SPATIAL AESTHETICS
FOR VICTORIA LYNN
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What is the place of art today? This book explores the new processes, contexts and relations through which contemporary art is produced. It traces the complex patterns of cultural exchange and the diverse forms of social interaction that inspire artists. At a time when the contradictions of globalization are becoming more visible and new local forms of attachment are being spliced with diverse influences, it is necessary to rethink the ways we connect with others. This process of connection is central to our understanding of art. Romantic and nationalist categories that emphasized either the supreme creative genius of the artist’s ego, or the unique distillation of cultural values, no longer serve as useful models for interpreting the meaning of art. The flows and reference points that shape the aesthetic and political power of art exceed the boundaries of an individual and national identity.

Thinking about the place of art is not just a debate over the line that is drawn between local, national and global contexts. It also involves an examination of the structures that confer authority and value to art. In the transition from cathedral, to gallery and then to the streets of everyday life, it is not only the place but also the authority of art that has undergone radical transformation. The authority of art has moved from sacred to secular, and the production of art has blurred the boundary between the unique
object and the mass commodity. In many of the essays in this book I reflect on the role of photography in this transition. As Walter Benjamin observed, the aura of art has changed in the age of mass reproduction. Photography has exposed the ambivalence that is associated with the use of images in everyday life. Artists not only use popular techniques and situate their work in familiar contexts, they also raise questions about the proper place and value of art. They have disconnected it from the elevated sites of authority and brought it closer to experiences of ordinary people. The use of photography has been the primary agency through which art has been brought closer to home. This has also stimulated new doubts. Despite the greater proximity to images and access to the technologies of visual production, there is still a barrier that separates art from everyday life. In an age when the production of the object in art is being displaced by the initiation of experiences, the old questions of the value and meaning of art are no longer causes for snobbery or melancholia but a return to the bigger quests for identity and truth.

For many years I have had the privilege of working with artists from places as far apart as Finland and Australia. Without these connections I could not have witnessed the constellation of ideas in local clusters and the transformation that occurs as messages pass from one place to the next. This book owes a debt to many artists, writers and curators who encouraged the earlier versions of these essays. For the purpose of this publication they have been modified, but I hope the original ideas, which were found in conversation with other people, are still evident. In particular, I would like to thank Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir, Ross Sinclair, Roger Palmer, Jonathon Watkins, Dan Fleming, Charles Green, Lyndal Brown, Patrick Pound, Jorma Puranen, Phillip George, Helene Black, Eugenia Raskopoulou, Polixeni Papapetrou, Lucy Orta, Erika Tan, Nick Tsoutas, Tony Bond, Carlos Capelan and Charles Esche. Lois McNay, while walking along the beach in Brighton, pointed out the broader significance of the concept of
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