Art in the Age of Siege
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The metaphor of flight has dominated the era of globalization. Even those who have never left home are affected by the movements of others and by the arrival of new messages. The flows of traffic in this new network have not only accelerated to new levels, but the directions of movement have multiplied and leapt across the well-worn paths. The movement of ideas, capital and people is faster and wilder than at any point in history. In this massive race to pass on information, to circulate symbols, to move from one place to another, no culture can exist in isolation. However, as nation-states welcome these advances of capital and new technology, paradoxically, they are meanwhile fortifying their borders against migrants.

Between the fall of the Berlin wall and September 11, visions of the immediate future were dominated by images of free movement. Neo-liberal economists celebrated ‘just-in-time’ delivery systems, calculated the benefits of out-sourcing and urged companies to develop new collaborative practices. The global hype of ‘no frontiers’ pumped oxygen into the old dreams of free trade as economic paradise. Commodities could arrive with minimum cost and maximum speed. However, this fantasy of uninhibited mobility hides the violence of penetrating boundaries, and imagines the world as a flat grid, in which all distances and objects can be calibrated according to a single value system.

This idealised map of global trade sits uneasily with contemporary migratory patterns and the dispersal of new communication networks. Here the fantasy of mobility discovers links but also encounters new monsters, viruses and barriers. As Saskia Sassen has argued, while a greater proportion of the economy is dematerialised and circulating within digital networks, there is also an uptake in cross-border communication initiatives in poor and marginal communities. However, unlike digital transactions on foreign money exchanges, or even the re-distribution of commodity production, human

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movement and communication has unintended and multi-directional consequences. The cultural dynamics of globalisation challenge our existing models for explaining the patterns of exchange, and the forms of belonging, now occurring in the world. Complexity and contradictions unwind in every point of contact. In every moment of human communication, as in every journey, there is a process of change.

After September 11, the general fear of the unknown has itself become more mobile – and has spawned its own ‘monsters’: terrorists in our midst and refugees on the move. However, the horror of death caused by terrorism does not compare to the minor burden of settling a few strangers. The disruption caused by refugees is trivial compared to the harm of terrorism. And yet, these two events are transposed onto the same paranoid level. Fear has become a force that is experienced viscerally, framing our suspicious glances at our neighbours, and extending into the gleeful approval of the state’s use of violence.

To understand the psychic, social and political dimensions of fear we need to not only excavate its origins and measure its consequences, but also consider the way it circulates in the ‘body politics’. Organization was once the driving force of modernity. By getting organized, companies, gangs and unions could gain power and even build a new kind of social order. Today the old bonds holding people together have loosened and fragmented. There is a growing fear that structures can no longer hold together, and that the turbulent forces driving the world are producing chaos and devastation. Fear, I will argue, grows in the metaphors of flow and containment. Through its self-fuelling momentum it develops a capacity to blur its sources and consequences. Fears are now most vivid in the way we describe mobility and belonging.

**Mapping Mobilities**

Modern power cannot control global flows largely because it has not addressed the complex patterns of mobility. The turbulence of global migration requires a new conceptual framework. Traditional theoretical frameworks assumed migration was a unidirectional movement – the migrant left one bounded space, entered another through the
front gate, then slowly began to acquire rights. Since the 1970s, there has been profound change in the volume and trajectories of global mobility. The complexity of current patterns hinges on five factors.

1. More people on the move. Today there are more migrants and refugees than at any point in history. Between the two world wars migrant numbers doubled. By 1965 there were 75 million migrants; in 2002 there were 175 million worldwide, of which 16 million were refugees. While migrant numbers grow, refugee figures appear to have peaked in 1993 and declined steadily since. However, these figures do not include vast numbers of undocumented migrants and internally displaced people. The UNHCR estimates that 20-25 million refugees have left their homes without finding refuge in another country.\(^2\)

2. Multiplicity of directions. The contemporary migrant does not necessarily ‘Go West’, embarking on a finite journey in a single direction, but traces more complex patterns, including seasonal, itinerant, recurrent and incessant movements.\(^3\) No one structural force, or singular set of co-ordinates, governs those movements. Contemporary flows of migration are multiple – unlike the earlier waves generated largely by the push-pull dynamic of the New World’s colonization by Europeans, or workers’ recruitment to Northern industrial centres. Labour migration now heads for both developed and developing countries. These movements follow turbulent patterns, not linear trajectories.

3. Diversification of migrants. The classical sociological image of an uprooted, lonely and poor man does not represent today’s diverse migrants. The classical image of the migrant centred on the psycho-social type known as the ‘marginal man’, but also included a more ambivalent figure sketched out by Simmel and Schutz as the ‘stranger’ – an image that suggested migration could broaden cultural horizons and introduce critical perspectives. By contrast, the contemporary figure of the migrant is loaded with stigmatic

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\(^2\) The US has the highest number of immigrants, but the heaviest percentage of migrants and refugees arrive in select parts of Africa, Pakistan and Iran, and overall most migrants are living in the South. *International Migration Report 2002*, Population Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, New York, 2002.

associations of criminality, exploitation and desperation. However, the reality involves men from all classes and status groups, and growing numbers of educated women.  

