Contemporary Art: The Key Issues

Art, philosophy and politics in the context of contemporary cultural production.

Dissertation

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(by dissertation and creative work).

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See "Exhibition: MELBOURNE - MODERNE" document

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Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) This thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD.
(ii) Due acknowledgment has been made in the text to all other material used.
(iii) The thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices as approved by the RHD Committee.

Signed;

Gary C. Willis
Abstract

This submission comes in two parts; the written dissertation, Contemporary Art: The Key Issues, and the exhibition Melbourne—Moderne. When taken together they present a discourse on the conditions facing contemporary art practice and one artist’s response to these conditions in the context of Melbourne 2003-2007.

1. Dissertation; Contemporary Art: The Key Issues.

This research has been impelled by a personal need to unravel the confusing conditions of contemporary art. Contemporary art can come in a myriad of different forms, however most historical and twentieth century theories of art now prove irrelevant to contemporary art production. Many contemporary artists, curators and theorists argue the ‘concept of art’ is superfluous to the political role which falls to contemporary art. The question this raises for the prospective student of contemporary art practice becomes; what relevance is the study of art now?

This research examines the problem from the broadest perspectives looking at concepts of canon, contemporary theoretical and curatorial directives as well as the political and economic conditions determining contemporary art production. Concurrently, it turns to philosophy to trace the etymology of art in a bid to locate the linguistic parameters of the concept. Eventually it draws a significant parallel between the most contemporary notions of art’s political responsibility and the most ancient conception of art’s function.

It argues that art’s role is to open up new cultural spaces and enable new ways of ‘Being’, although art’s primarily subjective motives are bound by the objective conditions of social knowledge and language. We could say that art practice illuminates gaps in knowledge and institutes its understandings through a performative act of language. Significantly, these criteria bear remarkable likeness to the ‘contribution to knowledge’ conventions common to all public funding criterion. However these criteria are secondary to art’s instinctive objectives. Where art differs from other disciplines is in its existential conception of time, its instinctive methodology and its subjective motive. The performative act of art serves to open an existential way forward for the artist, in light of a subjective conception of truth which is capable of establishing a resonance within the broader social context.
The problem facing art practice is that within the discursive field that constitutes contemporary art, ‘the concept of art’ is becoming irrelevant. Aesthetic practices are being displaced by ethical public production and contemporary art practice is no longer determined by art’s historical conventions and disciplines. The history of art in general and the history of twentieth century modernism in particular, now prove unreliable platforms for the study of art practice. Since the sixties art’s boundaries have been extended to embrace the broadest spectrum of cultural activities and knowledge production disciplines; new technologies abound.

However, this exponential growth in the reach of art’s umbrella has brought with it new limits. Faced with the glut of cultural practices which now vie for representation, contemporary arts institutions rationalise funding in terms of their own political objectives and ethical responsibilities. It is within this politically determined field that art’s historical conventions now find themselves marginalised. Art’s traditional materials have been replaced by mass-media technologies, haptic modes of production have been displaced by more rigorous research methodologies and individual subjectivities are secondary to collaborative cultural production.

For those philosophers who read the ancient Greeks, there is a clear demarcation between the production of culture and the production of art. Culture is determined as the community production of a better future, while art is an individual intervention in the hegemonic thrust of culture, to bring existential truth to light. Art’s function is to keep culture open to existential knowledge and generational change. At a time when historical conceptions of art begin to fail, this pivotal difference between art and culture could prove useful.

2. The Exhibition; MELBOURNE - MODERNE

Melbourne — Moderne consists of a series of large oil paintings set to demonstrate painting’s capacity to reflect upon a gap in knowledge, raise issue and engage a broad audience at a time when the practice of painting is widely discounted as inappropriate to the political objectives of contemporary art.

These paintings establish a local vocabulary of architectural and artistic reference to align neo-liberal ambition and rising class divisions, with the preconditions of terrorism. Melbourne — Moderne is layered with reference to both art and popular culture and concern the ‘cinematic blossoming’ of all the aspirational classes might desire of sociability. Specifically referencing Marcel Duchamp’s master work, The
CONTEMPORARY ART: THE KEY ISSUES.

*Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), these paintings raise the spectre of the ‘the bride’ as a metaphor for the goal of artistic ambition, the temple of art and culture, the National Gallery of Victoria. The references contained in ‘The Batchelor’ painting set the frame for discourse in terms of *Laocoön*, in this case an older Laocoön, which signals a discourse with Clement Greenberg's essay on the limits of poetry in painting *Toward a Newer Laocoön*, and equally a discourse with the original *Laocoön*, the Greek marble sculpture by Hegesandros, Athanedoros, and Polydoros; circa 150-175 B.C.

*Laocoön* is the sculpture of the sons of Laocoön who were devoured by Sea Serpents sent by Poisidon to avert their warning regarding the Trojan horse. Robert Graves suggests the snakes were sent to cleanse the boy's ears to grace them with the power of prophetic vision.\(^1\) In this contemporary world where the Macheavellian art of corporate war is backed by the law and their agents, the war of the gods becomes a battle of ideologies, a battle of wills and wits, in a world of Spy Vs Spy during a time global of terror.

In Duchampian terms, *TheBachelor’s* impotent game becomes to take shots at 'The Bride'. In this regard *Toward an Older Laocoon* sets up the conditions of the ‘first person shooter’, common to military, game and popular cultures alike, to confront the viewer with the warning echoed in the film *The Matrix* (1999 - 2003); who is responsible for these terms of total war? Ambition engenders the conditions of alienation which economic systems exploit, binding individual production to the generation of an endless future. Herein is the difference between art and culture. Culture is bound to the production of social futures, while art defaults to engender an existential truth.

*Melbourne — Moderne* cites an artistic instinct within the architectural of landscape of civic ambition to engender the paradox faced by the character of 'Neo' from *The Matrix*. Culture becomes a self-generating spectacle which alienates artist instinct and masks the existential conditions of 'Being'. Ambition engenders division which leads to death and destruction.

This essentially post-colonial project constructs a uniquely Melbourne genre, steeped in reference to Melbourne's artistic and architectural legacy, to localise questions of

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cultural identity and marginality, in the context of the globalism and the war on terror. In this regard *Melbourne — Moderne* offers its contribution to knowledge.
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see ‘Exhibition’ document
Introduction


This thesis constitutes two parts:

A — The written dissertation; Contemporary Art: The Key Issues

Contemporary Art: The Key Issues, comprises four chapters, The Issue of Art; The Issue of the Artist; The Issue of the Artist’s Subject; The Issue of the Artist’s Language.

B — The exhibition; ‘Melbourne — Moderne’

‘Melbourne — Moderne’ becomes effectively the final chapter; The Issue of Painting. This suite of paintings comprises a series of four large oils exhibited at the Maroondah Art Gallery from Thursday 22nd February — Saturday 10th March 2007.

Preamble

This thesis has been produced by a post-conceptual Australian painter at a time of deep questioning and relative disillusion. However despite my own commitment to the practice of painting, this dissertation scarcely mentions The Issue of Painting. Given time constraints and word limits, any discussion of issues specific to studio-based practice have proved beyond the scope of this thesis. The paintings themselves stand for the riddle which befuddles the practice of painting now. Whatever discourse they represent is contained by the paintings themselves.

The dissertation argues that contemporary art is a knowledge-driven project. Regardless of which language, technology or media and artist choses, their production is quantified in terms of three basic criteria; locating the gap in the knowledge, producing new social spaces and contributing to public knowledge structures. While there are many ways of fulfilling these criteria, the methodologies of twentieth-century art are irrelevant to the discourses determining contemporary art. The differences between art and other research methodologies have become particularly evident in the process of working between this dissertation and this series of paintings concurrently.

The academic objectives of a written thesis and the artistic objectives of public exhibition are profoundly different cannot and be conflated. Working on these very different projects concurrently has liberated each practice to address the demands of its own form directly. This has transformed an exegesis in support of a studio practice, into a thesis which might appear to bear little relation to the studio work. The thesis does not address the issue of painting, much less reveal the praxical processes of my studio production, rather it is concerned with the broader discourses and socio-economic forces currently determining art practice.

The written thesis does not advocate any specific art practice; rather it is concerned with the abstract of the artist's function. It insists that an artist's fluency with their own language system is critical to any art practice, contemporary or otherwise. This endorsement of an artist's language as central to art practice stands in direct contrast to the medium-specific discourses of high-modernism and the post-medium discourses of post-modernism alike. While the written dissertation has entailed an objective research methodology, the paintings have been engendered by subjective processes of building image on canvas through the haptic use of paint chemistry.

Of course there have been crossovers between the intuitive and research methodologies specific to each discipline. Both theory and practice were produced
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concurrently, during a time when the global war on terror precipitated many concerns regarding marginality. Both the artistic and academic projects share post-colonial concerns with the implications of neo-liberal globalism and human rights. What the text and the paintings contain belong respectively to each discipline. The paintings have been constructed within a Melbourne-specific genre, which could be called ‘Post-Neo-Popism’. They deconstruct ‘the conditions of contemporaneity’ through social-political and artistic code. They represent one artist’s response to the globalized conditions of living in Melbourne 2003-2007. The discourse contained by the paintings belongs to the paintings themselves. Despite their subjective origins, these paintings are intended to speak to the conditions of contemporaneity.

The written dissertation is as follows:

0.1 The aim

The aim of this research project has been to clarify the artist’s role at a time when there is considerable confusion regarding both contemporary art’s function and methodology. The question facing this dissertation concerns the artist’s role when anything is possible but, as Giorgio Agamben points out, the artworld appears to have aligned itself with ‘not art’ in the art — not art’ dichotomy?3 This question has lead to a re-evaluation of the concept of art.

This research reveals the basic conceptual platform underpinning the education of art practice has been destabilised. Art can take any form and now exudes from every quarter of society. Contemporary curators are now faced with a glut of artists and the endless re-run of every conceivable genre.4 However despite art’s ‘anything goes’ public profile, its historical trajectory is a politically determined teleology.

This research considers a wide range of contemporary curatorial and philosophic perspectives on the etymological, historical, political and socio-economic parameters determining contemporary artistic practice. The determining social, economic and political conditions of contemporary art have been revealed through the

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interrogation of four key issues. These are; The Issue of Art, The Issue of the Artist, The Issue of the Artist’s Subject and The Issue of the Artist’s Language.

0.2 The proposition

The argument contained within this dissertation pivots on the issue of language. The significance of the artist’s language can be easily understood in terms of the post-colonial research project now determining contemporary art’s institutional production, where artistic projects are subject to the ‘contribution to knowledge’ clause that determines most public production. It is exactly within this ethically determined knowledge-driven arena that the aesthetic discourses of art find themselves marginalised. The lessons of conceptual art have been absorbed by both popular and political cultures alike. The role that contemporary art is now called upon to perform can be drawn from a broad spectrum of disciplines. However, within the ‘art — not art’ dichotomy, the more reliable methodologies of ‘not art’ are now preferred.

In deconstructing these issues Jacques Rancière offers three models for consideration; ‘the imaginative realm of the true arts’, ‘the aesthetic régime of modernism’ and the ‘political régime of images’. This thesis explores all three options to conclude that the concept of art is no longer critical to that production which is presented as art. Many theorists and curators question the value of the concept of art; clearly artists can be drawn from a wide range of cultural practices. These are the conditions which raise question regarding the value of the concept of art and the Hegelian question regarding what was art before the concept became obsolete.

In this light we turn to first to the philosophy of art. This research traces etymology of art from the pre-Socratic myths of the ancient Greeks to Hegel and Nietzsche through to Heidegger. What develops is a surprisingly stable conception of art’s role in relation to culture and society. Most significantly this conception of art maintains its consistency through our readings of more contemporary philosophers such as Hans Georg Gadamer and Giorgio Agamben.

According to these philosophers, the act of art is ultimately an act of language which intervenes in the compulsive social discourse which is preoccupied with the production of future, to assert the existential truth of its own poiêsis. The terms of art’s performative action are developed through the philosophic act of poeticizing;
not to be confused with writing poetry, rather, poeticizing is the originating institution of all philosophic knowledge. The artist’s raison d’être is gleaned through subjective experience although artistic production presents within a public language of form. Art’s role is to usher subjective insight into public language. However more than a subjective expression, art’s objective is to speak to the truth of the ‘Being’. In this way art reveals the gap in the knowledge and offers a way forward; as such art can be understood as an epistemology.

However it would be a mistake to imagine that art can be substituted by any ratiocinatic epistemology. Art’s capacity to notate the gap in the knowledge is not what determines art’s form. Art is produced to open up a social space, to enable another way of seeing, another way of being. Its capacity to illuminate the gap in the knowledge is a by product of art’s greater social agendas which reach their limit in the institution of public knowledge. Art’s primary objective is to deflect social obligation and reflect the truth of its own condition, which it does despite the disregard of the broader culture. From this perspective we can understand that art practice defines itself in relation to a couple of key co-ordinates: Firstly, art’s objective is to break the spell of hegemonic social moirés, which it does through a performative act of language. Secondly, art must be capable of engaging a broader culture in its understandings; this means arts knowledge must be affective. In this regard we understand that the concept of language is pivotal to art practice. The significance of the role of knowledge and thus language to art practice has been greatly undervalued by both high-modernist and post-modernist discourses alike.

What comes to light within this research is an alignment between philosophy’s most resilient conceptions of art’s function and contemporary theory’s conceptions of art’s public responsibility. Contemporary art can take any form it likes but ultimately the artist’s objective is to bring knowledge into being. In this regard we can understand art as epistemology. Although art shares the ‘contribution to knowledge’ criteria common to all epistemologies, art defines itself in terms of a profoundly different methodology. The methodology clearly discernable from this philosophic lineage differentiates ‘art’ practice from other disciplines, without committing art to narrow parameters of medium, technology or culture specific discourses common to twentieth century art. This reading has the capacity to stabilize the discourse determining contemporary art practice at a time when most twentieth century conceptions of art practice now prove unreliable.
0.3 The problem

Let us imagine that a friend came to you for advice; their son or daughter wants to become an artist. They want to know what their child has to study in order to become a visual artist of the future. What would you suggest?

To put a frame around this problem; consider the following three comments:
Okwui Enwezor, the 2002 director of the world’s most significant contemporary art curatorial signifier, *Documenta11*, says there is no point in looking to art history for answers now, ‘we must look to contemporary politics and the global issues of post-colonial culture’.5 Isabel Carlos, the director of the 2004 Sydney Biennale, suggests that ‘it is better not to know about historic artistic production’. She recommends it would be better to have a background in science.6 Jean Christophe Armann the director of the Frankfurt Museum für Kunst Moderne believes, ‘art has lost its relevance to the broader culture, the cutting edge of contemporary creativity is to be found in the world of advertising, fashion and photography’.7 Perhaps your friend’s son or daughter would be better advised to study politics, computer engineering, film or fashion; that is to choose a discipline which has been extended to embrace artistic concepts but also provides a stable discipline for creative production.

Bluntly put, art education is facing a crisis. As we will demonstrate, within the context of contemporary cultural production, most historical art methodologies have become secondary to the political objectives contemporary art now serves. Art’s historical often haptic, processes are being displaced by rational research methodologies just as art’s traditional technologies have already been displaced by social strategies. Although art’s institutions remain central to contemporary cultural production, within the academically driven research project of contemporary art the concept of art faces obsolescence.

This situation represents a serious problem for the prospective art student who can no longer maintain confidence in the value of their study; answers to the problems facing art practice are not to be found within art’s historical methodologies. This is not just the decree of the radical avant-garde, this is the pronouncement of many

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7 Bruce James, *Contemporary Art Is Dead*” Radio National”, 2001 [accessed].
leading artists, curators, theorists and institutions alike. Whether individual artists accept the complexity of the predicament they now face or not, the ground swell of doubt regarding art's basic premise is already on the rise.

Bound by the pressures of neo-liberal economics, commodity culture and global politics, art's institutional networks now consider the role of art in light of art's socio-political obligations to economic opportunity and good governance. These developments have had a profound effect on what is presented as contemporary art through the hegemonic networks of the biennale circuits and the museum system alike. Ethical practices are privileged within artistic networks in a bid to shed light on complex social issues; artists are facilitated to grace the political change.

It is in this context that we recognise that the visual arts are being subsumed into the broader discipline of visual literacy, where mass-media technologies, political and marketing strategies become the generic tools common to a wide range of practices. As the school of art is brought under the academic umbrella of the university system, where all disciplines are rationalised in terms of their contribution to knowledge, the discipline of art is faces a major question. Does the practice of art have a discipline worthy of sustaining as an independent study? In light of this concern we begin to understand Arthur Danto's Hegelian concern that what he had understood as art may well be coming to the end of its era.

While this thesis acknowledges many twentieth century conceptions of art practice are irrelevant to contemporary cultural demands, it disagrees with the idea that art has come to its end. More importantly it argues that the concept of art has a very well defined parameter, one worthy of further investigation.

Conceptually, art retains its leverage exactly because society is defined by a reliably stable parameter. Society remains bound by a compulsive drive toward the future, determined by its preoccupations with security, opportunity and advantage. The subjective vision which defines both the artist and work of art remains marginalised within the social paradigm, along with all other subjectivities. Art must intervene in the social preoccupation with future in order to bring subjective insight into public language. This can only happen if art is capable of communicating its knowledge through objective means. Although this is not to say art can be defined simply as communication, we do conclude that the performative act of art is in effect, an act of language which speaks to the truth of beings.

However, this conception of art as a performative act of language is at odds with both high-formalist discourses of modernism and has been underestimated by the
post-medium discourses of post-modernism. At a time when modernist conceptions of art have been deemed redundant and post-modern conceptions of art have lead many artists to the ‘anything whatever problem’, hopping from one idea to another only to find their practices eclipsed by more pragmatic epistemologies, this thesis offers a way forward. The Graeco-German conception of art returns art’s discourse to the issues of epistemology and methodology through the production of language, without forsaking the concept of art. This reading offers a stable platform for the concept of art, worthy of consideration at a time when many conceptions of art prove to be either ‘not art’ or unreliable vehicles.

0.4 The scope

This research is atypical in that it swings between extremes, rather than concentrating on the consistencies of any particular genre. It exemplifies the extraordinary range of possibilities which have confronted the practicing artist ever since the late 1960s when art broke all its boundaries and extended the concept of art into the widest fields of innovative practice. For many theorists, curators and artists alike the differentiation of disciplines is not worth discussing. Contemporary artists construct practices from the broadest spectrum of creative endeavour; sophisticated modes of artistic practice now exude from the every quarter of society. It is this rapid expansion of the concept of art which has led to a crisis for the study of art in the specific sense. It is as if the centre of art has exploded like some supernova, sending its mîmes out into the universe, like some Trojan virus, leaving behind only a black hole from where the idea of art once radiated.

Given the extraordinary diversity of contemporary visual arts practices, I have sampled from a broad sweep of creative activities to present a series of loosely grouped case studies, from the most political to the most popular, in a bid to exemplify the discursive trajectory of contemporary art practice. However, there remain many creative practices inadequately represented. A short list could begin with music, dance, painting and end with bio-chemistry, robotics and cosmetic surgery. Given the limited scale of this dissertation it has not been impossible to cover all contingencies. Besides, this thesis is not concerned with charting art’s projection into other disciplines.

Rather, this dissertation is concerned with art’s centralising concerns. In this respect this thesis turns to the history of aesthetic philosophy in a bid to locate the linguistic axis on which philosophy conceived the idea of art. This study has extended from
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pre-Socratic myths to the work of Plato and Aristotle through to Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger and onto Gadamer, Agamben and Rancière. It remains a worthy project to extend this interrogation into the stability of this model through the work of a wider range of modern and post-modern philosophers. These could include Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Rudiger Bubner, Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Hannah Arendt, Umberto Eco, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Elizabeth Grosz and others. However, given the limits of time and word count, this project remains just that; a project worthy of future research.

Equally, it has been beyond the scope of this thesis to chart every contingency within the discursive arena of popular or political arts. Rather, I have exemplified the issues facing art in a series of case studies. These exemplars serve to represent the socio-economic conditions which determine what rises to public attention. Although there are many curatorial preferences within contemporary art, they are not all equal. Contemporary political concerns are considered in light of the implications of the developing significance of biennale cultures. Unfortunately, my word count has not enabled me to address the diversity of curatorial models on offer. I have privileged a close reading of Okwui Enwezor’s 2002 *Documenta11* and his curatorial claims for the broader project of the new avant-garde. This collaborative post-colonial curatorial project offers one template for art’s role in the future. Many of the issues raised by Enwezor were underlined by Nikos Papastergiadis in his summation of the *Empires, Ruins and Networks* conference presented by the Australia Council in 2004.  

In my readings of twentieth-century modernism I have not tried to retrace the development of every ‘ism’ through the reactive ‘endgame’ of twentieth century. This extensive history has been summarised by any number of historians and theorists. I have chosen Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yves Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh’s *Art Since 1900*, Ernst Gombrich’s *The Preference for the Primitive* and Bernard Smith’s *Modernism’s History* to overview this period. Smith argues the politically articulate modes of early modernism were marginalised in the twentieth century drift toward high-formalism. In this regard the theoretical work of Clement Greenberg warranted special attention. More critically, the tactical work of Marcel

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Duchamp is pivotal in any discussion of the post-medium conditions of contemporaneity.

