's attitude toward homosexuals) is giddily affirming, offering candid glimpses of a bountiful drag scene and a strong, politically motivated lesbian/gay milieu.

Sun 27 Jul, 3pm

**A Short History of Facial Hair**
20 mins

In 1993 the Australian artist David McDiarmid performed an essay, accompanied by 35mm colour slides, entitled *A Short History of Facial Hair*. The work has been recreated as a digital film. Beautiful, hard hitting and humorous *A Short History of Facial Hair* is an interrogation of McDiarmid's appearance as it changes from hippy to clone, to Gay Liberation activist, sexual revolutionary, hustler, dance floor diva, and ultimately, to HIV-positive queer subject – his self styled 'Toxic Queen'.