4. Complex forms of agency and spatial affiliation. Migration is not always driven by economic concerns. The recent acknowledgement of social, cultural and political factors as active in the whole migration process has a dramatic impact on our understanding of spatial attachment. Despite the North emitting contradictory signals – promoting its own commodities and values and the illusion of freedom via mobility, while restricting migration and devaluing other traditions – complex migration networks continue to emerge. Many diasporic communities channel their media services through satellite networks, which create a sense of adjacency across vast distances, twist the proximate forms of day-to-day intimacies and create complex new links. New production and dispersal methods for global commodities are also serving as strange attractors. Mass air transportation and new communication networks have also transformed spatial relationships. Migrants often choose their destination according to personal knowledge, networks and available transport, rather than geographic proximities. 

5. Governance of trans-national flows. In 1976 only a small minority of countries had policies to lower immigration levels, while a slightly larger number aimed to raise them. By 2001 almost a quarter of all countries saw immigration levels as too high, and almost half the developed countries sought to restrict flows with a range of measures: dismantling official migration recruiting agencies, limiting access to asylum claims, sanctions on airline carriers and employers, new detention and deportation practices, and the ‘safe country of origin’ and ‘safe third country’ principles. These measures have proven ineffective, or worse. Blocked from lodging asylum claims, legitimate refugees increasingly rely on illegal people trafficking networks. Alongside these networks

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4 In the Philippines, the second largest ‘exporter of labour in the world’, women migrants vastly exceed the men, and their remittances have prevented the national economy from total collapse. S. Go, ‘The Philippines: a look into the migration scenario in the nineties’, Migration and Regional Economic Integration in Asia, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris, 1998, p 147.

flourishes a sex slave trade as lucrative as the sale of drugs and arms. The UN High Commission for Refugees and the International Organization of Migration argue that migration is a global issue, but there is still no global regulative authority. The capacity of these institutions to act is circumscribed by the nation-state. This regulative void between global and local exposes refugees to criminal networks and exaggerates fears on cross-border movements.

The level of interconnection in the brief outline above is overlooked in mainstream political discourse. Governments do not admit that the history of imposing controls on migration is a catalogue of failures, or that migration is one of the driving forces and products of globalization. Historical evidence and economic data now demonstrates the dynamic role played by migrants. Yet the populist fear endures that migration is a threat to society, and the link is seldom made between stigma against migrants and an inherent ambivalence towards mobility in broader cultural frameworks for representing belonging.

**Mobility in Art and Culture**

The political discourse on migration has become the focal point of defensive reactions against globalisation and the aggressive reassertion of cultural nationalism. To find a

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6 As one pimp boasted, drugs and guns can only be sold once. Victor Pope, ‘Trafficking in Women’, *US News & World Report*, 7 April 1997, p 38. A recent report on international trafficking estimated that between 800,000 to 900,000 people are forcibly moved across borders every year: ‘Global Trends’, *Migration News*, Vol 10, No 3, July 2003, p 34. There are no uniform international laws against the trafficking and bondage of women by prostitution rings.

7 Douglas Massey and J. Edward Taylor argue that in the USA there is a historical correlation between growth in trade and immigration, and also a correlation between the recent restrictions on immigration and the decline of rates of trade between the USA and the rest of the world; see their *International Migration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, p 377. In the most recent British calculation it has been estimated that migrants earn about 15% more than their native born counterparts, and while they contribute more to the government’s revenue they are also less reliant on welfare and state support. Dhananjayan Sriskandarajak, Lawrence Cooley, & Howard Reed, ‘Paying their way: the fiscal contribution of Immigrants’, www.ippr.org

more affirmative and critical response to the issues of mobility, we must turn to the new transnational and anti-nationalist practices that are being articulated by artists.

In this essay I will focus on some select examples in contemporary art that challenge the mainstream political discourse, explore the complexities of cultural difference, represent the hidden forms of violence in contemporary society, and propose ethical alternatives through interpretative strategies that emerge from collaborative practices in specific communities.

Artists have also seized the new communicative technologies to transform the modes of production and interaction with their work. They have argued that neither the context of their practice, nor the meaning of their work, is bound by an exclusive locale. However, the common desire to be visible on a global scale or participate in transnational dialogues does not mean that all contemporary artists embrace the logic of global capital. On the contrary, they have been among the most outspoken critics of the homogenising tendencies in globalization, and among the most reluctant flag-wavers in the contemporary displays of neo-nationalism.

The events of September 11 and the global refugee crisis have sharpened the ethical demands in cross-cultural communications and re-defined the politics of transnational exchanges. Art cannot stand outside of these ethical and political challenges. From the diverse range of artistic responses I will examine, we can witness strategies that have opposed the border politics of exclusion, offered an alternative perspective on cultural identity and initiated a new ethical quest for community.