Despite the significance of the concept of language in the production of poïëtic and post-colonial knowledge, any concern with the specifics of language, medium or genre-specific issues such as the grammar of poetry, the material parameters of painting, the software limits of digital-media arts or the corporeal constraints of body art, also prove beyond the scope of this thesis. The objective has been to locate a conceptual foundation for the practice of art without dwelling on the medium-specific discourses common to many twentieth century practices.

0.5 The overview

This dissertation addresses the key questions concerning the practice of contemporary art through a series of critical frameworks, namely; The Issue of Art; The Issue of The Artist; The Issue of The Artist’s Subject; and The Issue of the Artist’s Language.

The structure of each of these four chapters differs only slightly; each chapter divides into three sections. Each chapter doubles back and forth between political and popular conceptions of contemporary art practice in a bid to plot the expectations which determine art’s public profile. While some chapters interrogate individual production, others digress into broader historical accounts of the developments and evolution of the theoretical and political conditions which have precipitated these shifts in a bid to locate fault lines and gaps in the knowledge. All chapters devote one third of their discourse to the ongoing consideration of the philosophic conceptions of art’s function and methodology.

The Issue of Art

This chapter examines the institutional conditions determining contemporary art. The art world is witnessing the exponential growth in its global circuits, numbers of artists, and range of art practices. However this radical expansion has led to the socio-political rationalization of the arts.

These developments can be understood in terms of the influence of the biennale circuits which not only serve specific socio-political agendas but also establish the public profiles of the artists presented in these global networks. Many curators and theorists in these circuits argue that the concept of art is irrelevant to the public
production that art serves. Aesthetic preoccupations have been displaced by ethical concerns with post-colonial politics. These shifts in contemporary art’s political focus are determined by changes in public funding priorities, initiated by government arts policies.

This chapter looks closely at the curatorial preferences of Documenta 11, the most important curatorial signifier of the times. Enwezor proposes a collaborative curatorial model for the 'new avant-garde' who's objective becomes to engage art in direct political action, developing a realistic model of the current state of global conditions, changing arts funding preferences to support socio-political strategies and knowledge-based-disciplines. Here we are given to ask, what does art have to do with this model? Here we locate the crux of the problem facing the study of art practice in the question; what constitutes the basis of the discipline?

In this context we turn back, like Arthur Danto and Thierry De Duve, to ask the Hegelian question ‘what was art when it was a proper name?’10 This question leads us to reconsider the most archaic origins of art and the work of Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger, both keen scholars of the ancient Greeks. Nietzsche argues the duty of art falls to the last god- Dionysius. Art is revealed is a model of social protest where the role of art is defined in direct contrast to the hegemonic compulsions of culture. In Heidegger’s model, art is performed for the artist’s own enlightenment. Its objective is social change which can only be affected through a public act of language capable of speaking to a broader culture. Art engages a poiētic/mimētic pivot to prise open a space in the framework of convention. In this way Heidegger decentres the subjectivity of the artistic act relocating the challenge in the objectivity of public language.

Obvious parallels are drawn between Enwezor’s political objectives for art and the Graeco-German conception of art as a mode of social protest.

The Issue of the Artist

Before publishing his notorious Institutional Theory of Art in 1969, George Dickie presented a paper entitled The Myth of Aesthetic Attitude in 1964 which argued, the only way we can understand art is by paying close attention to its permanently

INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the dynamic function of the contemporary artist through a number of examples. Many of these hybrid practices have developed in response to political and popular opportunities. These examples serve to bring our attention to the economic conditions determining contemporary art practice.

Many arts funding organisations, such as the Jerwood - Art Angels for example, draw no distinction between popular and political practices rather they are interested in projects which are ‘capable of transforming the way we think and feel about the world we live in’. Just as high art has appropriated commercial art, so too has commercial art appropriated high art and there is no longer any point in drawing distinction between political and popular practices. A shortlist of the artists referenced in this chapter include; Michael Landy, Jens Haaning, Kendell Geers, Janice Kerbal, Jan De Cock, Vanessa Beecroft, Yinka Shonibare, Björk, Lars Von Triers, Mathew Barney, Leigh Bowery. The breadth of these practices serves to illuminate the dynamic social and political strategies now in effect by all artists alike. Although twentieth century manifestos of art have little relevance to these practices, significantly Heidegger’s conception of art’s performative role maintains its currency within many of these practices.

Eventually this chapter extends Heidegger’s thesis through a close reading of the work of one of Heidegger’s students; Hans-Georg Gadamer. What comes to light in Gadamer’s seminal work, Truth and Method, is a profound rethinking of the hermeneutic significance of language in the performative act of art and the production of poïêtic knowledge.

Gadamer advances a hermeneutic paradigm where the artist transforms their entire conceptual experience, all the artist knows, that is their entire platform of knowledge, in a bid to break with cultural patterning which compulsively betrays subjectivity into a dispassionate future. Art’s defining trope emerges as the artist’s need to bring the truth of their own being into radiance through a resistant act of language, capable of transforming the artist’s relationship with the world-at-large and vice versa. Art achieves this affect through the coupling of poïësis and mimêsis.

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and the re-ordering of the hierarchy of genres. What begins to emerge is the consistency of this philosophic model.

**The Issue of the Artist's Subject**

The third chapter interrogates the question concerning the artist's subject in relation to the aesthetics of modernism, the politics of post-modernism and the knowledge-based project of post-colonialism. It uses Jacques Rancière's three historical models to help differentiate the issues at stake. These are 'the imaginative project of the true arts', 'the aesthetic regime of modernism', and 'the ethical régime of images'.

Rancière asserts that 'the ethical régime of images' is not a mode of art practice but a simulacrum of art, politically produced for what he calls the 'distribution of the sensible'. The 'aesthetic régime of the modernism', he argues, sacrificed the language of art to the democratic surface of silence, effectively condemning the artist to the status of worker segregating them from those political beings that 'think and speak'. Only 'the imaginative project of the true arts' retains the language capacities and the artistic methodology capable of offer a way forward for artistic intervention public discourse. The 'poetic realm of the imagination' aspires to a condition of speech privileging conceptual knowledge and social affect over the mute phenomenology of presence. Rancière affirms the idea that art achieves its ends through the coupling of poiēsis and mimēsis and here we begin to recognise the persistence of philosophies model of art’s dynamic.

In reconsidering the issues at stake in the aesthetics of modernism I have abbreviated the codes of twentieth century art through the overviews presented by Ernst Gombrich, Bernard Smith, Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yves-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh. Formalist conceptions of artistic subject are contrasted them with post-colonial conceptions of political content, brought to light through a re-examination of Enwezor’s *Documenta11*. What becomes apparent is the profound difference between artistic, academic and political conceptions of content. These differences are exemplified in the differences between aesthetic and scientific epistemologies.

Terry Smith characterises the critical differences between artistic and other modes of knowledge production in terms of the differences between subjective production of a ‘world-picture’ and the objective production of a ‘global-overview’. These terms are differentiated by Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida who all insist that 'word-picture' does not refer to the geo-political nature of the planet. Derrida argues the Heideggerian concept of ‘the world’ must not be confused with the simplistic representation of ‘the earth’; ‘the earth obscures the world’ and leads the artist to
what Derrida calls ‘the massification of man, the pre-eminence of the mediocre and the destruction of the earth’.

Art represents a subjective truth but one which speaks to the truth of ‘the Beings of beings’ and seeks to institute its understanding within the objective frameworks of knowledge. The act of art transforms all the artist knows into a new code capable of opening up a new space within the framework of language; this is the function of the ‘world-picture’. The act of art is primarily an act of language.

The Issue of the Artist’s Language

This chapter begins with a close reading of Gadamer’s hermeneutic understanding of the role that language plays in art’s function. The limits of our understanding are signified by the limits of our language and vice versa. Gadamer’s conception bears resemblance to Wittgenstein’s conception of language, wherein every language system represents another view of the world. In modelling the way the work of art functions Gadamer presents the concept of the *sprachkrystall*, the crystalline structure of language which compels by virtue of its ability to reflect, intensify, refract and confound whatever knowledge is directed toward it. Art’s ultimate function is to bring the truth of the artist’s being into radiance however what differentiates art from other performative actions is the artist’s contribution to language. In their performative act the artist deconstructs language to institute their own understanding into its framework.

The centrality of language to Gadamer’s argument, raises the question of ‘post-medium’ art practices where, as Rosalind Krauss puts it, modernist notions of medium ‘have been buried like so much toxical waste’ and the artist has been able to ‘walk away into lexical freedom’. For philosophers such as Arthur Danto and Hans Belting it is exactly this lexical freedom which led to the confusion which has given rise to the trivialization of art practice and led to the philosophical disenfranchisement of art. Most critics cite Marcel Duchamp’s Readymade as seminal in the liberation of contemporary art into the anything goes conditions of conceptual art. This chapter argues that art history continues to misconstrue the significance of Duchamp’s Readymade. What is underestimated in critical readings of Duchamp is the function of language in his reconfiguration of cultural knowledge.

This chapter ends with a close reading of Giorgio Agamben’s treatise on the subject of art, *A Man without Content*, drawing out the consistencies between Agamben’s model and those of the Graeco-German lineage already discussed in earlier chapters. Although Agamben’s treatise on the socio-metric dynamics of art
reinforces the significance of subjectivity in the impulse to art, like Rancière, Gadamer and Heidegger, Agamben acknowledges poiēsis and the objectivity of language as central to any concept of art practice. What emerges is art as a conceptual activity where fluency with the social dynamics of knowledge is essential, this means language. The subjective act of art is deeply grounded in the objective knowledge implicit in language. Art seeks to reveal the truth of Being.

At a time when twentieth century art’s chequered history fails to offer a stable platform for the study of contemporary art practice, this thesis isolates the linguistic parameters of the concept of art and redefines the conceptual axis on which art pivots. In drawing the parallel between art's philosophical origins and its contemporary expectations, this dissertation reveals art addresses the same objectives as all cultural production however art achieves these ends through a profoundly different methodology to other epistemologies. Significantly this reading of the art's profound methodology of mimēsis and poiēsis could prove useful to other epistemological disciplines.
The Issue of Art

‘The true work of art offers us the gift of poiēsis; the uncanny production of presence, where the past and the future are both at stake and the act of being-in-the-world claims its proper meaning.’

Giorgio Agamben\textsuperscript{12}

1.0 Introduction

This chapter argues there is a direct link between the socio-political criteria which determine contemporary cultural production and the most ancient conceptions of art’s social function; in both cases art’s role is to contribute to cultural knowledge and engender new socio-political spaces.

However, there remain significant differences between the political obligations facing art practice and philosophic conceptions of art’s subjective power. While contemporary art would appear to be determined by neo-liberal market economics, in fact it is better understood a politically determined production. Most twentieth century modes of art practice have been abandoned by the institutionalised world of contemporary art to survive the market place, which is not to say they are beyond redemption by history. However, these conditions raise a question regarding what constitutes art practice now. How is a contemporary artist to understand their role? More exactly, how is contemporary art positioned by institutional canon? This research reveals contemporary art is a politically determined production which is institutionally produced to bring a wide range of knowledges to the community. This chapter demonstrates that contemporary art’s institutions have less concern with conceptions of art than notions of public responsibility. In this regard we understand contemporary art is driven by a couple of critical concerns; the generation of post-colonial global knowledge and production of new social spaces.

Although the canon of contemporary art is discursive, capable of embracing a wide spectrum of cultural and knowledge production disciplines, on close examination the political determinants of contemporary art reveal no critical interest in the

practice of art in its own right. These decentred conditions of contemporary art create a problem for the study of the practice of art. The problem is that the history of art no longer provides a stable platform for the study of art practice. This problem has a long history but it has been recently accelerated by a number of cultural forces; the expansion of the concept of art to include the widest range of creative and cultural activities, art's appropriation of mass media iconography and technologies, popular culture's appropriation of art's post-object strategies, the institutionalization of the project of the avant-garde, the influence of neo-liberal economic forces and the displacement of aesthetics with ethical concerns. It is in this context that the school of art faces a question regarding the future of its discipline. What the Latin–American art magazine ARTECONTEXTO identifies as, ‘the urgent need to reform the ways of conveying knowledge in both practical and theoretical terms in (art) schools and universities’.13

Many art historians and curators alike agree historical conceptions of art have become irrelevant to the social function which art’s institutions are now called upon to perform.14 Hans Belting reminds us that contemporary art is ‘post-histoire’, where any development of art from within its own discipline has become virtually impossible. He ascribes the problem to ‘the lack of a binding definition of art’; a problem which Rosalind Krauss reiterates as ‘lack of any coherent set of rules’.15 Krauss points out that between the reciprocal appropriations of art and advertising, our concept of culture has been expanded to a point where the very notion of the work of art has become ‘wholly problematic’.16 Thierry De Duve blames the ‘young wolves of opportunism’ for having erased the boundary between art and popular culture and asks what can the artist possibly do when everything has been done and all avant-gardes are now interchangeable?17 James Elkins is amongst those that question art history’s reticence in dealing with the large scale problems facing contemporary art. As Anna Sigridur Arnar points out in her introduction to Elkin's

recent publication, *Master Narratives and their Discontents*, the problem is that ‘art history is an activity that generates jobs and fills seats in classrooms’.\(^\text{18}\) For many artists and theorists alike, art education is a matter of economic necessity. Danto also believes that art has reached a post-historical period and raises a Hegelian question; is our concept of art exhausted? Danto argues, our museums, galleries, collectors, journals etc. all exist against the presumption of art’s independent future’.\(^\text{19}\)

However, while many theorists tailor the concept of art to facilitate the neo-liberal demands for ‘creative industry’, others see the concept of art as part of the problem facing contemporary culture. Mieke Bal and Nicholas Mirzoeff, argue that art history’s hold over visual education must be displaced by the broader concept of visual literacy; ‘to take visual culture as art history is to condemn it to the same failure (as art)’.\(^\text{20}\) The visual literacies, research methodologies and display technologies which provide the basis of contemporary art practice are no longer unique to art practice but are common to a wide range of disciplines. Okwui Enwezor, the director of *Documenta11* argues, there is no point in looking to art history for answers, ‘we must look to contemporary politics and the global issues of post-colonial culture’.\(^\text{21}\) In many curatorial circuits, what constitutes contemporary art has become a politically determined project, instrumentalised to illuminate or remediate socio-political problems. Some theorists, such as Mark Nash, argue that the concept of art is no longer a useful concept.\(^\text{22}\) These conditions have been accelerated by what Paul Taylor called ‘a culture of temporary culture’, sustained by political directives and public funding.\(^\text{23}\)

In this context we begin to understand why some argue contemporary art’s most significant parameter is institutional opportunity; without it the artist is doomed and art becomes a *non sequitur*. In this regard the most reliable way of understanding what constitutes contemporary art remains George Dickie’s *Institutional Theory of Art* (I.T.A.), which broadly translates to ‘art is, whatever the artworld says is art’. As
Dickie put it in 1974, ‘the only way we can understand what art is now is by paying close attention to art’s permanently changing landscape’. On close consideration, art’s contemporary landscape reveals that the concept of art has been destabilised within contemporary art practice leaving the practice of art without a defining discipline.

However it would be a mistake to imagine this is the end of art. Art’s institutions are currently in the midst of a period of exponential growth and doubtlessly this period will produce its own masters. Rather, the issue is as Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe puts it, the practice of art is no longer ‘predicated on the idea of art’. Contemporary art has become what Arthur Danto calls a ‘post-historical’ practice, that is, those activities which come after the end of our idea of art. The issue at stake in this discussion becomes; ‘Does the concept of art have any relevance to contemporary art practice?’ In light of this complex question we also must turn back to re-consider the Hegelian question which Danto also raised: What was art before it became the discursive production it is becoming today?

Michael Clark and Adam Geczy, in their recent publication *Reframing Art*, argue that ever since its inception into English language around the 13th century the concept of ‘art’ has been in a permanent state of flux. They argue the concept remains open to be redefined by our own times. However, while this may be true, both Danto and Belting both go to some lengths to point out there are limits to how far linguistic parameters of any concept can be stretched before words cease to have any value. Belting insists ‘the concept of art cannot be constantly re-invented’.

Any concern with the limits of language and return to the authority of the etymology of knowledge might suggest a structuralist pre-occupation with grand narrative. I argue this is not the case. In fact quite the contrary, for what is revealed in this etymological search is the dynamic pivot on which post-structuralist thinking founds its claim to truth.

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In my interrogation of the etymology of art, I have used the work of Jacques Derrida as a pointer, a referent, a guide. Derrida dates the origins of the concept of art to the ancient Greeks whose mythologies and philosophic discourses conceived the original value the concept.29 Derrida cites two texts critical to any discussion concerning art’s definitional parameters and significantly, proposes these texts contain ‘the west’s most comprehensive meditations on the essence of art’.30 Hegel’s Lectures on Aesthetics and Heidegger’s The Origin of the Work of Art. Heidegger’s text takes both its name and its conceptual lineage from Nietzsche’s The Birth of Tragedy.31 All three texts extend upon the pre-Socratic conceptions of art.

Nietzsche’s model of seasonal worship of the Dionysian ‘Goddess of Beauty’, the annual Carnivalé, precludes the possibility of change. Heidegger’s model turns on a resistant insistence that art’s function is to institute change. The act of art, by its very nature, seeks change. Like Nietzsche, Heidegger proposes that the role which falls to ‘art’ is profoundly different to the static role of ‘culture’. Unlike Nietzsche, ‘the role of art’ envisioned by Heidegger is to adjust the static nature of culture in line with the demands of generational and conceptual change. The authority which Heidegger assigns to the performative act of art is nothing less than the originating power of new truth, new knowledge and understanding. In this regard we understand Heidegger’s model is pivotal in any conception of art’s role in social change.

Despite the structuralist critique of any return to the grand narratives of the ancient Greeks, the work of art presents a riddle which retains the power to break through the frameworks of cultural tradition. Although the work of art first appears as an enigmatic affront to the logic of the dominant culture, once art’s riddle has been solved, the work of art ceases to be active and its knowledge merges into the body of cultural knowledge at large.

1.1 The state of art

Ibid. 34.
Ibid. 23.
Historically speaking art is currently in the midst of an unprecedented period of growth. If in the early 1970s the biennale circuit consisted of just four events, the Venice Biennale, the Sydney Biennale and the Saõ Paulo Biennale and Documenta at Kassel held every five years, in 2005 the art magazine Contemporary catalogued 80 biennales dotted about the globe; more recent estimates put the number at 104.\textsuperscript{32}

New museums are opening up everywhere. Consider the recent developments here in Melbourne, by way of a microcosm of global tendencies; the refurbishment of The National Gallery of Victoria (NGV); the recently completed Federation Square complex, with the NGV Australia and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI); the new Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), the new Melbourne Museum (MM); the new Immigration Museum (IM); renovations at the Ian Potter Gallery at Melbourne University and the recently opened extensions at Heidi Museum not to mention the spate of state and regional gallery developments, such as the Maroondah Art Gallery. On the macro-scale we witness the development of corporate conglomerates such as the Guggenheim and the Tate. The Guggenheim currently has a chain of 5 museums; Guggenheim New York, Guggenheim Venice, Guggenheim Berlin, Guggenheim Bilbao, and Guggenheim Las Vegas. The Tate has at least 4 museums Tate Modern, Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool, Tate St. Ives, with signs of interest in expanding into South-East Asia. Every province is either establishing or expanding their museum infra-structures into regional networks and linking them into a global grid.

However, this exponential expansion of arts infra-structures does not guarantee a future for art practice as we have known it; the role of the new museum is a highly contested brief; for many the concept of art is a minor consideration. Although each contemporary curator would have their own preferences for the representation of the cultural logic of early 21st century globalism, not all are concerned with the concept of art \textit{per se}. In an interview posted on the Australian Broadcasting Commission’s website as \textit{Contemporary Art is Dead} the director of the Frankfurt Museum Fur Kunst Moderne, Jean-Christophe Armann, expressed deep concerns about art’s ability to reflect the contemporary experience, believing that ‘photography and other mass mediated forms have now usurped the role of art in modern society’. As Armann explained it to Bruce James, ‘art has lost its relevance to the broader culture, the cutting edge of contemporary creativity is to be found in
the world of advertising, fashion and photography’, by way of example they discussed the Benetton ads which had been exhibited at the Frankfurt Museum Fur Kunst Moderne. While both Armann and James agreed on the significance of a painter such as Lucien Freud, Armann lamented that such traditional practices are now unlikely to get the curatorial support required to survive the contemporary climate.33

Benjamin Buchloh would probably agree with Armann. Buchloh acknowledges the conflation of art and the commercial cultures of ‘advertising, fashion and entertainment’, although he, like many, is uneasy about the neo-liberal forces currently shaping art’s public profile. However, Buchloh expresses a concern that as an art historian and critic he is ‘unable to offer the support required to sustain practices which stand outside these homogenising commercial forces’. Buchloh argues the quantitative expansion of the arts and ‘the extraordinary overproduction of artistic practices’ is not a desirable development. Unless artistic production is linked to ‘an agenda of new forms of political articulation through cultural means’ Buchloh is concerned that an art historian, such as himself, would be unable to ‘prevent their total marginalization’.34

Contemporary art practice is now being determined by powerful social, financial and political forces whose motivational concerns have little interest in artistic pre-occupations. The artistic discourses which fuelled the twentieth century are irrelevant to these discourses. In fact artists pose something of a problem for policy makers in these circuits. As Benjamin Buchloh puts it, ‘the artworld is more crowded than ever before marked by extraordinary over production, the simple multiplication of artistic practices and alternative spaces might not be desirable if is not linked to an actual agenda of new forms of political articulation through cultural means’.35 What survives as art now, must survive the economic and political climate facing contemporary art.

The museum’s role is changing. The Museum in Motion conference of 2004 described the situation thus; ‘the museum for contemporary art no longer functions as a repository for the art of the past, but as a dynamic workshop for the culture of

33 Bruce James, Contemporary Art Is Dead “Radio National”, 2001 [accessed].
34 Rosalind Krauss Hal Foster, Yves Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Art since 1900, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004). 673.
35 Ibid. 678.
the present’. The artist led discourses of the twentieth century are of no relevance to these circuits, the rules of artistic engagement have changed. Whether the financing of contemporary art stems from private or public sources, the executive end of the arts industry has taken the controlling hand in the production of a new cultural vision.

The report published for the 2005 Frieze Art Fair, entitled *European Cultural Policies 2015*, presents a disturbing vision of the public funding mechanisms controlling contemporary art in Europe. It concludes that by 2015 art will be a ‘completely instrumentalised’ production. European art is expected to be brought into the service of European Union’s cultural interests through the development of museums and arts centres as a popular leisure activity. On one hand art is assigned to the role of ‘entertainment’ and abandoned to survive the market place, on the other art has been taken up as a political imperative determined by state initiative.

The relationship between commercial and non-commercial art production is expected to become ‘porous’ as capital flow for artistic ideals comes under the control of government-led curatorial and commissioning programs. The report exemplifies this model in the European Union’s cultural funding for the 2000 *Frieze Art Fair*. The European Union participates in the commissioning program in exchange for support mechanisms through corporate and private funding networks. In this way support is directed to key artists, ‘unwanted market influences’ are curtailed, and art practice is developed in terms of ‘strictly regulated cultural policies’.

We can see these public/private partnerships in action in all the Biennale funding circuits. The 2006 Sydney Biennale, for example, lists its major funding partners as the Australian Government, the Australia Council, the N.S.W. State Government and the City of Sydney Council, who play a significant role in enabling the corporate support networks. These large-scale productions model the links between public and private funding networks which sustain and in fact determine the arts. The knock on effect of these politically determining forces must not be underestimated, since curatorial opportunities must be first sold to funding agencies which are

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38 Ibid. 8.
accountable to government initiatives. From the political perspective art is becoming 'a public knowledge generator', as Nicholas Bourriaud puts it, and art has become a useful instrument in 'a political tool box'.

In the 'Global Tendencies' roundtable discussions on large scale exhibition, Catherine David, the curator of Documenta X reminds us that the question is not about the artist, but the audience and, of course, the politics of arts funding agencies. 'The Dictatorship of the Audience' provided the sub-title of the 2002 Venice Biennale. By implication it would appear that the audience has become the controller of contemporary art, although Yinka Shonibare’s ironic quips about the 'dictatorship of the curator' come closer to the reality of the situation. The curator has become the director of a social drama in which some artists get to play a role.

In the director’s discussions on the subject of the 4th Berlin Biennale, Maurizio Catalan, Massimiliano Gioni and Ali Subotnik provide a window into how the more creative curators think about art in interview with Modern Painters. The short list of conceptual frameworks for the 2005 Biennale were listed as; 'A biennale without art', 'A biennale with objects that just look like art', 'A biennale without objects', 'A biennale with just sound'.

There are so many art practices out there now that the curator’s challenge is to differentiate what is useful to the museum and its broader cultures. Consider the ongoing debate concerning 'the death of painting' as an example. 'We do not want for paintings', Robert Storr the curator of the Museum of Modern Art, New York explains, 'nor do we want for first-rate painters', the issue is no longer about painting. Saskia Bos, the former director of one of Europe's most influential curatorial program at De Appel Foundation, and the director of 2nd Berlin Biennale argues, 'we must detonate the idea of the artist as genius working away in their studio creating works of great expression'. Bos' Berlin Biennale focused on works which connect with 'the other', engage in issues and have a social or participatory

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41 Ibid. review. 158.
character, works which have a concern, contribution or connectedness with the world outside, as well as a critique of the art system with all its 'layers and codes'.

In a close examination of Bos' 2003 Berlin Biennale we note pieces such as Surasi Kusalwong's *Happy Berlin* with its alluring offer of free massages to visitors; Alicia Framis' relaxing *Mini-bar* for women only, complete with 'male comforter'; Dan Peterman's *Bottle Cap Pasta* where in the context of a sociable kitchen installation Peterman serves his clunky pasta made from bottle caps left in the wake of the exhibition's social surge. However as Axel Lapp, writing for *Kunsttexte*, points out 'although such exhibits are undoubtedly engaging and fun for the opening crowd', 'they can leave you feeling like you are missing out on the art'. Bos' stated obligations are to the social responsibilities of public exhibition, the responsibility to the broader culture. Bos' Berlin Biennale was not an isolated instance of humanitarian engagement with the general public; curatorial events focussed on the cultural needs of their constituencies have been in ascendency as the following events exemplify:

*Culture After Catastrophe*; Three day conference of artists, writers, architects, lawyers, scholars, activists, political and community leaders, to consider how people re-build following catastrophe and tragedy. This project specifically looks at how the artist-in-residency programs have brought global perspective to lower Manhattan following the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001. Its artist-in-residency program produced a wide range of creative and intellectual projects; art installations, performances, participatory and interactive events as well as conference discussion papers and poster, postcard, book publications.

*The Pursuit of Happiness*; A poetic exhibition which offers a kaleidoscopic vision of the endeavour of ideal love, in the form of videos, installations, and projects of twenty artists relating to the shifting quest for happiness, security, and suburban safety. This project is initiated by the Utrecht City Council as the second stage in an urban development project which began with building of a new urban infra-

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structure. It is concerned with developing the conceptual software within the community who populate this new urban environment.47

ADAM; An international project committed to the realization of some 30 contemporary art projects within the situational context of everyday life in Amsterdam. Taking the dynamic infra-structure of the urban architectural environment as a starting point, ADAM utilises art as a situational cultural activity. New modes of artistic production explore notions of trans-national identity from a local level.48

These projects and many more in this vein manifest as a broad range of social, political, intellectual and cultural activities. They are predominantly ephemeral, site-specific and cross-disciplinary. They often utilise interactive installation strategies as well as mass-media technologies to engage the broadest demographic. They are often produced as a consequence of architectural and civic planning forums which are facilitated under curatorial directives where artists are employed to produce relevant creative content and quantifiable cultural effect. They are directed toward the development of community, civic and global awareness and designed to draw large-scale public participation and generate specific cultural outcomes as well as a feeling of social well-being amongst their participants. The outcomes of these artistic endeavours are not gauged in terms of the archival quality of the art produced, but rather the affect they have on their communities.

In her paper entitled ‘Don’t Look Back in Anger’, Rebecca Nesbitt details the British government’s interests in the culture industry as a platform for social inclusion and the reduction of crime; the improvement of mental health and social well-being; tourism and the commercial project of creative industry. She quotes the British Secretary for State, Culture, Media and Sport, acknowledging that ‘within this country we have avoided the more difficult task of investigating, questioning and celebrating what culture actually does of itself’.49 In 2003 the First Minister for Scotland argued ‘Arts for all can be a reality, a democratic right and an achievement of the early 21st century’. The Scottish Arts Council’s has, what Nesbitt refers to as, an ‘arms length’ policy in which support for individual artists is forfeited in preference for increased public participation in the arts. The Scottish Arts Council

specifically targets ‘minority groups, ethnic communities and disabled people’ in a bid to narrow perceived inequalities within society. We can glimpse a parody of this model being played out in the British television series 'Little Britain'.

Nesbitt’s paper references the anonymous ‘Cultural Policy Collective’ who argue such ‘social inclusion agendas’ are unable to reverse the damage wrought by neo-liberal deregulation of the work force. The way public arts funding has been subverted to remediate social problems does little more than put a veneer of self-esteem on what remains essentially under-paid work, not to mention alienating the commitment of the arts community. These developments have prompted ‘Cultural Policy Collective’, an unnamed group of artists and arts professionals disenfranchised by social inclusion policies, to publish a pamphlet which argues such ‘top-down social democratisation’ neither reforms existing institutional frameworks nor reverses the damage done by the processes of neo-liberal privatisation rather they serve only to ‘adapt its target audience to the increasingly deregulated labour market’.

Nesbitt’s paper goes on to detail the Scottish Arts Council’s 1991 statistics where 93% of arts funding was allocated to infra-structure and maintenance of visual arts core institutions ‘under the misapprehension that some of it will trickle down to artists through fees’. The same survey has 82% of Scottish artists earning less than £5,000 p.a. for their artwork with the remaining 28% earning nothing at all.

According to the 2003 issues paper commissioned by the Australian Federal Ministry for the Arts, The Myer Report, this imbalance between infra-structure expenditures and artists funding is apparent in Australia also. As we have already noted Australia has made major commitment to its arts infra-structures over the last ten years. According to the ‘The Myer Report’ the concept of ‘the artist’ includes; actors, dancers, performers, authors, designers, illustrators, journalists, television and radio presenters, media researchers, film and stage directors, camera people, musicians, DJs, photographers, visual artists, potters, and unspecified related professionals which includes make-up artists, lighting, grips, gaffers. Interestingly, during the period when Australia identified itself as ‘The Creative Nation’, from 1986-1996, the

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50  Scottish Art Corporate Plan 2004 referenced in, Ibid. 21.
51  ref; Cultural Policy Collective, Beyond Social Inclusion; Toward Social Democracy, 2004 Ibid. 22.
52  Bonnar Keenyside ‘Making their Mark’; An audit of Visual Art in Scotland. Ibid. 22-23.
average income of visual artists fell by 15% to less than 60% of the average national wage.\textsuperscript{53}

From Belgian perspective, Frederic Jacquermin notes that in the strict sense there is no 'Belgian Cultural Policy'. Most artists in Belgium could be described as self-funded or derive their incomes from various forms of social security, such as unemployment benefits.\textsuperscript{54} Jacquermin raises the concerns of the visual arts community in face of the dismantling of social security benefits available to artists, currently observable throughout Europe. He mentions the recent 'artist’s statute' which secures an income of approximately 1,000 Euros per month for artists, in recognition of the financial insecurity of their practice. However he is quick to point out that ‘the artist’ has to demonstrate an income of more than 16,000 Euros in the 12 months before eligibility; evaluation criteria which bear no relationship to an artist's income, rather refers to what is now called the 'creative industries'; by which Jacquermin means the advertising and media enterprises.\textsuperscript{55}

Jacquermin describes the situation facing artists as two-fold: on one hand there is the public wastage of those 'artists blinded by the romantic ideal that arts will always be a suffering yet protected area of the welfare state', on the other there is a limited cluster of artists held in place within the upper-income brackets for national identity to produce an culturally specific iconography for an international museum market. Jacquermin suggests that public authorities imagine that the market might come into bridge the gap left by the decaying social security system. However, he argues, this option is unlikely given the utilisation of cultural infra-structures for social remediation and artist re-education policies.

Jacquermin suggests that by 2015 artists will be fully integrated into public arts infra-structures whilst artists and artistic groups involved in 'self constitutive, critical knowledge or social awareness programs independent of government initiatives that have formerly prevailed within the arts' will be simply politically neutralised if not 'wiped out' completely. As the Belgian Minister for the Arts recently put it 'culture is the best weapon of mass-destruction against barbarism'. This process amounts to 'a suppression of cultural initiatives' and leads to what Jacquermin calls a 'reverse-


\textsuperscript{55} Ibid. 51.
engineered process’ that will lead the arts back into the conditions which existed prior to May 1968 ‘signalling the end of cultural democracy’.\textsuperscript{56} Jacquermin suggests that by 2015, when the Belgian city of Mons becomes \textit{European Cultural Capital of the Year}, the neo-liberal policies which have spawned the new cultural apparatus will have expelled most of the independent artists from the system, Jacquermin suggests that cultural backlashes are expected from artists and other precarious cultural collectives marginalised by public arts policies.\textsuperscript{57}

In his overview on the European Cultural Policy document, Raimund Minichbauer details the shifts between the European Union’s \textit{Culture 2000} program and their current \textit{Culture 2007} program, as ‘complimentary to support directed by the individual member states’ and ultimately directed at the target audience/market; the ‘European citizens’.\textsuperscript{58} Minichbauer ironically details two key initiatives established in support of the arts: Firstly, the French proposal to set up a funding mechanism for ‘the culture industry’, specifically earmarked for publishing and architecture. Secondly the project of European Cultural Heritage Commission, proposes the translation of Greek and Latin classical texts for broader public consumption.\textsuperscript{59} Support for contemporary art inevitably comes down to the issues of education, social programming and the promotion of new-media literacy with special emphasis on disadvantaged groups. Maria Lind’s introduction makes it clear that the artist-led discourses of the early twentieth century are a thing of the past.\textsuperscript{60}

Despite art’s exponentially expanding infra-structures, what becomes apparent in this discourse is the diminished potential of the individual artist. In this highly political context we begin to understand how art’s historical discourses have become marginalised as irrelevant to the political agendas contemporary art is now called upon to serve. What begins to emerge is an image of the arts under increasing state control as public arts infra-structures exercise their power to marginalise or suppress politically expedient practices, while conversely generating cultural practices which they consider politically affective. In this regard we acknowledge a profound shift from the largely aesthetics pre-occupations of

\textsuperscript{56} Ib. 56.  
\textsuperscript{57} Ib. 58.  
\textsuperscript{59} Ib. 93.  
twentieth century modernism to the increasingly politically-determined practices of contemporary art.

1.2 Ethics vs. aesthetics

Clearly, artists do not hold copyright on creativity. *Der mensch its das kreative wesen*; 'man is the creative being' Beuys would say, in summarising Novalis' line; 'every man should be an artist'. A number of governments have begun to harness this wisdom, shifting their cultures into creative modes of thinking to face the complex cultural conditions currently facing their constituencies. From 1986-96 the Australian government called itself the 'Creative Nation', in 2005 the German government was calling itself the 'Cultural Nation' while China nominated 2006 as 'The Year of Creativity'. One might suggest Joseph Beuys' political dreams have finally begun to bear fruit as governments now begin to take up the banner of creative nationhood. Creative cultures represent models of government where creativity is used to accelerate problem solving skills in face of uncertain global futures.

This shift toward the expansive concept of a creative culture is symptomatic of a shift, from the production of art as a commodity culture to art as an instrument for socio-political effect. The avant-garde has brought art practice into the service of a global vision where aesthetics have been displaced by ethics and commodity culture has been displaced by the social imperatives of politics. In this regard art has become an ephemeral production for an audience-based experience. Art's material status has become secondary to socio-political affect and artists are increasingly employed in government-led initiatives to workshop urban development projects in conjunction with town planners.

Nikos Papastergiadis, in the closing address of the *Empires, Ruins and Networks* conference (ACMI, Melbourne in 2004) spoke with the implicit authority of the sponsors of the conference; the Australia Council. Papastergiadis reminded us of

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Bernard Smith’s premonitions of Death of the Artist as Hero, before raising the problems entailed in the self-centred presumptions of the old avant-garde. Papastergiardis insisted that ‘artists can no longer afford to isolate themselves or presume that they are ahead of the changes that are occurring in the world’. Predicting an end to support for the egocentric idea of the artist he explained that ‘art is now formed within the collaborative processes of working with others and within everyday institutional structures’. Jonathan Lasker in the panel discussions for Art Forum on the ‘death of painting’ argues that the political conditions in which contemporary art is produced amount to the ‘death of art’. Papastergiardis suggested the ‘artist-in-residence’ will soon be superseded by the ‘concepts-in-residence’ where individual artists/professionals from a wide range of cultural backgrounds will be integrated into cross-disciplinary networks for the production of cultural and historical knowledge on predetermined subjects.

The collaborative concept is one which has been on the rise since at least the seventies. Charles Green details a history of the conceptual production of artistic identity in The Third Hand. In Green’s model contributing artists construct a fictional identity, a phantom artist, a disembodied body-corporate which individual artists sustain as a conceptual production beyond their identities as individuals. This concept of a disembodied performance identity is time-honoured tradition for writers, actors, drag artists, clowns, theatrical and dance ensembles, rock bands, orchestras, and film production units. Green details the evolution of this relatively recent history in his thesis referencing wide range of collaborative collectives including; The Yellow House, Ellis D. Fogg, Christo and Jeanne Claude, Gilbert and George, Marina and Ulay, Komar and Melamid, The Starn Twins, The Chapman Brothers, The Harrison’s, The Poirier’s, and could have easily included the synthetic identity productions of Warhol, Stelarc and Orlan.

At the same Empires, Ruins and Networks conference Ross Gibson, detailed a number of new cultural forms such as networked databases and complex interactive

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64 Bernard Smith, Death of the Artist as Hero (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988).
66 Nikos Papastergiardis, Empires, Ruins and Networks - Local Clusters and Trans-National Networks (ACMI, 2004).
68 Charles. Green, Thief in the Attic: Artistic Collaborations and Modified Identities in International Art after 1968.
environments. Gibson pointed out how such productions can only be produced in collaborative networks. The career trajectory of Simon Penny, provides an appropriate example. Penny is currently a cross-disciplinary professor of Electrical Engineering, Computer Science and Studio Art at University of California, Irvine. Penny develops experimental interactive 3D virtual reality (V.R.) environments through global networks. Penny began his career in Australia in the late 1970s as a performance artist, by the 1990s Penny had left Australia and instigated a cross-disciplinary program between the School of Art at Carnegie-Mellon University in Philadelphia and the NASA Space Program. Penny’s *Fugitive* project featured immersive V.R. software and was exhibited at ACMI in 2002, was produced through collaborative global networks and academic research laboratories in America and Germany. As with the work of so many artists, Penny’s work is dependent on the infra-structure support and patronage of his hosting institutions, without which his production would be inconceivable.

Whether Penny’s highly experimental projects are driven by concepts of art or not they provide an excellent example of the way the edge between science and art has feathered. Gibson maintains, ‘it is just not useful to be the artist any longer’. Gibson’s own technology base is not unique to art production; his projects process public records, such as the forensic files of the N.S.W. Police Department or the archives of the Australian Museum. Gibson believes what is expected from creative people now is a collaborative expertise and a capacity to work within the institutional context. Gibson advocated the advanced models of collective creative behaviour currently being workshopped within academic, military, industrial complex. Gibson argues that such models are more socially constructive than the anti-social behaviours of the old avant-garde.

Okwui Enwezor, the Artistic Director of *Documenta11*, put a different spin on the politics afoot in his opening address for the same *Empires, Ruins and Networks* conference, insisting artists must now work toward ‘the production of new cultural knowledge and social space’ through collaboration and collectivity. Although the

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72 Okwui Enwezor, “Crisis in Global Capital and the War on Culture”, *review Empires, Ruins and Networks* (2004).
nominal director of Documenta11, Enwezor headed a collaborative curatorial team which included Carlos Basualdo, Boris Goys, Molly Nesbit, Angelika Nollert, AbdouMaliq Simone, Sverker Sorlin, Mark Nash, Sarat Maharaj, Ute Meta Bauer and Jean Fisher. We only have to look at the ‘Five Platforms’ for the production of new cultural knowledge developed for Documenta11, to understand the breadth of their collaborative vision. These Five Platforms generated the conceptual basis for the final exhibition and established a profoundly different model to any previous Documenta. These Platforms consisted of cross-disciplinary forums held right across the globe, as a prelude to the final platform; the exhibition itself Documenta11 in Kassel, Germany.

Platform 1 - 2001, was held in Vienna and reconvened in Berlin following the Al Quaida attack on the World Trade Centre in New York 9/11 - 2001. ‘Democracy Unrealised’; ‘the tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule’.

Platform 2 - 2001 New Delhi - ‘Experiments with Truth; Transitional Justice and the Processes of Reconciliation’; ‘the last two decades have witnessed overwhelming incidence of genocide, gross human rights violations and a lexicon of state repression’.

Platform 3 - St. Lucia Caribbean - ‘Créolité and Creolization’; ‘in this cultural milieu, identity emerges from the world of colonial domination as a diversity of consciousness and linguistic forms’.