What sort of alternative does this cultural resistance produce? Looking at these examples from some distance, we see a diversity of struggles: some operate in isolation, others are interlinked by different media. They are concentrated in very specific sites but also connected to parallel events or like-minded agents in distant locations. These collective or collaborative ventures contest particular historical and political constructions, but also draw on a broader discourse of cultural exchange and human rights. We can look at these
instances of resistance as individual dots that either spin deeper into a terrain, or as clusters of diverse entities that work within a locale, but also draw information, support and motivation into their field from a broader network.

These flashes of resistance appear all across the landscape of the contemporary world. The difficult question now arising is whether all these dots and clusters are connected in a way that offers an alternative response to the dominant fears. This is not necessarily answered by an empirical calculation of the sum or scope of resistance. While we have seen large-scale popular protests against the Iraq War, and sporadic symbolic skirmishes over the consolidation of globalization, this has not led to any new ideological opposition movements. It has dented the authority of political and economic elites, but it has not provided a platform for a new form of leadership.

What has emerged is a complex amalgam of diverse nodes, within which like-minded agents make tactical alliances. These fragmentary pockets of social interaction have sporadically produced intense bursts of resistance that have risen like flares but then faded into the horizon. The lifespan of these entities is limited. They do not consolidate within formal structures, but have the dynamic of cluster. They combine elements from near and far in a loose configuration, but also throw out signs that loop into other systems. Creative juxtapositions, unstable identities, non-linear feedback – these are some of the features of these new clusters.

The complexity of this cultural resistance is another indicator of the collapse of the ideological opposition between Western capitalism and Soviet socialism, and a marker of the decline of US geo-political hegemony. This struggle cannot be grasped in terms of two rival discourses in conflict over supremacy. Similarly, the increasing scepticism and outright hostility to US unilateralism has also produced some peculiar social and political alliances. The forms of cultural struggle evident in the artworld – in large-scale exhibitions like Documenta and the Venice Biennale, in major international surveys like ARS in Kiasma, or even modest artist-run initiatives and collaborations – are all symptomatic of this complex process of local resistance and global feedback. The energy
that sustains these events cannot be explained within the old binarisms of centre versus margin, or even the oppositional discourses of class struggles. Paradoxical alliances are being forged that defy the classifications of conventional models of analysis.

**The Shock of Difference**

After September 11 there was a chain reaction in the American political discourse. As Judith Butler observed, rather than pausing to reflect on the trauma, there was hunger for revenge and a quick succession of steps that justified “heightened nationalist discourse, extended surveillance mechanisms, suspended constitutional rights, and developed forms of explicit and implicit censorship”. The violence of terrorism produced its violent responses, including both a novel form of infinite retaliation and vigilance against anonymous enemies. Threat, we are warned, no longer takes the form of an invading army, but enters by more covert means and incites chaotic consequences. Images of warfare are now framed by terrorist networks that could be anywhere. Killing has become an invisible and irregular business. To pursue these boundless goals and faceless enemies, Americans permitted the state to be exempt from the full range of civil and international laws. The ‘land of the free’ had to suspend its own liberties, and, as Butler noted, this included the freedom of dissent. Opponents to the ‘war on terror’ were not just threatened with the charge of treason, but also mocked as either juvenile idealists, or anachronistic obscurants that are blind to the fact that the ‘world has changed’.

September 11 provided a stark reminder of the need to re-think the connections between art and politics. However, this task met considerable resistance in the mainstream artworld. Many critics and curators responded with disdain towards art that they perceived as either pointless activism or tedious literalism.

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11 On the backlash against political and conceptual debates within the art context, see Thomas McEvilley, “Documenta 11”, *Frieze*, issue 69, September 2002, p 82.
Perhaps the deep rifts in the international artworld were made even more explicit by the events of September 11. Cosmopolitan fantasies were challenged by ambient fears. Against this growing atmosphere of uncertainty and paranoia numerous artists, curators and theorists sought to comprehend how art could intervene in public debates. The Australian curator/artist Mary Lou Pavlovic noted that the urgency for an alternative because the government’s response was confined to “a discourse of racism and revenge.”12 There was a renewed self-belief that art could expand our consciousness of the political and psychic dimension of tragedy.13 The curators of Slanting House/Statements by the Artists in Japan since 9/11 felt the need to go beyond the image of apocalypse and examine the deeper notion of ruin. The title of their exhibition expressed both a lament for collapsing structures and a reflection on the crisis that is not simply a relay of political messages. This redemptive task was powerfully expressed by the participating artist Tadasu Yamamoto:

We can probably assume that we entered a new century on September 11, 2001. The commencement was announced in inverted form through an overwhelmingly eschatological scene. The incident distinctly divided time into before and after. What used to be hidden became visible through that incident. What had been silently in progress somewhere deep in the world suddenly emerged in an apocalyptic spectacle. And ever since that incident, all acts of expression appear to have had a huge hole cut through by an absurd spectacle to the extent that they are so deeply wounded that they suffer a feeling of helplessness. … Although there is no telling how certain the terrorists were about the effect such an image would have in carrying out those attacks, it is obvious that the sight of those planes crashing into the WTC and other buildings proved far stronger a weapon than a patriot missile, cluster bomb and daisy-cutter. People all over the world were attacked by the sight of those attacks broadcasted on television. I intend to convert the image shot into me into an artwork and throw it back to the world together with a premonition of catastrophe.14

For the curator/theorist Okwui Enwezor, the image of Ground Zero provided an even broader metaphor for recognising the crisis of globalization. He argued that the old ‘dead certainties’ of ‘East versus West’, and Bush’s cowboy rhetoric, would only inflame further violence. For Enwezor, September 11 marked a moment of critical

14 Taduso Yamamoto, Slanting House / Statements by the Artists in Japan since 9/11, curated by Michiko Kasahara (Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo), and Miwako Takasuna (Saison Art Program), Tokyo, 2002, p 93.
transformation: the problems of modernity were brought ‘home’ – the tensions that had been previously relegated to the margin were now being played out in the centre.\textsuperscript{15} This profound challenge requires us to acknowledge that both political forces and cultural identities are caught in turbulent patterns of interconnection and displacement. As people move across boundaries, they bring with them different ideas and values. Interactions may commence along old pathways, but they quickly bifurcate and develop within new networks.

Critical responses to these issues are now being driven from within the cultural domain. These contradictions and tensions in the deterritorialisation of cultures and people demand new theories of flow and resistance, and are compelling artists and intellectuals to rethink their methods. There is an urgent need for a new vocabulary in art discourse that can make sense of the complex forms of representation now emerging in the world – forms that incorporate images from different locations, and which simultaneously activate a multiplicity of signs, each embodying contrary or competing codes. Artists have set out to challenge the labelling, find new ways to explore ideas of mobility and attachment and create new perspectives on both the refugee crisis and the war on terror. In these practices we can witness both the loss of faith in the official political discourses, and an exploration of different modalities for expressing hope and developing ethical relations with others.

\textit{Artists in Opposition to Border Politics}

In times of crisis and conflict, artists are among the first to protest against authoritarian tendencies and propose alternative ways for relating to social issues. In Australia, for instance, artists were quick to show their solidarity with the asylum seekers in the wake of the \textit{Tampa} crisis.

\textsuperscript{15} Okwui Enwezor, \textquotedblleft The Black Box\textquotedblright, \textit{Documenta XI}, Catalogue, Hatje Cantz Publishers, Kassel, 2002, p 47.
The government’s response to the arrival of the *Tampa* in August 2001 signalled a shift in public values and attitudes. After whipping up hysteria over a coming invasion, the government’s mechanisms for dealing with refugees abruptly transformed from processes for determining legitimate asylum needs, to hostile and punitive tools for deterring migrants and excluding refugees. There was no public debate about the causes, volume and trajectories of global migration. But everywhere there were rumours about possible ‘flood’ and inevitable devastation of the ‘lucky country’.

Intoxicated by paranoia, and complicit with a vilification campaign against refugees, Australian political leaders led the world on how to be cruel towards the weak. Australian policies on immigration and asylum switched from being among the most benign in the world, to global standard bearers on the use of violence to deter and exclude. For the first time, military and intelligence agencies were mobilized to intercept ‘people smuggler chains’, destroy their transportation networks, prevent refugees from landing and even forcibly repatriate them. To further protect sovereignty, the state excised remote islands from the jurisdiction of national migration laws, enforced the mandatory detention of all refugees, and exempted detention centres from civil codes. Children born in detention are exempted from citizenship. Even refugees who are eventually deemed legitimate after years of waiting are at best issued with a temporary protection visa, their right to settle held in an anxious limbo. If at any future time the state decided they would no longer be at risk of persecution in their homeland, whole families could be repatriated without consent. Even children born in Australia have been plucked from their classrooms and extradited because their parents’ visas had expired.

The cultural and social opposition to Australia’s refugee policies has been loud and varied. Church leaders, anarchists, public intellectuals, student activists, senior statesmen, the judiciary and leading representatives of the health and welfare institutions have raised

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16 Throughout this essay I have used the term ‘refugee’ to bridge over the quasi-legal and moralistic distinctions between different kinds of asylum seekers. I have also used the term migrant in a generic way because I believe that the distinctions that are promoted in the popular discourse have at best a spurious conceptual basis and are usually a matter of conveniently reducing complex forms of connection to and complicity with the forces that compel people to move. The new vocabulary of qualified types of migrant and asylum seeker reflects not just a need to categorize people but also promote a false sense of order and control.
their voice in protest.\textsuperscript{17} They have demanded that this crude and cruel mechanism of exclusion should be dismantled, because it fails to deter new arrivals, creates profound harm and is based on an exaggerated fear of invasion. The horror of the system is an open secret, and the persistence of these mechanisms is seen as a humanitarian scandal.

Between the two major parties there are no differences in policies on refugees. However, as a social and cultural issue, border politics has divided the nation. The media has used attitudes towards refugees as indicators of the depth of our internal values and perspective onto the outside world. It is clear that the ‘moral majority’ is opposed, but an even larger electoral majority favours this use of violence. In one national survey 68\% of respondents agreed with the proposition that “refugees should be put back to sea.” We are living in a time when the representation of a moral position is split from the construction of violence as an expedient political force.

One of the most prominent artistic responses to the refugee crisis was Juan Davila’s \textit{Woomera}, 2002, a series of paintings and drawings in which he depicts the plight of the asylum seeker through the frontier myths of Australia’s colonial history. While the government was actively preventing the media from interviewing and photographing the asylum seekers and pushing their presence out of the public consciousness, Davila makes a point of depicting their struggle as part of the national mythology. Davila stages the drama of the detention camps against the background of the outback combining the discordant codes of Albert Namijira and the fiery tones of colonial landscape narratives. To intensify the parallels between Aboriginal displacement, colonial settlement and contemporary migration he repeatedly portrays the ‘monstrous’ figure of the refugee in the physiognomy of the dominant race.

In the painting “Detention Place”, 2002, two figures dominate a desolate, turbulent and parched landscape. At the centre is a middle-aged man, probably from the caring professions. He is kneeling – possibly as a sign of penance, or perhaps in stunned

\textsuperscript{17} Some notable examples include Archbishop Peter Carnley, Governor General Sir William Deane, and the former Prime Ministers Bob Hawke and Malcolm Fraser.
exhaustion. Behind him there is the red and brown glow of an industrial city. The whole atmosphere is dominated by whirling remorseless skies and a wind that seems to have stripped the trees of any vegetation. At the forefront of the painting is a strong, beautiful and naked woman. There are signs of blood having been smeared on her arms and thighs. She holds the shutter cable for a camera that faces the viewer. The image of violence has been turned awry and only points to the outsider: the one who is not inside the camp.

Almost three years after this painting was completed a story emerged of the incarceration of a former Qantas crewmember in an Australian immigration detention centre. Cornelia Rau, a German-born Australian citizen, suffered a mental breakdown and became delusional over her origins. The local Aborigines in northern Queensland who found her were convinced that she was ill and delivered her to the police. At this stage she was detained along with the other ‘illegals’. After ten months of searching, her family found her in tatters. She had been eating dirt, refusing to wear clothes and did not recognise her own sister. The story sparked a national scandal: on the basis of her ‘foreign’, unco-operative and clearly schizoid testimony the Australian government had not only falsely imprisoned one of its own residents but had made numerous efforts to deport her to Germany. As noted by one of the commentators, this ordeal gripped national attention and provoked unparalleled protest against the detention system, when it was revealed that, like the central figure in Davila’s painting, she turns out to be one of us.18

Mike Parr’s _Close the Concentration Camps_, 200219 was a performance in which his lips and eyelids were sewn together. It was a gesture of solidarity with the refugees and an attempt to expose the inhumanity of a system that the Australian government was shielding from public view. Even before this performance was executed the art critic David Bromfield dismissed the idea as a kind of “false realism” and questioned the vicarious motivation. In a letter to Parr he remarked: “we both know that it is no good simply becoming a glorified stand-in for a camp inmate.”20 Parr replied that doing

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20 Cited in Adam Geczy, “Focussing the Mind through the body: an interview with Mike Parr, _Artlink_, vol 23, no 1, 2003, p 45.
something “bad” might have a greater social effect. Prior to the performance Parr underwent a rigorous preparation process involving fasting and sleep deprivation. Through these experiences Parr sought to “violently split off whole zones of my body”, and perhaps mimic the state of bodily objectification that occurs in the traumatic experience of self-mutilation.

Parr’s re-naming of the government’s detention centres as “concentration camps” and the imperative to close them was both an unambiguous political protest and an act of symbolic shifting. It catapulted the seemingly sterile discourse of detention into the history of state barbarism. The use of terminology is a deliberate attempt to challenge the state’s terminology that evoked a false benevolence and concealed its own use of violence. Suspended in the hell of the ‘concentration camps’, and isolated from the outside world, many desperate individuals commenced acts of self-harm. With crude instruments and coarse string they stitched shut their eyes and mouth. The government interpreted this gesture as moral blackmail – and such a sign of their superior moral fortitude and administrative integrity that they offered no response. Parr’s performance may not have caught the public imagination like the ‘real story of Cornelia Rau’ but those who paused to reflect could see that he had temporarily used his body as a metaphor for the disfiguration of civic space.