Platform 4 - 2002 Lagos, Nigeria - ‘Four African Cities Under Siege’; Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos. ‘the urban systems of four African cities have witnessed the collapse of economic systems and government infra-structures under population expansion and immigration from rural sectors’.

Platform 5 - 2002 Kassel Germany ‘Documenta11’ - The historical exhibition of Documenta was infused, with the social and artistic production ensuing form the four other platforms; ‘the objective being to represent the global city as the incarnation of post-national citizenship and a model of trans-nationality’.

74 Ockwui Enwezor, “Crisis in Global Capital and the War on Culture”, review Empires, Ruins and Networks (2004).
Each of these discursive platforms mapped circuits of contemporary knowledge through science, culture, ecology, sociology and the economic relationships between the institutional and temporal urban systems, crossing global networks to piece together a diagnostic picture of the world we now live in. The post-colonial project is an ethically determined project, what becomes apparent in Enwezor’s model is the centrality of the political discourse to which his curatorial project was committed.

*Documenta11* developed a wide range of experimental projects, some in the poorest cities of the world despite their socio-economic collapse and grinding poverty. Enwezor dismisses the idea that art must stay above politics; such an idea ‘misunderstands the driving impulse of creative production’. He redirects the critique toward the hegemonies of modernism, whose preoccupations with aesthetics were a by-product of the prosperity of colonialist economies. He is equally dismissive of postmodernism which, he argues, ‘did little more than contest the modernist economy on behalf of a marginally wider concept of artistic practice’. Post-colonialism, he argues, ‘seeks to displace the historical claims of both modernism and postmodernism, with the ethical demands of globalism’.

Enwezor sees his curatorial role as an extension of the avant-garde project of the twentieth century. ‘To understand the role of the avant-garde today’, he argues, ‘there is no point in looking at contemporary art, we must look to contemporary politics and the global issues of post-colonial culture’. Enwezor’s curatorial model has exerted a considerable influence on curatorial directives within the global biennale circuits, not least of all *Documenta11* which accepted Enwezor’s project as the basic platform for its undertaking. Such developments raise serious issues for artists bound to artistic conventions. Where curatorial projects are determined by political or pedagogical concerns, as Julian Stallabrass points out, many of the artists participating in these circuits have re-constructed art practice to cater to professional opportunities.

Francesco Bonami, the director of the 2002 Venice Biennale, estimates the *Documenta* budget at roughly twice that of the Venice Biennale. This puts the

76 Ibid. 45.
Documenta 11 budget at approximately 12 million euros. The cross-disciplinary cultural workshops which Documenta 11 staged around the globe were closed systems, ‘curated cultures’, whose workshops were constructed to produce specific cultural content. In this way we understand the artworld privileges key practices, disenfranchising all but those selected artists co-opted to perform specific pedagogical or political functions. Occasionally artists are discovered whose content is pertinent to the curatorial agenda, however most artists on these circuits are professionals who are paid to develop specific content in direct relation to the curatorial brief.

Looking at the Documenta 11 catalogue itself, we note a predominance of temporal display media and ephemera; digital video, performances, installations, lectures, public forums and networked event structures. Now that the exhibition is over, we can understand Documenta 11’s contribution to knowledge is not contained by its predominantly ephemeral artistic production but rather it is embodied within the catalogue itself; a hefty hard bound tome of some 680 pages in all, that Enwezor refers to as ‘the analytical toolkit’. The catalogue includes a 30 colour page photojournalistic introduction to the historical context of the exhibition in colour; 11 catalogue essays, covering a broad spectrum of issues, 100 pages of curatorial perspectives in all. It details the work of 200 artists; including a number of collaborative groups, with 400 colour pages; including 50 pages of artist’s writings and project proposals. The catalogue comes with a couple of extra supplements including 50 page publication of artist biographies. Then there are conference papers presented at the four foundation Platforms along with the Documenta 11 catalogue itself, which has instituted the most significant contribution to global knowledge. If Enwezor’s curatorial interventions are an expression of the logic of the new avant-garde we recognise that while artistic production has become increasingly ephemeralized, the curatorial production remains committed to the most conventional mode of knowledge production — publication.

Enwezor’s performance has already instituted itself as the basis for the next Documenta. The incoming director of Documenta XII, Roger Buergel and his co-curator Ruth Noak, outline their founding premise of their curatorial program; ‘The avant-garde has laid waste to the project of modernism, whose name has been

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80 Ibid.review.
sullied with the violence of colonialism’, in this context they pose a question; 'Is your modernity our antiquity?'.

Turning to Buergel and Noak’s joint curriculum vitae for clues to their position on this question it becomes clear that the issue of arts instrumentality within public policy is central to their joint project; The Government (Barcelona, Miami, Vienna, Rotterdam 2003 - 2005); The Subject and Power (Moscow 2001); Governmentality (Hanover 2000). Pre-exhibition press for Documenta XII tells us that Buergel and Noak have established twelve platforms in preparation for the 2007 Documenta.

What becomes obvious in this promotional preview of Documenta XII is the fact that the aesthetic concerns which were once central to art are no longer driving art’s critical curatorial or funding discourses. If the artist once determined the agendas for art practice based on collecting habits of a market, curators now model the ethical parameters of art's public discourses and debates. In this regard Enwezor’s advice to the artist is worthy of restating; ‘there is no point in looking to historical conceptions of art for direction now; the artist must address the political issues facing global culture directly’. In summary we can say the role which falls to post-colonial art now has become a politically determined project, the criterion which Enwezor uses for curatorial opportunity and public funding has become ‘the transformation of social space and the production of new cultural knowledge’.

Within the context of these developments we can understand how artistic production has expanded beyond the aesthetic parameters common to mid-twentieth century art. Equally we understand that art can now be generated from a wide range of disciplines. Art’s hosting institutions are not so much concerned with concepts of art as much as the ethical discourses of political production and pedagogical development. The art market which sustained artists during the twentieth century has been subsumed into large-scale curatorial and museum patronage projects. Artists are employed on short-term contracts to work on political projects in the context of professionally led initiatives to remediate social problems.

These changes have led a crisis for many artists. Art produced outside the highly politicised circuits of contemporary art is no longer backed by public interest.

Corporate collecting habits have been reconfigured by public policies. The art market follows investment directives. Contemporary art is rarely just a decorative production, but without institutional interest, art competes for market share with furniture, fashion and wide-screen digital television. This is the neo-liberal context where mass media has appropriated art strategies to market commodity culture.

These are conditions of contemporaneity which now face the artist. Art has become a highly political arena where both public and private patronage have been absorbed by the public circuits which administer and allocate funding in relation to publicly inspired initiatives. Benjamin Buchloh describes the post-war situation as a ‘negative teleology; a steady dismantling of the practices, spaces and spheres of culture and the perpetual intensification, assimilation and homogenization to the point today where we witness what Guy Debord called “the integrated spectacle’. Ethical concerns have displaced aesthetics, the day job has displaced the studio initiative and the artwork has become secondary to the political imperatives which sustain art’s public infra-structures. Some would argue it has always been thus. Politics have changed, so too have art forms, but the artist’s relationship with power has not.

In this context, like Hegel and Danto before me, I too came to understand the practice which I had once understood as art has been superseded. Having briefly considered the frontiers of contemporary art we begin to understand how contemporary art has changed and how art’s history is becoming irrelevant to the practice of contemporary art. Before continuing this interrogation of the political forces determining contemporary art, we turn back to consider philosophy’s conception of the artists’ role. To raise a Hegelian question; what was art before it became indistinguishable from non-art?

1.3 Art’s most archaic etymology

In *Art after the End of Art*, Danto draws a parallel between Hegel’s proposition regarding the end of art in the late-eighteenth century and the state of late twentieth century art. Hegel had recognised people no longer turned to art, as
they once had, for answers to the deeper questions of life. Rather the integral role that Hegel believed art once held had been usurped by philosophy; no doubt Hegel saw himself in this role. By way of philosophic inquiry Hegel returned to the issue of art as he said himself, 'not for the purpose of creating art again but rather for simply understanding what art once was'.

Echoing Hegel’s inquest of art, Danto returned to interrogate the issue of art in the late twentieth century. In the shift from late-modernism to early post-modernism, conceptual art had surfaced at the point of philosophy where Danto believed art had again abdicated its power to theory. Thus Danto reiterated Hegel’s line; the practice that he had understood as art had again been usurped by philosophy. Although this time artists have been responsible for the demise of their own discipline, inadvertently playing into long history of philosophy’s attempts to emasculate art and supersede it.

This is what Danto calls ‘the philosophic disenfranchisement of art’ which amounts to a two-pronged critique of the practice of poetics which dates back to Plato. Danto details the first attack levelled at art is the trivialisation of the project of art as decorative; the second rebuke he details as the denigration of the practice of art as a second-rate mode of philosophy or more pragmatically — politics. We can see both of these critiques at play within the critique surrounding art practice today. In the first denunciation art is patronised as a trivial pursuit which serves a genteel desire for ornamental pleasure. In the second condemnation the practice of art is dismissed as a mediocre mode of philosophy, or worse — third rate art, incapable of any political effect.

In reconsidering philosophy’s various attempts to come to terms with art’s dynamic role, Danto believed the first historical figure to have grasped the complexities facing the concept of art was Hegel. ‘Art subjects us to its own mode of intellectual interrogation’, maintained Hegel, what art arouses is not simply a sensual pleasure, but rather art revitalises our capacity for conceptual judgement. Hegel had envisioned art as its own mode of cultural philosophy. This is what he called; ‘The Science of Art’ (Kunstwissenschaft) a form of conceptual play whereby art 'shares

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87 Ibid.

the spheres of religion and philosophy becoming an alternative mode of philosophy through which spiritual truths are brought to consciousness'. For Hegel the evolution of this journey comes to consciousness in the self-reflexivity of philosophy, and the understanding of the truth of being itself. As Danto points out, this is the point when art surfaces as its own idea of itself becoming in effect theoretical philosophy.

We can see this development in the transition from Abstract Expressionism through Post-painterly Abstraction to Minimalism and onto Conceptualism. The critical presentation of Clement Greenberg's theory evolved in relation to artistic practice eventually giving rise to a mode of theoretical practice which eventually displaced the centrality of studio practice with a conceptual/theoretical discourse. More recently theoretical discourses concerning art practice have centred on the concerns of curatorial practice which are in turn bound by political discourse. This is the sequence in which the aesthetic discourses of art practice have been displaced by political discourses of good-governance, and the project of art has been rendered redundant.

By way of a parallel Danto raises the hypothetical question of the end of philosophy, the point at which truth has been established and philosophy's conceptual project has been exhausted and the philosopher is liberated to a life of what he calls 'a post-historical Club Mediterranean', where alienation has ceased to exist, class wars have been resolved and the philosopher has nothing more to do than kick back and hang out by the pool. For Danto such a conception of philosophy is 'deeply-flawed', he argues, but this is the retirement that has been prescribed for the practice of art. This is the absurdity of what he calls 'the philosophical disenfranchisement of art'.

Danto delineates its history; following the Futurist manifesto, art was thrown into an endgame where artists were qualified in terms of their contribution to a canon. Artists quickly came to recognise their survival was contingent on their capacity for coining a new movement; 'isms' and manifestos proliferated. As Danto points out, art came to be 'the practice of raising the question of art's identity, whilst

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90 Ibid. 110.
concurrently rejecting all available answers’. Once an artist coined a new ‘ism’ and ritually published its manifesto, they were bound to the endless manufacture of the material verification of the genre. Each movement lasted a season; what was once a serious practice quickly devolved into a game of trivial pursuits.92 In this progression art quickly exhausted its conceptual mission becoming first ‘anything’ before it eventually became ‘nothing’. Art devolved into the production of one-line theoretical contributions to the canon, before eventually being displaced by theory itself.93 This is the context in which the political avant-garde argue the concept of art is now irrelevant to the political responsibility obliged of arts public infrastructures.

Danto challenges the idea that art is reducible to an ‘ism’, much less a progressive sequence of isms. ‘There is no reason to think of art as having a progressive history’, he argues. The history of art is simply the history of the lives of individual artists one after another; an archipelago of islands, each to be studied on their own right.94 Each artist’s work refers to their own state of mind and their own relationship with the world about them. ‘There is no linear development here’, he insists. From this perspective the evolution of art, much less the end of art, has no meaning whatsoever; it is simply a false idea. From a philosophic perspective, and here Danto quotes Heidegger; ‘not one step has been taken since Aristotle’.95

Although the individual artist is always faced with the task of their own survival, the evolution of their own cultural knowledge and their own language systems, the artist’s basic palette ‘the vocabulary of human experience/feelings remains the same’, argues Danto. This is the basic instrument which the artist exercises in response to the worldly conditions which surround them. Art practice in this model becomes an epistemology and ‘takes its linguistic place in the lexicon of knowledge, where interpretation becomes its interface’.96 What Danto projects here is a universal definition of art which cannot be ‘threatened by historical overthrow’. In this light, we turn back to re-consider the artist’s project from an etymological perspective.

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92 Ibid. 109.
93 Ibid. 109-110.
94 Ibid. 103.
95 Ibid. 104.
96 Ibid. 107.
In his delineation of the dynamic of art Derrida draws us into a ring cycle; 'Art is one of those productions of mind', he begins, 'which turns back upon itself, encircling the meaning of what it says only by retracing its own steps into a concatenation of encircling circles'.

He situates the modern German philosophers as the best readers of the ancient Greek conceptions of art. Art, or 'the words which seem to translate as art in Greek or Latin' are, according to Derrida, best defined by those modern German texts which translate ancient Greek conceptions of art. The forthcoming section is my reading of the implications of what is contained in Heidegger’s *The Origin of the Work of Art*. It begins with a close reading of the implications of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*\(^\text{98}\), which is one of two texts which inspired Heidegger’s conception of *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

As far back as 200 BC art was recognised as a threat to established social order. Art’s nominal role was to challenge the sedentary values of culture at large. For the ancient Greeks, art was duty-bound to transgress boundaries. Malcolm McLaren, the entrepreneur of punk, came to the same conclusion when he delineated an incisive history from poets to punks, broadly paraphrasing the pressure points as *sex and drugs and rock and roll*.\(^\text{99}\) Remarkably, McLaren’s conclusion is consistent with both Robert Graves’ historical grammar of poetic myth and Nietzsche’s thesis on the role ascribed to art by the ancient Greeks.\(^\text{100}\)

According to the ancient Greeks it was art’s capricious disregard for power, moderation and individual aspiration, which proved the greatest menace to rational society, but this is exactly what gave art its leverage. Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* provides a lucid model of arts unique power.\(^\text{101}\) Nietzsche opened up a phenomenology of meaninglessness in which Hegelian idealism, predicated on the productive evolution of future, begins to falter. Historical notions of progress give way to an infinite present.\(^\text{102}\) Here optimism ceases to have any relevance and teleology tumbles into the endless repetition of the same meaningless patterns.

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\(^{98}\) Ibid. 21.

\(^{99}\) Following art school Malcolm McLaren, with Vivienne Westward, set up a number of conceptual art bands including; "The Sex Pistols", "BOW WOW WOW". In Sydney for the Biennale McLaren gave two talks where he espoused this theory; 1/. ‘The National Art School’ 2/. ‘Art Gallery of N.S.W’.


light of this existential condition, Nietzsche began to re-consider the significance of the pre-Socratic myths of Sisyphus, Prometheus, Oedipus, Apollo and Dionysius, where life’s only certainty was the cycle of creation and destruction and mankind triumphs only to fall back into chaos again. It was in response to this worrying condition that Socratic society developed its rational aspiration to a secure future in which life becomes preoccupied with the production of a future state where life will eventually be secured, safe from nature’s cruel indifference. In this rational realm life quickly becomes preoccupied with the maintenance of boundaries and the defence of principles and productive codes.

In Nietzsche's model, society’s self-determining principles are defined by the two truisms; to thine own self be true and moderation in all things; individualism and caution. Between them, these two codes control individual conduct and exclude transgressive behaviour, ensuring the regulated rhythms required to build the ordered state and its defensive structures. Nietzsche saw this Socratic need to control social behaviours as compulsive, inevitable and unstoppable and identified its model in the Myth of Apollo. By contrast to this apparently rational call to control nature, Nietzsche recognised the wisdom of art’s role, as modelled within the myth of Dionysius. Between these two mythic models Nietzsche modelled art’s dynamic role in opposition to culture’s sedentary aspirations.

Apollo, son of Zeus, god of empire and culture, creates an ordered society where all forms of life are celebrated by significant form and beauty is deified within the temple of art. The Apollonian sensibility is mannered, its consciousness rational. Apollo generates a worldly culture defined by strict limits, boundaries and codes with which it excludes the barbaric and cruel indifference of nature. Apollo enables us to enjoy beauty with a feeling which borders on religious sentiment, but without having to prescribe to any sacred content. Apollonian culture is always agreeable, but its superficiality masks a profound relationship with power. The Apollonian cultivates a formal social garden specifically to exclude the barbaric world of the Dionysian.

The Apollonian has a major investment in the sovereignty of the state and builds the garden wall to keep the barbaric at bay. However, although the god of empire and culture rigorously maintains an illusion of stability, he is ultimately unable to control

103 Helen of Troy, the goddess of beauty belongs to the Dionysians but the compulsive attraction of her disregard is contained in the sanctity of the temple and objectified through worship. Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, Beauty and the Contemporary Sublime, (New York: Allworth Press, 1999). 12-14.
the forces of nature or save his subjects from their reasonable fears of chaos and catastrophe, much less the profound sense of meaninglessness which pervades their lives. In this regard the Apollo erected a temple to the goddess of beauty; Helen of Troy.

On the right hand of Zeus, sits Apollo’s mystical brother Dionysius, the god of art. Dionysius dwells deep in the forests, on the other side of the garden wall. Dionysius, is blessed with the gift of poetic insight. Dionysius achieves his crowning privilege in the artistic jubilee which rejoices in the sensual gospel of universal harmony in the spirit of *rausch*; which Heidegger characterises as the idea of going beyond oneself in the rapture of reciprocal communication.\(^{104}\) Graves details *rausch* as a state of ambrosial ecstasy, wherein Dionysian tears back the mask of self-control, unlocks the wisdom of corporeal knowledge and celebrates the destruction of individual will.\(^{105}\)

The Dionysian gift of poetic insight comes with the acceptance the fundamental injustice of life and the arbitrariness of tragedy. By nature the Dionysian mocks any wilful self-determination and aims directly at life in the present tense, but this existential independence is exactly what poses a threat to the Apollonian investment in the future of the secure state. It is exactly this capricious disregard for individual ambition and any investment in the future, which makes the Dionysian so dangerous to the rational principles of Socratic society bent on cultural regulation and the production of empire. Nietzsche identifies this social instinct toward empire as compulsive and it is exactly this which guarantees art its leverage. In Nietzsche’s model there is no confusion between the roles of art and culture; art stands in direct opposition to culture and the empire of Apollo.\(^{106}\)

Nietzsche’s model is derived from pre-Socratic sources, based on the logic of myth. In this regard its value can be difficult to comprehend within a contemporary context. However within its allegory we can see the artist’s leverage located in direct relation to a compulsive social flaw, the need to control the future. Nietzsche’s image of the artist is that of the sacred outsider, ‘whose epistle is


\(^{105}\) Robert Graves details the Dionysian as a secret mushroom cult who’s Satyrs, Centaurs and Maenads who ritually partook of the dangerous mushrooms; panaeolus papilionaceus and amanita muscaria, which induced delirious visions and brought the gifts of prophecy along with enormous muscular strength and erotic power. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1961). 48.

worshipped only through exclusion’, and even then, only within the context of the
temple, the gallery or festival, which serves to prove the rule of exclusion for art’s
sacred knowledge.107

There is, however, a price for the Dionysian vision. We can see it pictured in a
painting by Nietzsche’s favourite artist. Two hundred years before Nietzsche
developed his treatise on the Dionysian, Peter Paul Rubens painted his homage to
this theme in a painting which now hangs permanently in the National Gallery of
London; The Drunken Silenus (1620). Ruben’s painting models the conceptual
dynamic of the Dionysian discourse. From Graves we understand the ambrosial
Silenus was Dionysius’ teacher when Dionysius was a young girl. Silenus is pictured
in the context of a dialogue which transpires between King Midas and Silenus. The
viewer of the painting becomes a witness to this dialogue with Silenus from the
perspective of Midas, who is cursed with the gift of Apollo; ‘the Midas touch’, in
which everything he touches turns to gold, including his food, his wine and his
loved ones. In desperation the unfortunate King is advised to seek the wisdom of
the Silenus, who lives beyond the garden gates deep in the woods with the Satyrs
and Maenads108. Eventually Midas stumbles upon the ambrosial Silenus who
answers Midas’ desperate plea for help with a sardonic;

‘Oh, you humans you ask for too much. It is better that you ask for
nothing, to be nothing or better still to never have been anything in the
first place. But failing that, you might hope to die as soon as
possible.’109

In this model we glimpse the barbaric disregard of the Dionysians reflecting the
cruel indifference of nature. For the ancient Greeks all art is duty bound to enact
the wisdom of this disregard in face of all gaining ideas; here lies the key to this
thesis. Art’s role is to remind us that we can not control nature, no matter how
hard we try. Nature’s pains, just like its pleasures, are not within our control; it is
better that you ask for nothing and enjoy what comes your way rather than demand
everything and have your existential experience of the world poisoned by
expectation.

107  Ibid. 36.
Heidegger’s treatise on the same subject, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, was drafted in 1934-6; following Heidegger’s resignation from his position as Rector of Freiburg University. Although Heidegger retained his membership of the Nazi party until the end of WWII, *The Origin of the Work of Art* was not published until after the war in 1950. As David Farrell Krell points out in his epilogue to Heidegger’s thesis on the subject of art, it does not purport to solve the riddle of art but rather it is concerned with identifying the essential nature of the riddle which signifies the presence of art. Heidegger himself proposed that his thesis offered a methodology for both creating and presenting the essential elements of new truth within a pre-existent culture. The concept of art is both the origin of the work of art and the origin of the artist the same time but, Heidegger is quick to point out, the concept of art is but a word.\(^{110}\)

The concept of art which Heidegger proposes divides along the abstract polarities of what he calls ‘the earth’ and ‘the world’. These concepts of ‘the earth’ and ‘the world’ could broadly be understood in terms of the nature/culture divide evoked by Nietzsche’s discourse however Heidegger’s model is far from literal.\(^ {111}\) Art comes into being to illuminate new truth, in this regard it presents a new world, which Heidegger calls ‘the world’. The ‘world’ represented by the work of art claims the primacy of its truth despite the hegemonies of the dominant cultural régime, which includes all human nature and any preordained culture. This cultural régime is what Heidegger calls ‘the earth’, by which he means the active logic of all that already exists.

Heidegger paints an extremely precise although extraordinarily abstract picture of how this performance of art’s truth comes into play. Heidegger’s notion of truth is not a pre-existent given, such as the truth of things-in-themselves. Truth, ‘is not a rigid state with a curtain permanently raised’, he explains.\(^ {112}\) What is given is the everyday, the ordinary, the hegemonic nature of power and the conspiratorial nature of the all too familiar. Heidegger’s notion of truth belongs to what the ancient Greeks called *alêteia* by which they meant ‘the unconcealedness of

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\(^{111}\) As a student of Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer described an incident where Heidegger interrupted himself in the midst of reading one of his essays to impatiently announce ‘All of this is Chinese’. Gadamer agreed and saw his own philosophic task as that of translation and interpretation of some of these ideas. Robert Dostal, “Gadamer: The Man and His Works.” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

beings', a state where 'the Being of beings comes into the steadiness of its own shining'.

Heidegger pictures this performance of truth in the precinct a temple, which already designates a Dionysian zone wherein beauty is worshipped in the form of the moon goddess Helen of Troy, who Robert Graves reminds us, was an orgiastic goddess. Heidegger imagines a crowd gathering in a holy precinct cleft from unforgiving ground. This temple becomes the site for what Heidegger calls the rising of the earth, ‘the unexpressed rational longings of the emotions’; below the sea surges, above a storm rages, lightning strikes and the glint of light splashes across this stony precinct illuminating things as nothing but themselves. ‘Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket… come to appear as what they are’; this is the emergence of things in themselves which the early Greeks call physis, which becomes the origin of modern physics and refers to the nature of things and matter, which Heidegger calls ‘the earth’.

Heidegger’s metaphoric temple was drafted on the basis of the Greek temple at Paestrum. Heidegger’s temple draws itself up into being out of obscurity in spontaneous support of the rising of the unconscious longings of the ‘unthought’. Heidegger describes this rising of the earth as the motivating impulse of the unexpressed rational needs of the emotions and the highest gift that thinking can bring. It is the rising of this ‘unthought’ which transforms the tongue of the earth into a votive offering that comes in the form of a need to understand. In this context every utterance transmutes into a single syllable to contest what is true, and that which is not, that which is great and that which is small, that which is brave and that which is weak.

It is this very demand for the contest of truth, which lays the linguistic foundation for the work of art to bring its equipment into play. As the unconscious stammering of the rational emotional longings of the earth begin to raise their doubts concerning the question of truth, these rational longings cluster into conspiratorial

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113  Ibid. 164-165
huddles and in this way they open up a space of self-doubt within the temple which enables the work of art to set up its equipment, and bring the ‘work-being’ of the work of art into play. In this clearing, opened up by doubt, the work of art is enabled to establish the structure for its own appreciation, the primary platform required to bring into effect a new world, a new truth, the untruth.

However, Heidegger insists, this performance of truth is permeated throughout by the 'un' of refusal; ‘truth only ever presents itself in terms of an opposition of primary strife’. This condition of essential strife is not to be confused with discord or dispute, for Heidegger this concept of strife is not contingent upon some wilful state or rigid insistence, but rather ‘a surrender to the concealed originality of the provenance of ones own being’. Art’s truth does not seek approval, the truth of art exists despite the disinterest of the earth; in this respect there can be no question of compromise in the performance of art. Equally, the stammering earth has no obligations to art’s declaration of indifference. It is only within the context of this mutual disinterest, Heidegger explains, that the work of art is enabled to 'step into the insubordination of its own shining'.

The more cleanly the work of art cuts its ties with the conspiratorial nature of the long familiar, the more solitary and strange its world appears. The more strange and solitary its world appears, the more luminous it becomes and the more cleanly it transports us out of the realms of the ordinary, into the realms of the 'unthought'. Only in effecting this act of primary strife with a resolute confidence, can the work of art arrest judgement. Only by apprehending all smug conceit, can the work of art become that which it truly is; a new truth, the likes of which has never been seen before. Only under this transformative spell is the ordinary, the conspiratorial earth, enabled to become that which it has never been before.

Within the intimacy of this act of primary strife, beings are brought out of the refusal of their conspiracy; out of concealment into lighting. Only by being brought into the luminosity of illumination are beings brought into openness, into a state of becoming. However, this state of illumination, the truth, is not a given. Heidegger’s notion of truth is not an eternal opening onto the everyday. The essence of truth remains dominated throughout by resistance, ‘a double restraint - a
double refusal', Heidegger explains. The world and the earth, the new and the old, culture and nature, are always in conflict. In this regard Heidegger’s model evokes a political conquest where the new world wins in the heart of the old ways with its performative act of truth, ultimately engendering regime change.

‘The world’ and ‘the earth’ are both ‘essentially belligerent by nature’, but it is only through the authority of self-assertion that ‘the world’ is able to escape from the orbit of the ‘concealing denial’; the conspiracy of the ordinary. Only through this act of primary strife can ‘the world’ overcome the sheltering instinct of ‘the earth’ and shine forth into its own radiance. The more fully ‘the world’ is engrossed within its own essential nature, the more ‘the earth’ is freed to become itself. Through the window of wonderment ‘the earth’ is enabled to step forth into its own lighting and freed into becoming that which it has never been before.

It is through this performative event of illumination that our accustomed polarities and networks are displaced and transformed. It is in this way, Heidegger argues, the work of art enables the becoming of Being. Only through this process of letting go of all knowing, relinquishing our bond with the familiar, falling under the spell of the ‘unthought’, can we come to accept a new truth and thus come to accept differences within ourselves.

Art’s role is to contest the fundamental nature of truth. This is the transformative role which Heidegger ascribes to art. In Heidegger’s model the role that falls to the work of art is to open up a profound new social space. Heidegger’s performance of truth does not take place for the edification of the artist nor for the entertainment of the audience but as the fulfilment of the unexpressed rational longings of the emotions.

However, unlike Hegel who is happy to accept the end of art, Heidegger model of art’s performance of unconcealment (alêtheia) can be called upon at anytime to resolve the question of truth and the dispute between that which is sacred and that which has become common. Heidegger’s model reveals art in light of a dynamic power which is not contingent upon the fashionability of genre, not based in any

120 Ibid. 180.
121 Ibid. 177.
122 Ibid. 181.
123 Ibid. 183.
specific medium, nor is it dependent on the accord of patronage. Rather, Heidegger’s concept of art functions exactly because of the apparent apathy and malaise, the disinterest of its audience. The power of his model is based in the clarity of the artist’s truth; contingent upon its timing and the conditions of doubt which surround it, that is, the predisposition of their audience to the nature of the truth the artist has to offer.

Heidegger’s model reveals a social dynamic where art’s truth comes into radiance out of necessity, in direct relationship to the socio-political conditions which surround it. In Heidegger’s model the artist’s role is to open up a new social space and reconfigure the dynamics of the political field. In effect, the work of the work of art is to unlock the bind of those ill-fitted ideologies which lock being into the production of the endless future, enabling truth to originate from the present. Heidegger’s model sustains Nietzsche’s dynamic where the role of the work of art is both philosophical and political. Art’s role is to liberate being from inevitable social bind of the Apollonian concept of empire, where all energies are directed toward the production of an endless future, into the Dionysian concept of being, which abides in the infinite present.

The artwork itself becomes a marker, a point of reference which contributes to an ongoing body of knowledge. This is not knowledge geared to the production of future but rather knowledge which is contingent upon the production of the present. Although each work of art liberates being into the present, as we will see in the following chapters, it does so through the production of a language structure capable of reconfiguring knowledge. In this regard art’s linguistic framework becomes bound to the specifics of time, each work of art is locked into its own time-frame and each work of art institutes its own contribution to knowledge from within its own present.

However it is a mistake to imagine that this historical progression of art’s form displaces of art’s function. Each generation must disarm the obligations to the future engendered by their forefathers. Art’s objective remains static; to terminate the compulsive social projection toward the presumption of future. In this regard we understand that art is bound to a specific cultural dynamic, one which has changed very little over the course of time. Art’s role is to put an end to the future and lay claim to the present.
1.4 Conclusions

What emerges from this chapter is the recognition that despite the exponential growth of art’s infra-structures, the art’s industry is no longer concerned with the concept of art. The institutionalised arts industry is concerned with affecting the socio-political demographic, which art is capable of engendering. The economic and highly political engines driving arts infra-structures are concerned with what art can do for their audiences, their markets, their patrons, their funding agencies, their governments, their constituencies and communities — they are certainly not concerned with what the artworld can do for artists. In this regard art practice faces the inevitability of rationalisation in terms of the same parameters as any other discipline namely its ability to stimulate key social outcomes and initiate new cultural knowledge.

The question facing the artist now has become how can they contribute to a discourse when art practice has been pronounced obsolete and irrelevant? In the sixties, the artist’s retort may have been ‘by any means necessary’. However, the political climate which sustains contemporary art production is politically networked, ethically determined and art’s infra-structures have been instrumentalised to facilitate key political and educational initiatives. Whilst a few artists are being inducted into collaborative teams to network the production of specific knowledge projects, most artists have been abandoned to survive the market or displaced by a wide range of professionals in ‘arts-led’ initiatives to update public perceptions of the realities of a rapidly changing world. Given the redundancy of art’s traditional disciplines, the irrelevance of art’s histories and collapse of value of the concept of art, many artists now face a problem.

What constitutes contemporary art is defined by two closely related limits; politically-determined opportunities and the individual artist’s ability to sustain their product within an marketplace. On one hand, public arts opportunities are politically encrypted to redress the imbalance implicit within the culture of social-spectacle and reclaim the hearts and minds of the masses on behalf of the state. On the other hand, culture is determined by scales of economy where it is the shopping habits of masses that guarantee audience, patronage and cultural significance. These are the precarious parameters of contemporaneity currently facing art practice. Despite the exponential growth of art’s public infra-structures many artists face redundancy within this highly politicised public arena.

Medium-specific conceptions of art practice prove unreliable, the artistic canon is irrelevant and twentieth century conceptions of art offer no defining discipline for
the production of knowledge, audience or for that matter, market. Advanced visual skills, high-end display technologies and complex research methodologies are generic for a wide range of productive disciplines. The creative avatars of contemporary culture are those who are capable of generating cultural landslides and audience-based economies of their own accord. This is the point at which some curators argue that the fabric of creative culture has changed; contemporary artists are better advised to develop a background in social politics, science and technology, urban design, architecture, advertising, fashion, filmmaking or game-culture. Whilst we are all artists of one sort or another now, most historical conceptions of art practice prove of little value.

What constitutes art practice is determined by politics. This predicament is what Danto refers to as 'the philosophical disenfranchisement of art'; where art is persistently excluded from the discourse. Whether it is deemed trivial, decorative or dangerous, art is regularly sidelined as ineffectual by politics and economics. What is significant to this discussion and bears closer examination is the reliability of this socio-pathology and it is in this light that Nietzsche and Heidegger's conceptual models are worthy of re-consideration.124

Despite obvious differences between the political and pedagogical demands determining contemporary art and these archaic philosophic conceptions of art's role, we recognise they have two key concerns in common; the first is their respective commitments to the production of new social spaces, the second their respective aspirations to institute new cultural knowledge. Despite the fact that art appears to be in a state of permanent historical conflict with culture, the commonality of their two key concerns bears further consideration. What is at stake in this dissertation is the possibility of a stable platform for the conceptual production of art, one capable of serving both contemporary political expectations of art and philosophy's conception of art's function. At a time when historical conceptions of the artist's role have been destabilised, this uncanny alignment is consistent with both the most political of contemporary art's criteria and the role ascribed to art in art's most archaic etymology.

However these concurrent criteria also illuminate critical differences between society's public production of culture and the artist's subjective production of the

public experience of art. Public art is produced by the orchestration of politically determined funding opportunities, conceived in alignment with the long-term political objectives of the community, while the artist’s subjective production offers an affective shift generated by the displacement of the hegemonies of future production. Art is an existential production which engenders change by reconfiguring the present in alignment with the truth of being, while politically-driven cultural production is determined in alignment with the long term objectives of community production. The difference between these two conceptions of cultural production is in their respective relationships with the concept of time.

The artist reconfigures the future in alignment with their subjective needs for truth in the present. Culturally determined production commits the present to the production of the future in terms of broader social needs. While art practice is driven by individuals capable of breaking through the cultural commitment to the future and the social prejudice against subjectivity, arts funding opportunities are determined by public politics which construct cultural programs to promote ethical values relevant to our future.

In light of this division between public objectives and subjective insights, the next chapter, The Issue of the Artist, continues this interrogation into contemporary art practice from the individual artist’s perspective. It focuses on the developing dichotomy between the political and popular conceptions of art practice; the artworld’s preference for political affect and popular culture’s leverage within the art industry. The Issue of the Artist extends the on-going inquiry into philosophy’s conception of the artist’s method through the work of another Greco-German scholar, Hans-Georg Gadamer.125

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The Issue of the Artist

There really is no such thing as art. There are only artists.

Ernst Gombrich\textsuperscript{126}

2.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to clarify the role of the artist. It argues the contemporary artist can only be understood in terms of how they process their knowledge of the world and the ends to which they put that knowledge. What defines the artist is their need to bring their own sensibility into radiance through their deconstruction of world knowledge. This is achieved through the intuitive process of poeticizing, where the artist builds a new model of knowledge refabricated from the broader spectrum of all the artist knows to reflect the ontological truth of the artist’s present. This methodological parameter defines the question concerning art.

Ultimately, the artist’s way is up to each individual artist; however as we have demonstrated in the previous chapter, what constitutes the artist today is a complex question. As we have noted in chapter one, there are some who argue the concept of artist is simply no longer useful. As the curator of Documenta X, Catherine David puts it ‘many people I work with no longer respond to the figure of the artist’; the curatorial challenge has become to produce, discussion, debate and circulate critical ideas amid the broader community.\textsuperscript{127} Although the artist has been liberated into a state that Rosalind Krauss calls ‘lexical freedom’, with the collapse of twentieth century conceptions of artistic production the artist now finds all the rules are gone, all conventions redundant and the figure of the artist has been further marginalised.\textsuperscript{128} De Duve puts the situation in perspective; ‘artists can do whatever they want, say whatever they want, use any material, respect or abuse any

technique, cultivate or transgress any idea, attitude or style”; ‘they are accountable only to themselves’.129

In this chapter we evidence how arts funding policies have been extended to include the broadest spectrum of creative activities. Christine Wertheim reminds us in her Notes toward Understanding Contemporary Aesthetics, that the concept of art practice has been expanded to include a widest variety of critical activities; 'large chunks of philosophy, science, mathematics, clinical psychology and popular culture'.130 The problem facing the education of the artist is that many twentieth century conceptions of art have been orphaned by arts funding policies. While some artists have honed their creativity to reflect the broader political objectives of their funding agencies, alternative cultural avatars are now being drawn from the broader spectrum of creative, commercial and industrial production. Given the material fabric of knowledge, artists of the future will compete with politics and science for audience.

This chapter exemplifies the extraordinary range of creative activities currently presenting as art from the polarities of political and popular practices. At one end are the socio-politically determined practices in which art doubles as an alternative mode of political activism. In this circuit the artist’s production is quantified in terms of ethical codes and art’s capacity to produce new cultural spaces. At the other end of this spectrum are those practices which have blurred the boundaries between hi-low cultures where distinctions between popular culture and commerce have become irrelevant. In this arena popular culture has appropriated high-art by taking on art’s tactical modalities in a neo-liberal appeal to audience and market. At both ends of this spectrum creative practices flourish, but at the extreme ends of this spectrum the concept of art is irrelevant. However, this is not to agree with art’s detractors. As we will see from some of these examples of creative practice, art remains a powerful methodology for those who understand its dynamics.

The objective then becomes to delineate the issues concerning methodology which face the artist. In our bid to gain some perspective these problems, again, we turn to art’s deepest etymological origins for perspective. This time we consider the work of one of Heidegger’s students; Hans-Georg Gadamer. Unlike Heidegger,
Gadamer did not join the Nazi party. Indeed Gadamer was known to have had liaisons with a group who had mounted a failed attempt on Hitler’s life. A number of this group were later executed. Gadamer’s second wife (Katie Lekebusch) was accused of treason, imprisoned and scheduled to be sent off to the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Gadamer intervened on her behalf, saving her from the holocaust.

Gadamer’s opus *Truth and Method* offers a hermeneutic reading of Heidegger’s project *The Origin of the Work of Art*. Although Gadamer did not propose his treatise as a ‘set of rules to describe let alone direct the methodological procedures of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*)’ his work develops and extends Heidegger’s treatise and in this regard offers a critical interpretation of *The Origin of the Work of Art* which is pertinent to this thesis.\(^{131}\) This model is further developed in Giorgio Agamben’s treatise on the same subject *A Man without Content*, which is discussed in the final chapters.

What comes to light in Gadamer’s treatise on the production of culture, sensibility and character, the condition where everything is in a constant process of re-construction, are several issues pertinent to the production of contemporary art. Artistic methodology comes to light as a pivot for cultural change. Although, European in origin, the model contained in these discourses is not bound by any specific notions cultural subject or language. What his model provides a stabilising platform for the basic concept of artistic methodology. Gadamer articulates the light in which new truths must stand in order to be understood as art. He raises the question regarding the significance of art’s communicative platform of knowledge and how the artist’s platform of knowledge is transformed in the production of new ways of being. He also introduces the question concerning the role that language plays in the production of new knowledge. This is the pivot offered by the practice of art; where all that is known is transformed into new ways of being.

A close examination of Gadamer’s hermeneutic model helps us redefine the parameters of artistic practice by clarifying both the artist’s objectives and their methodology. Unlike many twentieth century theories of art practice, Gadamer’s model is not driven by any medium-specific conception of genre aesthetics, period politics or culturally specific representation. Rather, Gadamer draws his model from

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art’s deepest philosophical origins to reveal art as an essentially production wherein the artist asserts the ontological truth of their own ‘Being’ in light of all knowledge. However this is not to imagine that art is a purely subjective production, rather art offers a subjective truth couched in a common language capable of speaking to the truth of Being. This conception of art’s dynamic is central to all etymological interpretations of art and locates the essential question concerning art; only through common language of form capable of communicating between individuals can new truth come to light.

Gadamer details the artist’s methodology in terms of the process of poeticizing, which is not to be confused with writing poetry. In the process of poeticizing the artist differentiates what is essential to the present from the broader spectrum of all the artist knows. This epistemological process when enacted presents a structure of knowledge from which the artist’s own sensibility is both present and missing. Through the intuitive process of poeticizing the artist constructs a new model of knowledge, one which has been built from the broader spectrum of knowledge but a model whose logic has been structured in light of poïêtic insight.

Gadamer refers to the artwork in terms of a sprachkristall, a crystalline structure of language, an integral linguistic structure capable of attracting and refracting all knowledge, ultimately reconfiguring knowledge in light of the artist’s subjective demands for ontological truth. However, this essentially subjective impulse comes into form through the production of public language capable of speaking to the truth of being. This sprachkristall, the work of art, only becomes visible by virtue of its capacity to generate doubt, drawing both its audience and itself into visibility through its capacity to raise question. Here we can see parallels with Heidegger’s concept of ‘the primary act of strife’. In this way the artist affects a conceptual shift in social space, asserting their own existential contribution to language, despite their marginality within the broader social project of the future. In this way the artist institutes their own contribution to knowledge, maintaining the truth of a subjective sensibility within the broader cultural and historical frameworks of knowledge. The lineage of knowledge is not simply ‘cultural’, rather it belongs to the profound lineage of knowledge to do with the wisdom of being in the present.