Alongside the individual works there were also numerous collective responses to the refugee crisis in Australia. The exhibition called Borderpanic was a powerful guerrilla styled response to the ‘refugee crisis’. Upon entering the gallery my attention was immediately captured by Hossein Valamanesh’s photographic installation titled Longing Belonging. The absence of a preposition in this title also launches these two terms into orbit. They are drawn to each other, but an invisible and perhaps unbridgeable distance is also maintained. This work represents neither the exile’s nostalgic longing for belonging, nor the citizen’s slothful belonging in longing. The photograph shows a Persian carpet, a campfire and a clearing in the bush. By magic the carpet seems to hover just above the ground, and the fire seems to be drawn by the carpet’s uplift. Is this an unhomely arrival, or the co-existence of two types of landing in a strange landscape?
The tense juxtapositions between place and meaning that are projected by Valamanesh in *Longing Belonging* are further echoed in a collage by Vivienne Dadour titled *Legislation Affecting Aliens 1895*. This work combines images from archival photographs of a family wedding, a small gathering of people squatting together, an early Christian building and an historical document declaring that Chinese and Syrian people should be excluded from Australia because they carry unwanted parasites and intransigent customs. They are represented as biological and cultural risks to the integrity of the yet unformed nation. Dadour takes these images from her own family history, sets them on a canvas covered in black tar and washes the surfaces with a soft blue. The relationship between image and text is intended as a direct counterpoint. The racist texts are juxtaposed against images of community and hospitality. At the center is the peculiarly inviting gaze and gesture of a man looking up. His gaze immediately focuses the viewer’s attention and offers ‘us’ the position of guest in his scene. It is an ancient invitation to share in food and drink. The gesture is unequivocal, the arms open to embrace and receive. This gesture moves beyond the photographer into the future of the unknown viewer. Generosity is declared despite the subject not knowing who will be on the other side of the photograph, and it prefigures the same gestures made across the wire by refugees in Woomera: “Tell them we are human, we are not animals”.

Carlos Capelan’s sculpture “My House is Your House” (2005) is a stark reminder that hospitality is not unlimited service in a hotel. Capelan has repeatedly used the chair and a glass of water in his installations as a symbol of the minimum offering we can make to strangers. In this recent work, as part of his exhibition *Only You*, at the National Gallery of Uruguay, he has tied two stakes to the legs and back of an old fold up chair. These prosthetic legs transform the chair to resemble the frame of a tent, but the sculpture also carries the more sinister echo of a body thrust rigid by shock treatment. The invitation to share a house is a precarious gesture, for it splices the guest’s acceptance onto the host’s tensions.

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21 This was reported in the tactical media lab held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, to coincide with the exhibition Borderpanic at Performance Space, September 2002, (see www.borderpanic.org).
Jacques Derrida has stressed that hospitality, unlike charity or other forms of investment, is made without any expectation of return. The ‘gift of hospitality’ is not offered with any expectation of gaining an appreciation in terms of economic security or social status. “Let us say yes to who or what turns up, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any identification.”\(^\text{22}\) However, such an open-ended ‘gift’ can never find a place within any given legal or political structures. As Derrida argues the gift is also held together with strings. An unconditional welcome, a concept that he concedes is practically inaccessible is also posed against its opposite, the imperative of sovereignty. The right to mobility must be positioned alongside the host’s right to authority over their own home. “No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one’s home, but since there is also no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence.”\(^\text{23}\)

When two rights are posed as both legitimate and incommensurable, the task of negotiation becomes urgent. The competing rights are unrankable. You cannot decide by putting one above the other. To betray hospitality in order to secure sovereignty is a moral loss. To denounce sovereignty for total hospitality is a political catastrophe. In this conundrum, relativism is no help. Decisions need to be made, and as curators Maria Hlavajova and Gerardo Mosquera argued that by virtue of the “dialogic concept of art”, it can play a vital role in participating in, rather than merely observing, the conduct and content of these debates.\(^\text{24}\) Artists in the exhibitions like *Cordially Invited* and *Borderpanic* have used the spaces of art not only as a tool for public discourse but as stages to reinterpret the boundary between sovereignty and hospitality. No nation can ever totally open its borders, but the current hostility towards refugees, is symptomatic of a deeper ambivalence towards our own sense of place and the repression of exilic narratives from the national imaginary. This ‘unknown history’ is excavated by the photo-monteur Peter Lyssiotis in his *The Great Wall of Australia*, a fictional

\(^{23}\) Ibid., p 55.
\(^{24}\) *Cordially Invited*, curated by Maria Hlavajova and Gerardo Mosquera, BAK, Utrecht, October, 2004.
documentation of a timber and brick fence that stretches across the infinite suburbia of Southern Australia. Lyssiotis not only probes the smug and self-contained architecture of suburban life but also links this to the paranoid fantasies of border control. In contrast with the Arabic mythology of paradise as a walled garden, Lyssiotis represent the walls of suburban gardens as a block out. The wall not only limits topographic associations and excludes the ghosts that an indigenous artist like Darren Siwes would summon from the land, but it also protects the fragile forms of homely affection. The wall becomes a metaphor of our insecurity.