Unlike politically or commercially determined production, which quantifies cultural activity in terms of projected social or capital outcomes, the artist’s methodology instinctively breaks with everyday politics and the hegemonies of future production to liberate subjective needs for truth within the present. As we have already seen in chapter one, Heidegger’s conception of art’s role is to open a way for the becoming of being to originate from the present. The artist is defined in light of
the incisiveness of their poiêsis, the clarity of their poiêtic insight. This is what opens up the artist’s present and engenders their future; not their ability to project politically determined outcomes, promote pedagogical objectives or generate future markets. In art, truth originates from the present and speaks to the truth of being.

Although we are now living amid times which maintain only an ambiguous regard for the concept of the artist, this chapter argues that art’s original methodology retains its leverage to affect change; at least within the artist’s field of experience. What eventually comes to light is a unique conception of the artist’s role in the production of public knowledge or the structure of social language; one which extends Heidegger’s discourse and develops our reading of the concept of the artist. However, before re-considering the artist’s original methodology in detail, we take a closer look at the changing political conditions which are currently determining contemporary art’s public profile.

2.1 The artist’s political context

Consider the shifting context of contemporary art in terms of the announcement of the ‘Jerwood Artangel Open’, the British arts commissioning initiative valued at one million Euro, set up to ‘tap into the rich seam of unrealised artistic potential’\(^\text{132}\). The ‘Jerwood Artangel Open’ draws no distinction between disciplines; it is open to broadest range of proposals from the widest range of ‘emerging artists’ including; curators, visual artists, filmmakers, choreographers, composers, writers, theatre practitioners, industrial, applied designers and popular artists, working individually or in collaboration with cultural producers. It invites proposals for ambitious transformations of specific sites and situations anywhere in the UK. Specifically the ‘Jerwood Artangel Open’ is looking for projects which are ‘capable of transforming the way we think and feel about the world we live in’.

Here we recognise two major shifts; the funding mechanisms which enable the artist and also the public expectations of the artist. The artist has been liberated from the medium-specific discourses of genre, but now faces the question of public accountability. The question facing the artist is not about what they can do, much

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less how well they can do it, but rather by what their work has to offer the broader community?

The *Jerwood Artangel Open* is an amalgamation of several British arts funding projects. Originally, the *Jerwood Foundation* was known for their *Jerwood Painting Prize*, instituted to 'celebrate and support the achievements of British painting', the *Jerwood* has re-allocated their resources to enable the broadest spectrum of creative endeavour.\(^ {133}\) The *Artangel* group has a long history of co-sponsoring many of the globe’s most significant contemporary artists in the broadest sense including; Derek Jarman, Barbara Kruger, The Pet shop Boys, Mathew Barney; Rachael Whiteread, Michael Clark Dance Company (with Leigh Bowery), Jenny Holtzer, Michael Landy and more recently Janice Kerbal, to name but a few.\(^ {134}\)

The *Jerwood Artangel* is open to proposals from any kind of artist or artistic production team, to be effected in any site across the whole of the UK; except the art gallery, the theatre or the concert hall. This open mode of funding socially-engaged projects has associates in the Netherlands, with *SKOR*, and in France, with the *Nouveaux Commanditaires*. Funding agencies such as the *Jerwood Artangel*, *SKOR* and *Nouveaux Commanditaires* have dispensed with boundaries and opened their funding opportunities in lieu of the political demands art; that is ‘the transformation of the way we think and feel about the world we live in’.

The work of young British artist (yBa) Michael Landy, provides an excellent example of such a practice. In 2001, Landy took over the defunct C&A department store in Oxford Street, Central London. Into this empty concrete shell with its glass frontage onto Mayfair, Landy installed an industrial processing system and employed a small team of uniformed staff to systematically take apart everything he owned, shredding and granulating every material manifestation of his existence and returning it to dust. Over the following two weeks his team publicly deconstructed the 7,227 items inventoried as Landy's material existence. In the end Landy's lot weighed in at 5.75 tons of scrap; they eventually dumped it as landfill.\(^ {135}\)

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Here we understand Heidegger's poetic conception of 'the earth' and art's capacity to reveal it. He explains, 'in setting up 'the world' the work sets forth 'the earth'. During the course of his dematerialization, all Landy's worldly goods circulated on conveyor belts around the various departments for all to examine, before being meticulously dissembled. There had been various offers to buy or salvage items as they had circulated around his de-fabrication system, but all were declined. Everything was broken down and shredded to waste. Each item had been fastidiously detailed in a comprehensive inventory, for posterity; eg - 'Item E1038 - Purple Nintendo Game boy CGB/001 with game cartridge 'Rug Rats' - gift from Gillian Wearing (his partner); after breaking elbow.' The catalogue included his love letters, his art collection including his Damian Hirst, his SAAB car, all his furniture, the complete contents of his house and studio, living, library, whitegoods, television, computers, all his personal widgets; electronic toothbrush, torch, soldering iron, etc., his birth certificate, his passport, his credit cards, right down to the change in his pockets and the clothes he was wearing on the last day of his Break Down.  

It is easy to understand Judith Nesbitt's use of the word *opprobrium*; the disgrace ensuing from some reproachful or offensive act of transgression. Landy had stepped across a boundary. No doubt Landy's work would have had a curious, if not liberating, effect on the material anxieties of some innocent shoppers who might have chanced upon Landy's reverse cycle, whilst trawling Oxford Street in search of material comforts. But what impact did this work have on the artist himself? Landy talked about his own personal breakdown during the time of the event and how the work effected a profound shift in his sense of self; from 'I have', to 'I am'. 'It is like my own funeral but I am alive to watch it - I am happy every day' he exclaimed. Here is the significance of Heidegger's 'primary act of strife'; the break with future production and the acceptance of the existential terms of being in the present. We can understand the dynamic of Landy's Break Down in terms of the Dionysian's sacred war against the profane compulsion for material security. No doubt it had a similar vicarious effect of some of his audience. It certainly gives pause for thought. Is Landy suggesting that we should all eliminate the material base of our domestic existence, like St. Francis of Assisi or Buddha, disavowing all

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138 Ibid.
139 Ibid. 12.
material possession? What are the implications of such a piece? Is this a sign of an impending future? How much did it cost? What was Landy worth? Who paid for all the equipment, the rent on the C&A department store? What happened to Landy after the wilful obliteration of his material existence? Where does he live now? What did his wife, Gillian Wearing, think about all this?

Examination of the evidence reveals Landy’s project was firmly grounded within the firmament of British art patronage. *Break Down* was co-sponsored by *The Times* newspaper and *Artangels*. Landy’s *Break Down* project had been selected for sponsorship by a peer group panel which included the artists Rachael Whiteread and Brian Eno, the Art’s Editor of *The Times* and the co-directors of *Artangels*. The process of the *Break Down* itself was extensively documented and published as a book, *Break Down Inventory*, for posterity. 140

Here we see contemporary art performing the double act of transforming social space and instituting its contribution to knowledge. However Landy’s performative act is far from straightforward; on one hand Landy’s *Break Down* is a deeply personal project; on another it disarms the future and speaks directly to the social insecurities of our times. *Break Down* offers a point of resistance to material conceptions of existence, whilst at the same time sending a political signal which engenders the social insecurity which we all face now, leaving its viewer stranded in the present.

It also raises the question concerning the future of the artist. Landy, a graduate from Goldsmiths College in London, had not been an overnight sensation. Rather he has a long history of such self-critical projects which marks his passage through the world as that of an artist. We catch a glimpse of the persistence of Landy’s ironic stance in *Scrapheap Services* (1996) a cleaning company for ‘getting rid of used-up little people’, exhibited at Chisenhale Gallery in London’s East End. 141 *Scrapheap Services* was set up as a social service for the disposal of people who are no longer useful to society, as a reflection of Landy’s own predicament as an unemployable artist drifting between retraining programs in the early 90’s, as British social security systems began to fail its artists. In interview with Sarah Kent for London’s *Time Out* magazine regarding his future, Landy confessed ‘I have sacrificed

everything ... all my friends have left me, even my cats'\textsuperscript{142}. When Kent asked; 'Where do you see yourself in ten years time?' Landy’s laconic reply belied the future which was to follow; 'sweeping the streets?'\textsuperscript{143}

However, despite his bleak outlook, Landy has been a rare success story. Public funding enabled \textit{Break Down} to be presented on such a spectacular scale that it is easy to understand how it had such an impact on his audiences and struck a raw nerve within British culture. From the art historical perspective it is also important to understand how Landy’s work has been taken up at the highest levels of British art patronage and instituted into the annals of cultural knowledge, for it is only within this reciprocal act of public patronage that an artist can make a contribution to public knowledge. Given the ephemeral nature of contemporary art, Landy’s act of self-destruction would have been of no consequence had it not been covered by public indemnity and instituted into the public archive. In this regard we begin to understand contemporary art as a collaborative production between the individual artist and institutional support networks. What art reveals belongs to ‘the earth’ although it is transfigured within ‘the world’ generated by the artist.

In 2004 the Tate Britain commissioned a new work from Landy worthy of note. \textit{Semi-detached (2004)} reveals the material conditions of Landy’s father’s existence; it consists of a life size replica of Landy’s father’s two story semi-detached house, built of real bricks and mortar, inside the Tate-Britain. His father, John Landy was the victim of a mining industry accident in 1977, when the roof of the colliery collapsed, crushing most bones in his body and leaving John ‘a total wreck’.\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Semi-Detached} provides a window into the compromised state of his father’s existence. Inside massive digital video projections focus on the overwhelming scale of minutiae and John’s will to surmount obstacles which most of us would never imagine being problematic such as, counting out painkillers. Landy’s work is no celebration of triumph, but rather it offers a Nietzschean sense of tragedy.

While we understand that Landy’s work would be impossible without the levels of public support that it garners, we can also understand how its psychological dynamic functions in terms of the Dionysian challenge to \textit{principium individuationis}; challenging principles of selfishness, greed and the demands for material security

\textsuperscript{142} Sarah Kent and Martin Herbert, “Sensation Generation”, \textit{Time out}, 18th September 1997. 21.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
which both Nietzsche and the Buddhists attribute to the cause of all suffering and terror in the world. Through the act of self-abnegation the artist confronts us with the callous indifference of nature. In this regard Landy's work becomes a testimony to the power of Nietzsche's concept of tragedy and the resilience of ancient Greek conceptions of the artist's role. We can also see Heidegger's concept of 'primary strife' in action in Landy's work where the artist's double-refusal is not so much an act of strength but a surrender to the original provenance of one's own being, outlined in the first chapter.

Landy's work is an artistic confection, no more real than Yves Klein's photomontage *Leap into the Void* (1960) or Ruben's painting *The Drunken Silenus*. However, like much good art, it leaves us humbled in face of the fragile parameters of our own existence. In this regard Landy's work is refreshingly touching and a long way from the provocative sensationalism of some of his yBa contemporaries, such as Marcus Harvey's portrait of Myra Hindley the British child serial killer made up of the coloured hand prints of little children, removed from exhibition by public petition.

Landy's creative interventions are incisive although they make no presumptions regarding the world-at-large. Performative by nature, Landy's events re-stage the political subtext of his own material existence within linguistic structures which captivate our most instinctive concerns and oblige us to rethink the expansive parameters of our own desires. By delimiting the exact parameters of 'the earth' within 'the world' of art, the artist draws us into a process of reconsidering the threshold of our own projections. In this way Landy evokes a socio-political discourse without degenerating to a political activism common to so much bureaucratically-sustained cultural production. As Sarah Kent points out, 'art as a political practice is an immature preoccupation for any artist'. Landy's work touches upon political nerves and speaks to the social issues which concern us all without degenerating into the political pragmatism which often justifies the disenfranchisement of art.

The next artist for consideration in this discourse, Kendell Geers, defines himself as a cultural *agent provocateur*. His art functions as a blunt instrument and appears to speak more to his funding agencies than his audience, who are usually shocked by his interventions. Importantly, in this model we recognise the cultural support

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political practices often garner. However, what becomes obvious in this model of artistic practice, when we are allowed to understand its carefully concealed secrets, is its ability to affect the way we perceive our social space. Geer’s work presents a territorial abuse to evoke the treat of real violence; a common post-colonial legacy. The barbaric disregard of ‘the earth’ is revealed within ‘the world’ of Geer’s art.

In Melbourne for the Empires, Ruins and Networks conference Geers introduced his work in terms of ‘ethical transgressions’. His work is didactic, overtly political and his reputation is based on his ability to confront his audiences with the violence of post-colonial politics.147 Looking at Geers’ work in the Documenta11 catalogue, it appears modest enough; a series of unexceptional snaps; small by contemporary standards, 30.5 cms X 40.5 cms. They feature images of security signs as photographed on the walls of private residences and gated communities of the privileged post-apartheid suburbs of Johannesburg; ‘Warning — First response armed response’, 'Access security warning — electric fence', etc. Geers work is concerned with the heavily fortified social chasms and the economic abyss between black and white South Africa. In Geers work we recognise a literal mode of political provocation; a mode of practice which seems common to so much public production. However, my reading of the work changed when Geers himself revealed that his photographs masked the presence of a real bomb, left armed in the gallery.148

Doubling back to the Documenta11 catalogue there is no mention of this detail in Geers’ pages. However, a broader inquiry into his history reveals that Geers is famous for this volatile feature. As Ruth Kerkham explains in her article ‘There is a Bomb in this Gallery - Kendell Geers charged’, Geers work illuminates ‘a defensive paranoia of a world where safety has become a privilege’.149 Geers work reverses the polarity of the heavily fortified boundary between colonial power and post-colonial justice, the law of property which appropriates primary resources and keeps the multitudes at bay under the threat of violence. Here we understand the relevance of the walled garden erected by the Apollonian empire to keep the barbaric at bay.

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147 Okwui Enwezor, “Crisis in Global Capital and the War on Culture”, review Empires, Ruins and Networks (2004).
148 Nikos Papastergiardis, Empires, Ruins and Networks - Local Clusters and Trans-National Networks (ACMI, 2004).
We recognise the implicit threat of violence in Geers earlier work when he erected the live 6,000 volt electric fence which partitioned-off his exhibition space in the Pretoria Art Gallery (1997) and effectively recharged the apartheid debate. Geers explains his logic to Nicholas Bourriaud and Daniel Buren, ‘the art gallery is the precise site of transgression in which violence is acted out’. An earlier piece *By Any Means Necessary* (1995), announced his intentions more clearly. It consisted of a poster pasted onto the wall of Delfina Studios Gallery (London) which began; ' A bomb has been hidden somewhere in this exhibition space, set to explode at a time known to the artist alone …', and ended, '… it is a contemporary South African artist's response to the world he lives in and the historical conditions he has inherited'.

Geers' work appears to be fuelled by a transgressive compulsion, which sets his profile in line with the romantic image of French literary figures such as Arthur Rimbaud, Antonin Artaud and Jean Genet. 'I became an artist to keep out of jail', Geers explained to Nicholas Bourriaud and Daniel Buren, justifying his use of violence in terms of a history of art practice and its patronage where, 'there is no honour amongst thieves'. Geers declares his empathy for Guy Debord. Geers describes himself as an abused son of a white colonialist; 'I am an iconoclast, I want to destroy history, kill the father'. His work reflects an oedipal response to his colonialist cultural heritage and its apartheid legacy. Geers' work is clearly radical but his practice raises questions regarding the line between sensationalism and terrorism, if not art and politics.

Politically didactic practices such as Geers are bought into the public arena under a theory of ‘relational aesthetics’, whereas Bourriaud explains, ethical concerns demand the replacement of ‘images of desire' with images 'we refuse to face'. In practices such as Geers the artist’s role is to confront the viewer with political inequities which they often prefer to ignore. Geers' strength is that his work traces the exact line between what it acceptable and what is not, by exemplifying

what Rancière calls ‘the wrong’ (le tort), to confront us with the realities of political inequality.\(^{154}\)

It is in the context of practices such as Geers’ that we understand how art has become a politically determined project. For the general public there are only the diminutive photographs which Art Forum refers to as ‘smug’ snaps of the signs on the walls of the gated communities.\(^{155}\) Geers’ bombs can not be publicly disclosed. When they are he is charged with felony. Despite his public patronage the reality of Geers’ work remains something of a curatorial secret.

The representation of ‘the wrong’ and the deployment of transgressive tactics have become common amongst politically determined projects. ‘The world’ of art is embedded in the barbaric disregard of ‘the earth’. Consider the work of the Danish artist Jens Haaning for example. With pieces such as Weapons Factory (1995) he stages the exact point of juridical difficulty, employing immigrant workers to manufacture real weapons. Earlier works such as Candy Bag (1993) which consists of a collection of confiscated drugs, exhibited in a plastic bag as if evidence of a misdemeanour, and Sawn Off (1993), which presents a sawn off shotgun with impounded ammunition, again exhibited in a plastic bag as if in substantiation of some misdemeanour, are set to raise questions regarding immigration anxieties.\(^{156}\)

Who pays for these bombs, these weapons manufacturing units, we might ask. Where did these confiscated drugs and sawn-off shotguns come from? Is there a market for this sort of work? Who buys them? What inspires its production? Who does it speak to? Such work is inevitably hailed as radical and avant-garde in advance of its presentation, however on closer examination it seems that most of this work is produced as the instrumentality of government-led initiatives. Bourriaud pictures Haaning’s work as ‘typical of art today’ being produced ‘beyond any consideration of the art system or the museum’, however what Bourriaud fails to point out is that such artists are inevitably funded by the government/corporate quangos set-up to ameliorate, and sometimes antagonise, social problems.\(^{157}\) In this context we understand the agent provocateur as a public events agent enabled by


\(^{157}\) Nicholas Bourriaud, “Jens Haaning - Illegal Worker”, Ibid. (Dijon, France: Les presses Du Real). 103.
government agency to engender radical social awareness programs in advance of sweeping social change; as the Belgian Minister for the Arts puts it ‘culture is the best weapon of mass destruction’.\textsuperscript{158}

While within the political debates surrounding art practice artists are often accused of solipsism, Julian Stallabrass argues that Haaning is amongst those artists who have fashioned art practice to take advantage of funding opportunities generated by socio-political problems; in this case the neo-liberal rationalisation of trade and immigration borders.\textsuperscript{159} Stallabrass details the political context from which Haaning’s practice has evolved. In the 1990s Russia and Scandinavian countries were advised by western economists that a sharp exposure to the shock-therapy of an open-market economy would be socially painful in the short term, but would in the long term produce economic enrichment. Mass immigration radically transformed, what had been until then, ‘enclosed and homogenous societies’. ‘A small army of cheap flexible labour’ was unleashed across Scandinavian countries exploiting and alienating the erstwhile affluent cultures.\textsuperscript{160} Concurrently many Scandinavian and Eastern-bloc countries dismantled their social welfare programs. While a few corporations and individuals prospered, in the economic recession which ensued, unemployment exploded, ‘most basic human services buckled, crime became rampant, destitution became widespread and life expectancy plunged’.\textsuperscript{161} In this context, we begin to understand the role of avant-garde in the state-led project of globalisation.

Take Haaning’s publicly funded \textit{Turkish Jokes} (Oslo 1994) or \textit{Arabic Jokes} (Copenhagen 1996) as a case in point.\textsuperscript{162} In these works, ‘jokes’ are broadcast or pasted around the Nordic capitals, as Bourriaud explains, ‘to enable the bond of humour between the immigrant workers … for once excluding the natives’ and destabilising any nationalist claims on local territories’.\textsuperscript{163} Clearly such production is a product of the political effort to open up the Danish economy to the ‘small army of cheap flexible labour’. Seeing the scale of \textit{Arabic Jokes} in installation one is left

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to question Bourriaud’s complicity in what appears to be a series of fundamentally sexist and racist jokes, offensive to both Muslim and Danish communities alike.

_Arabic Jokes_ consists of a series of huge posters pasted around the red light district of Copenhagen in a political bid ‘to bring the immigrant workers into a circle of inclusion’, as Bourriaud puts it, ‘reversing the local privileges’. These posters feature a larger than life-sized image of a busty blond, a Danish ‘porn-star’ we are told, naked to the waist, unzipping her hot-pants, flanked on either side by jokes in Arabic. What were these Arabic jokes, we might ask — unless you read Arabic you will never know. From a purely visual perspective, without understanding the text-based content of these jokes, the sexist implications of the images are worrying; the role of the state in the production of such material is disturbing.

Regardless of the Haaning’s appeal to ‘a sense of humour and the imagination’ or his bid ‘to avoid turning artistic practice into an essentially analytic and administrative tool’ or the theoretical defence of such work as being produced beyond any consideration of art or the museum, the question remains; what has this work got to do with art? George Dickies _Institutional Theory of Art_ may help us rationalise the realities of such production but the fact is that the most radical work is produced by the very institutions which it purportedly critiques; this is the reality of state cultural production. Is this any different to the Papal production of Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel, the Constructivist objectives for state-controlled cultural production; the Socialist Realism of Stalin or Mao; C.I.A backed International Abstraction. The answer is no.

In her paper ‘Which side are you on cultural worker?’ Diedrich Diederichsen explains ‘artists survive in relation to their support networks of power’, all artists are all anxious about their survival and are quite oblivious to the havoc that their opportunism wreaks upon peoples lives. The free will of the artist it is ‘a fallacy’, Diederichsen maintains, mechanisms of power determine the public profile they need of the artist, it is a mistake to imagine that the artist’s work is a product of unfettered self-determination. Contemporary art is no different. What constitutes

164  Ibid.
contemporary art is determined in the context of broader political agendas and instituted as a lateral approach to education and new social awareness programs.

2.2 The artist’s popular context

What represents contemporary art in the most influential circuits, as we have already demonstrated, is an institutionally determined project. As the boundaries between arts, politics, science and popular culture begin to crumble, artists can be discovered working in almost every discipline. While in some circles what determines the public project of art is politics, in others it is popular culture. The avant-garde have a long established commitment to the 'hi-low' mix of cultures. This mix enables the political representation of a broader cultural cross-section and it also connects the museum to the economic power of mass audience and mass market. Andy Warhol's wry comment on commerce serves to introduce the issue at stake; 'business art is the most fascinating kind of art, making money is art and good business the best art'. In the open discussion between the editors at the end of *Art Since 1900* entitled 'The predicament of contemporary art', Rosalind Krauss acknowledges that the advent of post-structuralism, conceptualism and video art have effectively dismembered the medium-specific conceptions of art practice and left traditional conceptions of art practice to compete with a wide range of post-art modes of production; such as popular culture, mass-media and the promotional industries alike.

While modern painting has become indistinguishable from interior décor, design and architecture and vice versa. Marketing agencies have appropriated popular culture and mass-media modalities in their bid to colonise mass markets, and commercial interests regularly colonise art modalities to engage their increasingly art-savvy audiences. The fold between the designer and the artist has become fluid while the difference between a seasonal fashion and a period style has become negligible.

Consider the neo-liberal model of contemporary art’s performance in the work of Vanessa Beecroft. Beecroft’s world reveals a different earth, one which is complicit

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with consumer culture. In 1998 following her success at the Venice Biennale the previous year, Beecroft staged 35 performative events in 24 cities around the globe, all sponsored by Gucci. Beecroft’s touring exhibition culminated in her show at the Guggenheim Museum in New York where twenty fashion models stood around for the two and a half hours of the opening wearing 'Tom Ford', Gucci rhinestone bikinis and high heels, some of them were wearing just the shoes. At the opening invited guests could purchase the Gucci bikinis, the Gucci shoes or the Beecroft photographs. While the artworld saw the show as a 'sell-out' by the artist and the museum alike, the media loved it, Leonardo Di Caprio thought it was 'cool' and Gucci’s conceptual marketing manager, Tom Ford, was hailed as the new Damien Hirst. The show was the talk of New York that season. 169

Patricia Bickers, the editor of Art Monthly UK, in her article, *Marriage a la Mode*, wonders whether the artworld’s interest in fashion isn’t just ‘a marriage of convenience’. 170 Bickers raises the example the Giorgio Armani exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in 1999; a win/win for both the Guggenheim and Armani alike. The exhibition raised $15 (US) million in sponsorship for the museum, becoming effectively a paid promotional event for Armani, whilst setting new attendance records for the museum. 171

While designers such as Gucci and Armani have used the Guggenheim (N.Y.) as a promotional venue for their collections, some fashion is clearly art and vice versa. Alexander McQueen’s early work with Issabella Blow regularly utilised radical performative strategies to incarcerate the imagination of his art-savvy clientele. Art is no simple matter of setting up a visual effect, the performative act of art must excite the imagination of its audience before the object itself is empowered to signify the conceptual event it has engendered. We can see this performative effect in McQueen’s launch of *Burning Down the House* (of French fashion -1996) project with Blow or his *Overlook* collection (1999) which launched the public ice rink at London’s Courtauld Institute. Like many contemporary designers Alexander McQueen’s work is layered with sly reference to the work of his yBa contemporaries. Take his hollow transparent Perspex bustier from *The Hunger* collection(1996) for example, which doubles as a live worm farm; a direct reference Damien Hirst’s formaldehyde fauna. Hussein Chalayan’s collections *Remote Control*
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(2000) or After Words (2000 - 2001) which straddle the boundary between conceptual sculpture and contemporary fashion are also worthy of note in this context. More important to this discussion are the rising museum and collector interests in such designers. Individual pieces are avidly collected and key designers are regularly offered major museum shows.172

While the haute-couture designers of the ‘beau-monde’ such as Christian Dior, Balenciaga or Coco Chanel might never have wished to be considered as artists, in the sense of their bohemian contemporaries from the rive gauche. Today fashion designers are numbered amongst the new avant-garde. Bickers details the short history which began in 1982, when Germano Célant published a special 'Fashion Issue' of Art Forum which featured Issey Miyake’s paraphrase of the Samurai rattan ‘practice armour’ on the front cover. If you can call high-fashion mass culture, Célant publicly acknowledged the significance of the developing alliance between ‘the avant-garde and mass culture’.173 Twelve months later Yves Saint-Laurent’s retrospective opened at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, Saint-Laurent becoming the first fashion designer to be offered a retrospective at a major museum. Although the history of fashion as art is a relatively recent phenomenon, fashion has become a regular contributor to most art magazines these days.

In1996 Célant, then the senior curator of the Guggenheim (N.Y.), set up the Florence Biennale pairing celebrity artists with celebrity designers; Hirst with Prada; Holtzer with Helmut Lang; Roy Litchenstein with Gianni Versace, etc.174 At that time most of the haute couture designers, such as Saint Laurent, Armani or Versace, were primarily focussed on fashion as fashion rather than fashion as art. However, since the nineties the distinction between designers and artists has become only a minor alteration of materials and market. Within today’s canon, the similarities and subtle differences between the work of Bridget Riley and Mary Quant would be worthy of an exhibition.

Lisa Philips, the director of the York's New Museum of Contemporary Art, candidly disclaims any distinction between fashion and art as ridiculous; ‘fashion at its highest level is an art form’ and the best fashion can be an investment capable of

174  ‘once the fashionistas and paparazzi left, the audiences stayed away in droves’ There were only ever been two Florence Biennales - Patricia Bickers, “Marriage a La Mode”, Art Monthly 2002. 3.
bringing more than just social dividends.\textsuperscript{175} Since Saint-Laurent’s retrospective at the MET in 1983, many museums have mounted major retrospectives of key fashion artists and established comprehensive collections.

Chris Townsend, the author of \textit{Rapture - Art’s Seduction by Fashion}\textsuperscript{176} dates the conflation of fashion and art back to the 1960s and the rise of the everyday as art, although the history of art’s conceptual collusion with capital could begin with Duchamp’s perfume bottle \textit{Belle Haliene - Eau de Violette}(1920) (Beautiful Breath - Water of the Veil). The production-line perfumes of Salvador Dali and Warhol are worthy of mention in this context, more recently, Tracy Emin’s production line handbags with her signature appliqué text, in this case ‘Me - International WOMAN’.\textsuperscript{177}

Ever since the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century the door between decorative arts and formalist furniture has swung backwards and forth; this shift between formalist and functionalism is obvious in the work Art Nouveau, Art Deco, Bauhaus, Constructivism and De Stijl. In the 1980s the American sculptor, Ham Steinbach, was producing generic shelving units to display his Readymades, extending the Duchampian lineage in the most literal manner. More recently Steinbach has been setting up elegant display systems for Prada handbags and shoes. The door between art and design swings both ways. In 2005 Jan de Cock, the interior designer for Rei Kawakubo’s label \textit{Commes Des Garçons} was commissioned to design an installation environment for the Tate Modern, just like \textit{Commes Des Garçon}, although Alex Coles, the editor of the Tate magazine maintains de Cock’s commercial installations for \textit{Commes Des Garçons} were more successful than the purely aesthetic production for the museum.\textsuperscript{178}

In his book \textit{What is wrong with Contemporary Art?}, Peter Timms raises a legitimate question; ‘do we need to spend our public funding on an art which shows us that art exactly the same as shopping or clubbing?’ Timms quotes Rex Butler in support of his argument; ‘if there is no difference between art and shopping why bother with art at all’\textsuperscript{179}. However representing the high-class shopping habits of the rich

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\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{175} Ibid. 1.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{176} London’s Barbican Centre, 2002. Ibid.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{178} Alex Coles, “Curator as Stylist”, \textit{Contemporary} 2005. 20.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{179} Peter Timms, \textit{What Is Wrong with Contemporary Art?}, (Sydney: University of NSW, 2004). 87.
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and famous was arguably the museum’s original function. Despite the rhetoric, the artworld remains a closed circuit which is dependent on the patronage of the wealthy and thrives on upward mobility and the privileges of prestige and luxury. We only have to think of all those museums stuffed full of farthingales and ruffs, whale bone corsets and finely crafted suits of armour and the collections of Victoria and Albert, Margaret of Austria and Catherine the Great. As Warhol points out ‘what survives as art is what the ruling class of the period decrees should survive’.180

Just as the boundary between art and fashion has folded; the space between classical and popular-music has gone pop. For many the distinction between art and popular culture is hardly worth mentioning. Art went pop well before we were born; not just with Warhol and Pop Art but as far back as Picasso and Cubism. We could trace a direct line of influence from Scriabin to Stockhausen to Pink Floyd, but popular music now exerts a significant influence on classical culture which we see in Pierre Boulez interpretations of Frank Zappa’s compositions. During the 60’s art schools generated so many pop bands, not least of all *The Beatles*. A few pop artists have effected the shift from ‘pop star’ to ‘art star’, Pipilotti Rist, Jan Van Vliet (*Captain Beefheart*) and *D.J. Tricky* spring to mind. Many contemporary artists have developed art bands for fun and promotion; Jonathan Meese, Martin Creed, Jon Campbell to name a couple. Laurie Anderson, *General Idea* and *The King Pins* walk the line between art and popular culture commonly known as postmodernism, while many pop-stars now produce a hybrid genre of performance celebrated as art, *Marylin Manson* is worthy of mention here. Equally many artists work between creative and commercial disciplines, we have already mentioned Warhol and Emin, this list could include Julian Schnabel and Vincent Gallo.

*Björk Gudmundsdottir* makes no distinction between art and pop polarities, her artist’s pass enables her to ‘access all areas’; including your CD player and television, the concert hall, the art gallery and the museum. *Björk*’s stated desire is collaborative; to work with ‘artists working at the cutting edge of their disciplines’.181 Her practice has led to extensive collaborations with artists working across many disciplines; from art, fashion, film and pop including; Mathew Barney, Lars Von Triers, McQueen, Chalayan, Chris Cunningham, Nick Knight, Stephanie Sednaoui and Nobuyoshi Araki to name but a few. In many respects cross-

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disciplin ary artists such as Bjørk or Nick Cave inherit a lineage which extends back to artists such as Jean Cocteau, whose creativity attached itself to whatever caught his imagination at the time. Cocteau is identified as a musician, a composer, a draughtsman, a painter, a poet, a novelist or a playwright and a filmmaker; having made significant contributions to most of these genres.

Given the exponential growth of the creative classes, the accessibility of creative technologies, the collapse of boundaries between high-art and popular culture and the glut of artistic practices which qualify as art now, we need curators to filter and present what is relevant. As we have already noted in the previous chapter, the politically-engaged avant-garde argue that art’s funding must be reserved for socially determined projects. However, we must not underestimate art’s capacity to engender its own networks of support. In using art’s methodology many artists, cunningly or unwittingly, generate complex fields of social and political support which can translate to a market economy under the right circumstances. Art’s role is to cause a conceptual shift in our perceptual experience of the world.

Bjørk’s performance at one of London’s premier classical music venues; St. John’s at Smith Sq. provides a window into her capacity to effect a shift in her audience’s experience of the world. In the following review we can see that the boundaries between contemporary art, performance, pop, classical music are down as Bjørk walks a line from the rustic right up to the operatic;

Where Bjørk’s voice is concerned, "marvellous" is the only word. She seems to approach her practice like a track and field event, stamping feet and swinging arms to add weight and momentum to the gorgeous, guttural braying which characterises her lower range at full pelt. This is particularly impressive on a gob-smackingly emotional song in which Bjørk’s amour for her new boyfriend (Mathew Barney) breaks down to the repeated phrase ‘I love him, I love him, I love him’, as the Inuit choir added its counterpoint, your correspondent’s goose bumps weren’t so much raised, as run up the flagpole.182

The criteria by which cultural practice is assessed has shifted, artists are graded in terms of their capacity to effect a social shift, to generate new social spaces. Artists working within what was once understood to be the conventions of art practice are no longer privileged, the artworld has opened its doors to the avatars of popular
culture; D.J.s, computer-game designers, pop stars, fashionistas, filmmakers, philosophers, architects, photojournalists, and political activists. Although the museum industry is not in the business of underwriting the egos of creative types, many significant creative figures have been absorbed by the artworld after the effect of their on the world has been quantified. This does not always happen within an artist’s lifetime.

Leigh Bowery was such a figure. Was his production actually art? Bowery didn’t care what you called it, as he said himself, ‘there really isn’t a name for it’. His talent was far greater than any of his nominal identities; artist’s model, performance artist, costume designer and \textit{enfant terrible}. When Bowery died in London on New Year’s Eve 1995, aged 33, his obituary in the London underground press described him as Australian performance artist and costumier and ‘a subversive reactionary till the end’.\(^{183}\) Despite the fact that his production was not produced for any stable concept of market his work continues to be exhibited in the same spirit with which he lived, his name often appropriated from the names of his costumes such as; Fergus Greer, re-presented in the \textit{Things that are Certainly Not Art} exhibition which launched the Bloomberg SPACE in London 2002.\(^{184}\)

Within the world of fine art, Bowery was probably best known as Lucian Freud’s life model. However within the world of contemporary art Bowery’s modus operandi has more cache than Freud’s. Although Bowery (and his wife Nicola Bateman) always modelled for Freud’s paintings naked, Bowery was noted for his costumes and performances. For the opening of Freud’s 1993 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, which featured all of Freud’s paintings of the naked Bowery, Freud sent Bowery in place of himself.\(^{185}\) Bowery caused a sensation when he turned up at the MET in full costume complete with platform shoes, embroidered floral gown and matching face mask with Nazi war helmet; a work now known as \textit{The Metropolitan} which has since been acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria.\(^{186}\)

Bowery was an artist without boundaries, although was best known as a costumier whose work has inspired many designers including Vivienne Westward, Alexander

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McQueen, John Galliano and Rifat Ozbek, as well as artists such as Gillian Wearing and Yinka Shonibare. Westward described Bowery as ‘one of the most important designers I have known’. Bowery was another beneficiary of Artangels funding as the designer for Michael Clark Dance Company. Bowery’s pop collaborations are almost as numerous as Björk’s. He worked with pop artists Massive Attack, Boy George, Trojan and headed his own band Minty. His performative spirit was coerced into The Serpentine Gallery for the opening of The Andy Warhol Show, as well as the windows of Tokyo Department Store, Parco, and the Anthony D’Offay Gallery in London. Bowery modelled for a host of photographers including Nick Knight, Anne Leibowitz; staged impromptu and orchestrated performances across queer underground of Western Europe and ran his own club in London Taboo, famously named because ‘nothing that occurred there was’.

A emblematic example of Bowery’s work is pictured in a photograph by Michael Fazakerley, captioned ‘Leigh Bowery wearing his cape made of painting rags stolen from Lucien Freud’s studio floor, sewn together to picture a portrait of Adolph Hitler when opened’. Its main function was to dumbfound and astound his painter and patron. Although the costume was proposed for Michael Clark Dance Company, it was never used. In Fazakerley’s photograph we see Bowery’s blackened face and shaven head popping out of a toilet seat like a big black spot. The black plastic toilet lid is slung around his shoulders somewhere between a collar and cap. Below Bowery’s colossal body is sheathed in transparent an acrylic lingerie and partially covered by the offending ragged cape which he opens out to torment his patron, the grandson of the famous Jewish psychoanalyst. Reified into Bowery’s cape, lovingly stitched together from the coloured patches of Freud’s own painting rags, is the pointillist portrait of the Jewish painter’s nemesis; Adolph Hitler. Bowery’s work is hard to categorise, it was certainly not driven by any conventional notions of process-driven aesthetic production, fulfilling a function or even fitting in. Rather Bowery’s work was a performative event predicated on his own instinctive need to shine.

Bowery was a shameless extrovert whose work usually opened up with, what Heidegger called, the belligerent act of primary strife and proceeded by violating all expectations. Bowery happily stepped into the subordination of his own shining without apology. Whether he entered as the pregnant man and ecstatically gave birth to his bloodied wife or just dropped his pants to squirt a fresh enema in face of his audience, there was never any question of compromise with Bowery. Like the good student of the ambrosial Silenus, Bowery disarmed all expectations and challenged his audiences to meet him on his own level.

Bowery did not court the artworld, rather the artworld courted Bowery; they turned up to his performances in droves. If there is such thing as a conventional artist these days, Bowery wasn't one of them. He was ushered toward exhibition opportunities by curatorial talent scouts. Bowery had dropped out of Fashion School in Melbourne 'bored with the compromises of style' entailed in utilitarian production and headed off to London, to 'make it'. He progressed by astounding everyone around him. He began his assault on London by simply turning up in the Underground club scene in his costumes and set to work with whatever was going off. The London designer, Rifat Ozbek, provides a window into Bowery at work:

I met Leigh in the Pyramid Cub, at Heaven. Every time I saw him I would go up to him and say 'My God! You look so incredible! You look so … genius! Who are you? So we started talking. Leigh loved to be adored, worshipped. I just couldn’t help myself. I would ask him, 'Where are you going tonight Girl? What clubs are you doing? He’d say; I'm gonna go here and I'm gonna go there and I'm gonna end up at the Daisy Chain. So I would just go to the Daisy Chain every Tuesday night and just wait for him to arrive. Every week I thought he could never surpass what he had worn last week and every week he did.190

What Bowery demonstrates is that art has the power to open its own doors. Bowery had no clearly defined career plan, no major financial back-up; he refused to be bound by the economies which patronised him. Bowery was quickly marked out as a 'must-see' original, he had the ability to 'transport us out of the ordinary' and generate a luminous truth, the likes of which we have not seen before and will never see again; an untruth. It is easy to understand Bowery's performance in terms

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190 Rifat Ozbek: Ibid. 124-127.
of Heidegger’s notion of how truth wills itself into being through the primary act of strife to contest what is a blessing and what is a curse.\textsuperscript{191}

Of course Bowery had developed sophisticated skill-sets and a confidence in his ability to orchestrate his talents to engage and astound all those about him. His art was expressive of a personal need to find an alternative way through life based on his own truth. But Bowery did not have a formal education in art; his practice was a product of an instinct and an eccentrically developed sense of language. As a sensitive but gifted child he had developed a natural flair for décor and costume which later developed into an extensive vocabulary with which was able to confidently command attention and leave his audiences gagging.\textsuperscript{192} It was the richness of his language that enabled him to convert his own demands for attention into a language of form to excite the world about him and open up a new way of being in the world.

How can an audience ever predict an artist’s genius? In the examples of Bowery and Bjørk we can see Heidegger’s notion of primary strife at work, there is no attempt at ‘insipid agreement’ in their work, no attempt at a homely reconciliation with their community, no search for the lowest common denominator of public accord. The artist is not a politician. The artist does not begin by conducting a market survey canvassing the needs of their community; the artistic act is not the result of consensus politics; the artistic act is determined by subjective demands for the truth of the artist’s own being. It is through their ‘surrender to the concealed provenance of the truth of their own being’ that the artist knows what is true and what will work; what will open the way forward for themselves and those about them. This is what Heidegger meant by ‘the primary act of strife’; the artist takes responsibility for internal logic of their own ethics. This is what inspires the support which garners around them as a consequence of their own incisive logic. There is no question of compromise in the act of art.

As we have seen, the role of the artist belongs to whoever is capable of drawing us out of ourselves, through the artist’s demands for their own truth and inspiring us beyond the narrow parameters of our fettered existence. What is important is the conceptual rush which accompanies the experience of the work itself. This is how we know when we are in the presence of an artist. It matters little what medium

they use or whether their production belongs to some artworld or not. The artist comes from wherever culture they do, they utilise whatever language they have at hand. What marks the artist is their ability to inspire their own way forward through the resonance of the truth engendered within their performative act. This act of art is not arbitrary rather it distinguishes itself as an astute and incisive act of language which challenges our knowledge of the world. However, although the act of art demands a virtuosic act of language, the challenge facing the artist is not reducible to a virtuosic display of skill. Art is understood in the artist’s capacity to open up a way forward. The artistic act is not done for the edification of the artist but for the production which opens up the becoming of beings in light of new truth. The artistic act is structured in light of the artist’s confidence in the power of their own ability to affect the world about them. The instinctive act of art is not an instrument of institutional initiative; rather it develops despite the hegemonies of institutional interest.