**Artists as Border Shifters**

Between the USA and Mexico, there is a Real Great Wall: the place where the two Americas meet and one bleeds. For decades, migrants have been finding ways through the wall by slipping between the gaps, or going beneath it and travelling in the sewers. Others make the crossing over the sea on leaking boats, and even inflatables. The border between the towns of Tijuana and San Diego is a place of intense violence and creativity. During the 1980s the artist collective *Border Arts Workshop* mimicked and celebrated the hybrid imagination of the itinerant border crossers. Perched on the Tijuana hills were illegal Mexican radio stations that declared themselves as ‘border busters’. These radio stations beamed their own blend of music that formed a bridge across Chicano-California. The artist collectives shared this energy – which they defined as a “formal and intellectual hybridism” – and set out to show that even the most fortified zone can be penetrated, and that ultimately cultural survival requires circulation and exchange.25

However, a decade later the optimism of border crossing and vitalism of cross-cultural exchange has been overtaken by a far more despairing vision of the journey. On the border there are even more guards. On one side there are those who live and, as is revealed in Chantal Ackerman’s multi-screen installation “From the Other Side”, (2002)

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at ‘Documenta XI’, there are those who dream of leaving, for whom there is the road of
death and disillusionment before them. The installation is structured around the countless
stories of migrants who seek to cross the frontier but fail, and by the silence of those who
disappear. Alongside video footage of guards tracking and pursuing migrants with
helicopters and night vision cameras, Ackerman recorded the stories of those who
crossed and returned from the other side. The survivors’ voice is not one of conquest but
of guilty solitude. It is in contrast to heroic stories of the proud migrants who see the
journey across the border as the decisive point of destiny, the turning point at which they
claim to have made something of one’s life. The border is represented as an irresistible
and yet fatal encounter. Before the border there are slogans warning “stay out and stay
alive”, closer by is the a shrill pitch of police alarms, and even on ‘the other side’ there is
the monstrous portrayal of ‘wetbacks’ on the Californian road signs – a man running and
a mother pulling her child in flight.

While driving from Los Angeles to San Diego the Thai curator Apinan Poshynanada
contemplated the meaning of this monstrous sign. After considering the various
imperatives of vigilance and courtesy he mused on a more revealing possibility; the sign
is a mirror of America’s desperate past: “These illegal travellers might escape the
authorities to become sojourners and settlers in communities where their status would
change to that of housemaids, waiters, teachers, laborers, bartenders, masseurs, chauffeurs,
security guards, robbers and so on. Their status one day might be that of American
citizens, later driving on that same LA – San Diego motorway to see the signs of their
past.”

Artists have often identified new trends long before they are articulated in mainstream
debates. In a prescient video installation for ARS 01, ‘3-minute survival attempt’ (2000),
Anna Jermolaewa simulated both the destabilizing effects of conflict and the anxiety over
the faceless aggressor. The fragile balance in the social order is played out in the
interaction of toys made in the shape of pendulum figures. Accompanied by an ominous

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26 Apinan Poshynanda, “Desperately Diasporic”, Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and
soundtrack of jackboots, one piece suddenly falls onto another, precipitating a cascading effect. As the pieces begin to tumble into each other and fall in a multitude of directions, it is never clear in which order they will ultimately fall; the only certainty is that disaster is imminent. Although each toy is uniform in shape, and at first appears to be stable, their movement leads towards a chaotic fall. The displacement effect is compounded by another unseen force that creates a swirling motion. The toys spin and fall into a vortex. Eventually even the surface tilts and everything falls off the edge. But the aggressor who precipitated the fall is never shown.

In Documenta XI there were a number of collaborative projects and installations that worked with the thesis that power was as evident in the new mechanisms for controlling flows than it was through the occupation of territory. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have argued that in the networked and globalized world, sovereign power takes a deterritorialised form, and is increasingly defined in the ability to regulate movement and exclude rivals.27 ‘Multiplicity’, a collective of artists, architects and activists based in Italy, presented an installation, *Solid Sea*, (2001) on the ‘ghost ship’ that sank off the coast of Sicily in 1996. A handful of survivors tried to convince the authorities of the tragedy that had happened in their waters but the incident was ignored until fisherman began to discover the bodies in their nets and the identity papers of the dead began to wash up on the shore. ‘Multiplicity’ then began its own investigations. In the course of examining the surveillance records from the Italian Navy and satellite footage from the metereological department they demonstrated that the State had callously turned a blind eye to drowning refugees. At one level this act of exclusion confirmed the prediction, made almost a decade earlier by Etienne Balibar, that after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, ‘fortress Europe’ would erect a new invisible Wall in the Mediterranean to exclude the South. At another level it was also an index of the way social life is dominated by “borders, walls, fences, thresholds, signposted areas, security systems, check points, virtual frontiers, specialized zones, protected areas and areas under control.”28 This proliferation of ‘border devices’ has not merely extended the function of sub-division but

also shattered the utopian dream of an urbane conviviality based on the co-existence of cultural differences.

In recent times politicians are increasingly caught in a negative competition – who will flex the biggest authoritarian muscle by exerting the greatest ever ‘crackdown’ on migrants. While seeking to bolster a flagging sense of sovereignty, this ‘crackdown’ also re-draws the boundaries of social responsibility. Artist projects like *Solid Sea* refuse to accept the declaration that refugees in international waters are in no-mans-land. They prefaced the work with the caption: “An Italian community in Tunisia, an African community in Sicily. The fishing activities in the Strait of Sicily have blurred the border between the two continents: each population can see its counterpart reflected as in a mirror. One landscape crossed by 150 miles of solid sea.” The title of the project, *Solid Sea*, refers to the blockage of an historical process and the fluid networks that previously enabled the coastal populations of the Mediterranean to share the view that they possess a common sea. Today this space is fraught with tension and striated by exclusive zones that regulate mercantile flows, and national boundaries are patrolled with heightened military vigilance. The common sea is now funnelled into separate zones for immigrants, tourists, fishermen and soldiers.

As refugees attempt to leave one place and enter another they become part of bridged space that includes both places. This ambiguous bridge does not sit comfortably within the ever-narrowing administrative categories of civic entitlement and is increasingly being weakened by the undermining of the existing international laws on human rights. In a variety of ways globalization collapses old distances as it produces new intimacies, compels new platforms of convergence but also bypasses obsolete stations, yet for all the experimentation between internal and external forces there is an increasing effort to regulate flows into the antagonistic logic of capital and exclusive categories of cultural identity.

*Waiting for the Barbarians*
Just over a hundred years ago Contantin Cavafy wrote the poem “Waiting for the Barbarians”. Cavafy received a classical education in England and lived in the cosmopolitan merchant quarters of Alexandria. He may have had some premonition of the expulsion of foreigners, but he was deeply aware of the general sense of unease in the city. In ancient Greece the mark of the barbarian was linguistic. Greeks considered their language to be the only sign of a civilized human. All other tongues were indistinguishable to them. They could hear sounds but to their ears they were no different to the bar-bar-bar bleating noises made by animals. Of course, barbarians could be admitted inside, once they learnt to speak Greek. Nevertheless the barbarians that remained outside were always something to be feared. How could you negotiate if there is no language? What do they want? If not to destroy our precious civilization, then their aim must be to exploit our goodwill? Cavafy describes the foreboding that precedes an invasion. He reveals how the internal fears are spread by the rumour and that this provokes a panic. There is a dread of devastation. In this state of alert the city to braces itself for the worst. However, he does not end his poem with an apocalypse. On the contrary there is an ironic twist.

Night is here but the barbarians
Have not come
And some people arrived from the borders,
And said that there are no longer any barbarians.
And now what shall become of us without any barbarians?
Those people were some kind of solution.

The people had come together for defence, they were ready for a fight, and then, after all the waiting, there in silence, nothing happens: neither conquest nor defeat. The problem vanished. You would expect Cavafy to follow this realization with the exhalation of relief. But he intimates that something else has happened. The city had become dependent on the barbarians. If not addicted to the fear that they inspire, at least affirmed by the desperate stance of defensive hostility.
The barbarians had served a purpose. They helped by bringing a focus into the city. By closing up the city, needs could be simplified, loyalties resolved and identities separated. “Those people” were indeed “some kind of solution”. The barbarian could be seen as a mirror of the internal fears. We need them to see ourselves. However, this kind of narcissism is also a form of self-seduction. While waiting for the barbarians we created a mirror that not only reflects our fears, but also deflects a deeper encounter with our self. In the state of defensive preparedness against the barbarian, there is already the beginning of violence towards the self. The mirror is very opaque before this wound. With the barbarians outside it is convenient to avoid asking the question: is the barbarian already inside us?

In the context of refugees and global terror, it is both easier and harder to see power as multi-directional. The ambient fears of global terror suggest that the faceless terrorist could be anywhere. However, while we realise refugees also utilise complex information networks and transportation systems, we still tend to think of them as passive victims caught in the vice of persecution and exploitation. They are stuck in a no-mans-land. Dropped into a lawless void, blocked from returning home by fear of persecution. When there is a sympathetic image of the refugee, it is no longer an image of the homeless drifter, but a trapped person, unable to go either forward or back. The image of refugees held in detention, cowed by over-sized and heavily armed guards, their movements being recorded by elaborate surveillance technologies, confirms that the state is in control. The reality is more complex. The refugee knows of the state’s power to exclude, but also maintains faith in his or her capacity to gain entry.

After September 11, the violent impact of the hijacked planes and the repeated screenings of their explosive consequences did little to undo US hegemony – but it produced an audacious image of the “implacable hatred” of its enemies and an equally perplexing revelation of vulnerability. A vertical city that accommodated over 150,000 workers and visitors daily was reduced to a few tortured girders and a pile of smouldering rubble. Most subsequent commentaries and editorials repeated the line that these events marked a ‘clash of civilizations’: a dreadful illustration of the perversity of tyranny and the
precariousness of contemporary life. However, it had nothing to do with civilization. When civilizations encounter difference they do not clash, but search out new avenues for dialogue and negotiation.
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