The problem facing the artist now is that the concept of art has become so broad, that it is of little value. Twentieth century art exploded the concept of art which has given way to a politically determined project where the artist is often publicly constructed to suit a political brief. As we have seen, many artists develop practices determined by public funding opportunities and/or political determinations. Equally we note contemporary art is often constructed by commercial forces of popular culture. While furniture, film and fashion all have their own disciplines, art in the specific sense faces a crisis. Contemporary artists are now free to use whatever then can in their bid to regain their lost power, although it is the lack of stable ground which is the problem facing the artist. This interrogation into cross-disciplinary practice could be extended to a wide range of disciplines science and technology, urban planning and landscape architecture; however it is the conceptual destabilization of art, in the specific sense of art education, which is the central focus of this thesis.

James Elkins, interrogates parameters of contemporary art in four chapters; Modernisms, Post-modernisms, Politics and The Question of Skill. While Elkin’s thesis remains centrality focussed on the history of painting, his map of the broader parameters of contemporary art and visual culture acknowledges the advent of popular culture, reality T.V., commercial television, advertising, Disneyland, Hollywood and Bollywood. Ultimately, Elkins raises more questions than he is able to draw conclusions. The discussions at the end of Elkins’ book unveil the depth of the conceptual crisis currently facing art. Within these discussions the Michel Foucault scholar, Arpad Szakloczai, suggests the central questions facing
contemporary art come to the key issues of aesthetics, ethics and politics; all concerns which had been recognised by the ancient Greeks. Szakloczai reminds us that Foucault had spent the last four years of his life attempting to unravel the complexities of the issues at stake, although Foucault died before he had a chance to formulate his own position on the subject.193

### 2.3 The artist's original methodology

In this context we turn to the work of Hans Georg Gadamer, who died in 2002, at the age of 102. Gadamer often introduced himself in terms of his reading habits; 'Basically I only read books that are over 2,000 years old'.194 Gadamer had been a student of Heidegger's. His opus *Truth and Method* re-interprets some of the ideas and language developed by Heidegger in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. I have extracted a specific reading from his treatise on artistic method which I believe is relevant to this discussion concerning *The Issue of the Artist*. Although Gadamer's work is essentially concerned with 'the hermeneutic phenomenon of art' which he reminds us 'is not a problem of method', Gadamer differentiates artistic methodology from scientific methodology and extends upon Heidegger's conception of method.195 On close examination, *Truth and Method* reveals a compelling model of artistic methodology, one which is worthy of re-consideration at a time when many twentieth century models fail to sustain their currency within the discourses of contemporary art.

Published in the 1960's, *Truth and Method* offers a model the artist's role which stands in accord with Heidegger, Nietzsche and pre-Socratic conceptions of the artist's role. In face of any critique of philosophic retrospection, Gadamer argues it is a weakness of philosophical thought to attempt to 'play the independent fool' to not test ones ideas against the history of knowledge.196 For Gadamer art is the production of the unfamiliar but, he argues, it is a mistake to imagine that art is an

arbitrary production of novelty; ‘art is an unfamiliar illuminated by a glimmer of the true’. 197

Gadamer was the first to acknowledge the lack of radicality of his conclusions; defining, the significance of the artist's metaphysical performance of truth in contrast to the epistemologies of science. 198 Scientific knowledge, he argued, is produced within the context of ‘a forgetfulness of being’ which leads to ‘the nihilism that Nietzsche had prophesied’. In this light Gadamer defines art as a fundamentally humanist practice. 199

‘Art becomes a history of world views; that is a history of truth as it is manifested in the mirror of art. If we want to justify art as a way of truth in its own right, then we must fully realize what truth means here. It is in the human sciences as a whole that an answer to this question must be found; for they seek not to surpass, but to understand the variety of experiences, whether aesthetic, historical, religious or political, that means they expect to find truth in them’. 200

Gadamer was aware that there can be no ‘method’ for the performance of ‘truth’, rather his opus serves to clarify some historical confusions which have developed between the classical conception of the artistic process and developments contemporary at the time his writing.

Gadamer delimits the parameters of an artistic methodology based on the artist's performance of their own truth, in direct reference to Heidegger’s treatise on the subject. Gadamer was present when Heidegger presented his lectures on the Origin of the Work of Art, which Gadamer describes as having ‘caused a real sensation’. This was not just because of Heidegger’s claim that poetic thought is the foundation of all historical and cultural knowledge but also because of the poetic language which contained his essay. 201 It is Heidegger’s use of terms such as ‘being into light’ which makes his treatise both compelling and complex. The use of this is linguistic base is evident in Gadamer’s writing also; his language is as complex as his model abstract.

199 Ibid. Introduction p. xxxvii.
200 Ibid. 98-99.
In Gadamer’s model, the performative act of art attests to the truth of the artist’s being. Art is produced to evolve the artist’s cultural knowledge and reconfigure their social relationships in light of this knowledge. In the self-presentation of the truth of their own being through their chosen medium or language, the artist reconfigures the cultural conditions surrounding their own being and in this way transforms both themselves and their social conditions. In this way the artist reconfigures social space and institutes their contribution to knowledge.

As we have seen within Heidegger’s model, the artist’s role is to bring poetic knowledge into being through a performative act of language. In Gadamer this comes to the self-presentation of the truth of the artist’s being, which happens only through language, in the broadest sense. This involves the transformation of all that the artist knows; that is the transformation of the basic foundation of knowledge. In this essentially subjective act personal knowledge is embedded within objective, communicable, form. The artistic act entails an act of self-alienation, wherein the artist represents of the truth of their subjective experience in a hermeneutical act of language and offers it up for interpretation in a language of form. That is the subjective act of art becomes an objective act of language. The transformation of all the artist knows, into an incisive linguistic structure capable of captivating its viewer by virtue of its ability to differentiate the existential conditions of being in the present. The objective of the work of art is to oblige the viewer to re-think their basic premise of being in the world and enable the truth of the artist’s being to institute itself into the fabric of knowledge.

For the artist, this process begins from an alienated state, where being-in-itself becomes a ‘no-thing’, where consciousness itself becomes a conceptual black hole from which all light is cast outwards toward ‘all other being’. This black hole of consciousness excavates subjectivity, and objectivity becomes all. In this condition all knowledge belongs to ‘the world at large’ and this is what constitutes all the artist knows. This is what Gadamer means by the basic platform of knowledge. From this condition, the artist soon discovers that all knowledge has been generated by the past and life patterns default to social patterns.

‘The miracle of language’ is not the fact that idea becomes form, but rather that whatever emerges as language has already-been formed. We can see this in terms

of the history of painting; to take up any mode of painting is to reiterate a predetermined genre; Classicism, Cubism, Colourfield. Language references the 'signified' but it is only the 'signifier' in this respect language can never say a thing as it is. Here we have Magritte's famous painting The Treachery of Images (C'est ici n'est pas une pipe-1929), which is not in fact a pipe but a painting which pictures an image of a pipe. What Gadamer refers to as 'the verbum cordis', is the linguistic connection between the signified and the signifier. The signified, the real, can only be brought forth as an image of itself in language. Thus we understand all language belongs to the domain of the representation. Our history of knowledge is defined by what has been represented in the social and historical collectivity of language.

On one level the objective of art is no different to any other research discipline; to present knowledge as language. On another level, the artist’s objective is to enable ‘the becoming of Being’ to originate from the present. The artist opens a linguistic doorway into the present, but the work of art or ‘the equipment’ which has effected this shift, remains embedded in a language of form. Eventually the connotations of the artwork, the implications of the linguistic event of art, stabilize and whatever knowledge the work of art contains becomes bound by historical circumstance. Although the role of the work of art is to enable ‘the becoming Being’ to originate from the present, eventually the work of art becomes a part of the structure of historical knowledge. Here we see how the production of new social space eventually institutes itself into the fabric of cultural knowledge.

However, despite art’s role in converting the present into language for the history of knowledge, art is not quite like other research disciplines which are defined by the literal processes of documentation, maintains Gadamer. Artistic knowledge does not belong to the logic of scientific or historical knowledge which is based on empirical evidence; art belongs to the gestalt of philosophical knowledge. In this regard the artist’s conceptual power is based in metaphysical apprehension of the world, although Gadamer argues art is dictated by ‘Being’ itself, which resides in the present and precedes all other forms of knowing.

Ultimately the artist is driven by the process which both Heidegger and Gadamer call poeticizing. Poeticizing is defined as the originating institution from which all

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205 Ibid. 97.
profound knowledge springs. Gadamer qualifies Heidegger’s conception of art’s origin as a spring, and the springing off the platform of all that the artist knows to set up a new linguistic structure which speaks the essential name of the present.\textsuperscript{206} We can see this production of a conceptual structure which springs from the platform of \textit{all the artist knows}. We can see this process within the performative act of Landy’s \textit{Break Down}. In deconstructing everything he possessed, Landy transformed all that he knew into a new linguistic code to engender the becoming of his own being in the present. In this way Landy engenders the becoming of those beings who step into the conceptual field of his event. In recognising the implications of Landy’s \textit{Break Down} they are enabled to make a shift in line with Landy’s cognitive experience which effects the becoming of their own Being.

This new linguistic code which names the essential nature of the existential present becomes, what Gadamer calls, the \textit{sprachkristall}; a conceptual structure which doesn’t attract by engendering desire, as much as it compels by virtue of its conceptual astuteness and its ability to confound, refract and reflect whatever knowledge is directed toward it.\textsuperscript{207} Again Landy’s \textit{Break Down} provides an excellent example of Gadamer’s conception of the \textit{sprachkristall}. What draws us into the implications of Landy’s deconstruction of all that he has known is certainly not its pleasant form, rather \textit{Break Down} compels our attention by way of its representation of the ‘all too familiar’ but confounds us with something profoundly alien; laced with the glimmer of the true.

Gadamer developed this concept of the \textit{sprachkristall} in reference to Paul Célan’s cycle of poems ‘\textit{Atemkristall}’, which in turn stems from Anne Frank’s poem ‘\textit{Kristall}’ and Adalbert Stifter’s short story ‘\textit{Bergkristall}’. This history of poetic interpretation all take their origins in Friedrich Schelling’s metaphysical conception of the crystalline structure as a natural phenomenon which nature creates out of itself becoming a metaphor for all forms of artistic knowledge.\textsuperscript{208} Gunter Figal represents this \textit{sprachkristall} as a linguistic structure where ‘language consolidates into a new

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\item \textsuperscript{206} Joseph Kockelmans, \textit{Heidegger on Art and Art Works, ”Phaenomenologica”} (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985).
\item \textsuperscript{207} Gunter Figal, \textit{For a Philosophy of Freedom and Strife}, (Albany N.Y.: State University of New York, 1998). 137.
\end{itemize}
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poetic form where the fixity of this conceptual structure emits a fire of resistance whenever light falls upon it'. 209

For Gadamer, the artist's role is to divine the linguistic structures which attest to the truth of their 'Being' within the existential present. 210 The artist differentiates what is essential to the present from what belongs to the past and in this way defines the present. Gadamer suggests this is a sacred process where the artist sings the sacred identity of the present in order to divine a linguistic structure which does not belong to logic but neither can it be easily decoded. Rather this crystalline structure 'illuminates both surface and depth, concurrently constructing an inner surface which reflects its depth outwards'. The artist’s linguistic structures do 'not attract by means of a pleasant form but rather they captivate through the flash of light', the glimmer of truth. 211

For Gadamer the objective of the artists' performance is not to obliterate all foregone knowledge but rather to differentiate and build upon cultural knowledge in light of personal experience and poetic insight. Essentially this is a grounded experience. However both Heidegger and Gadamer acknowledge that 'art does not take its gift from the ordinary'. Rather, art’s linguistic form is determined through a process of 'aesthetic differentiation', where knowledge is redefined. Only through the acceptance of the linguistic power of things and the history of knowledge that they represent, is art able to bring forth its original significance and be recognised as a work of art. 212

Gadamer and Heidegger are both of the opinion that to understand art, we must be able to recognise the significance of the primary truth which is contained by the work itself. Only through a hermeneutic encounter with art’s poetic essence, can we begin to recognise a thing as being a work of art at all. Most importantly only by comprehending the implications of the work of art are we are liberated into the becoming of being which the work of art facilitates. To accept the work of art as a

purely aesthetic production, non-binding or lacking in any existential seriousness is to trivialise the project of art.\textsuperscript{213}

Art, and the evolution of cultural knowledge plays a significant role in the development our moral education, argues Gadamer. This concerns ‘the essential character of human rationality as a whole’.\textsuperscript{214} Mankind is characterised by a conceptualising break with nature, he explains.\textsuperscript{215} This shift from the appreciation of natural phenomenon to the development of moral endeavour and sensibility constitutes the fundamental character of cultural knowledge.\textsuperscript{216} Although some basic cultural tools are implicit within our social education, this deeper aspect of our cultural sensibility is not a given, rather it is only produced only through committed cultural experience where the development of complex cultural knowledge of any form is inevitably hard-won. In this respect, Gadamer argues, our knowledge-based being does not belong to nature rather it belongs to culture. The education of this sensibility is the role of culture. This is what Gadamer calls \textit{Bildung}, by which he means the construction of conceptual memory which can only be formed in the context of cultural knowledge through the development of language.\textsuperscript{217}

Within the context of general knowledge where memory is formed, Gadamer explains, conventions of tradition, taste and beauty prevail. Hegelian conceptions of beauty and taste are formed by the law of aggregates, where the most beautiful flower of any species is recognised as the one which displays the most emblematic characteristics of its genus.\textsuperscript{218} However Gadamer’s view of the conventions of beauty, taste and tradition correlate to Heidegger’s conception of the ordinary, what he calls the ‘all too familiar’ where the hegemonic conspiracies of convention are in force and truth lies sheltered in concealment. In this regard we understand Gadamer’s conception of the artist’s way, has little to do with the conventions of beauty, taste, tradition.\textsuperscript{219}

Art is concerned with performance of the truth, that is, the coming into radiance of the truth of the artist’s being, which Gadamer details as, the originating source from

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{214} Ibid. 12.
\bibitem{215} Ibid. 11.
\bibitem{216} Ibid.
\bibitem{217} Ibid. 10-12.
\end{thebibliography}
which all conceptions of beauty, taste and tradition are formed. In Gadamer’s model, truth defines beauty. Not the other way around. This is the Greek concept of $\alpha$-lethêia, which is central to both Heidegger and Gadamer’s conception of art’s role. $\alpha$-lethêia does not refer to conventional notions of beauty of good proportions or symmetry. Rather truth is the appearance of a thing in itself where something comes into its ‘shining’ (scheinen; ‘to shine’ and also ‘to appear’) and is allowed to be seen for the very truth of itself.220

This conception of truth and beauty is closely related to the idea of ‘good’ (agathon) and means that which is able to be looked at, whilst ‘ugly’ (aischron) is simply that which cannot be looked at. In this realm a thing is chosen purely for itself, not as a means of access to something else. It is the primacy of truth which defines our conception of beautiful. In light of this truth, ‘desire comes to rest’, understanding is enabled, being is facilitated.221 The artist’s primary purpose is to propose a truth, which of itself comes to define our conventions of tradition, taste and beauty, not vice versa. But the artist’s role is not to illustrate aesthetics or standards of attractiveness. The problem with the conventions of tradition, taste, and beauty which Nietzsche recognised is that they over-power the artist’s thinking and intuitive processes, ‘blocking access to the primordial sources from which poetic and philosophical knowledge originates’.222

The primordial source of art is what Heidegger and Gadamer call ‘poetising’. Poeticizing is the pivotal axis of art’s originating institution and the basis on which the identity of both the artwork and the artist are dependent.223 Poeticizing, Heidegger and Gadamer both insist, is not to be confused with the art of poetry or poesy ‘it is certainly not the imagining of aimless oddities’ or the fanciful drift from the real into fiction.224 Poeticizing is the gleaning of poetic truth and constitutes the very essence of art. It is only within the revelation of poiêtic truth that beings come out of concealment into wonderment and the light of becoming. It is by virtue of the capacity of this poiêtic action, that the artist wins their future and institutes their poiêtic knowledge into our culture.

220 Ibid. 477-482.
221 Ibid. 487.
The question facing the artist becomes; how can they effect this act of truth and open up being into wonder and the transformative state of becoming? The dilemma lies between what Gadamer calls; ‘the infinitude of the divine’ which ‘Being’ recognises in terms of fulfilment, and ‘the finitude of language’, where poiēsis effects its institution and becomes installed into the software of cultural knowledge.

Art’s power is that it allows beings a way out of the confinement of what has become ‘the all too familiar’, where judgement has been forfeited and life is driven by the gaining ideal of future. By engendering wonder the artwork allows the viewer access to a range of options which judgement will disenable. In this light we understand the performance of art does not belong to tradition, but rather its obligation is to the transformation of knowledge. The artist transmutes all the artist knows into a new linguistic structure. Through the act of naming of the divine nature of existential present the artist brings their own being into the wonderment of becoming.

Heidegger and Gadamer both insist, this primordially poetic act of knowledge can only happen within the context of language, be it spoken, written, visual, performative or spatial. The language of art is not a tool for communication, just as art is not an educational aid. Although art is empowered by historical consciousness, art’s role is not pedagogical; in fact Gadamer argues, ‘arts role is harmed by the self-gratification of education’. Art’s poetic knowledge is ultimately subjective, intuitively gleaned within the aroused creative state that Nietzsche calls rausch, and brought into form within its material processes of production.

Fundamental to the artist’s identity is their capacity to transform experience into linguistic code and make form of their insights. Art is the originating institution of both the artist and the artwork alike. The artist is recognised in light of their capacity to transform cultural knowledge into structures which are capable of enabling the becoming of the being of the artist, within ‘the way of all men’. In Heidegger’s view, poietizing is a process of philosophising which becomes embedded in language. Through the conceptual act of thinking, which happens within the material process of transforming meaning into form, the artwork comes into being.

However there remains a considerable distinction between thinking and poeticizing, as Heidegger explains, although ‘the thinker and the poet dwell near to one another, they live on mountains far apart’. The poet names that which is holy, whereas the thinker thinks Being. Poetising takes the form of a gestalt; art works by generating a spellbinding effect capable of capturing attention by having reordered given knowledge into a profound new form, while rational thinking takes the method of a reasoned logic. For Gadamer art remains ‘the free play between the imagination and the serious business of understanding’ but, he argues, romantic conceptions of genius fail to adequately represent the complexity of the artistic process.

This issue is critical to this thesis and concerns the collapse of value of the concept of language within the arts, a problem which Gadamer tracks to Kant’s misunderstanding of the concept of genius. Nineteenth century preoccupations with the unfettered imagination, commonly associated with the concept of genius, have led to the rise of irrationalism and, Gadamer argues, ‘the devaluation of rhetoric’. He outlines a history where the rhetoric of reason and the transcendental mechanisms of intuition were compared and contrasted in terms of classical conceptions of allegory and symbol. Modern theory defined art in terms of intuitive process of symbol, whilst the metaphysical processes of allegory with their origins in logic and rhetoric were devalued.

Gadamer puts a strong case for the re-instatement of rhetoric within the process of art making. At origin, he argues, art becomes the institution of philosophic knowledge where allegory, with its origins in mythic consciousness, is essential to the artistic performance of poeticizing. In the early 1960s, Gadamer argued, the conceptual divide between mythic knowledge and aesthetic experience is not as great as modernism had presupposed, and conceptions of pure aesthetics have been generated by a false romanticism. Aesthetic experience and poetic knowledge are both required in the production of philosophic knowledge. The problem with the unconscious genius model is that it diminished the artist’s means and abdicated conceptual responsibility to the viewer. The problem with the

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227 Ibid. 196.
229 Ibid. Kant’s doctrine of taste and genius. 42 - 60.
230 Ibid.
doctrine of art as pure aesthetics is the ensuing collapse of language left the artist focussed on questions of taste, style and genre, concerns which block access to the primordial knowledge on which the integral process of poeticizing depends. Surface and free symbolic association prove insufficient grounds for the production of complex knowledge, argues Gadamer. They leave art dependent upon a genius of understanding, which is no more insightful than the unthinking genius of productivity. On both counts they lead to a relinquishing of authorial responsibility and produce an art incapable of substantiating any claim to knowledge.²³¹

For the Graeco-Germans, artistic production is driven by personal experience and poetic insight (das Erlebnis und die dichtung) where personal experience is transformed into poetic knowledge through the production of a language of form.²³² Art is not a chance arrangement of ideas, images or aesthetics. Nor is art produced on demand under commission, but rather art proceeds on the basis of personal experience, which cannot be measured by public morality, Gadamer maintains.²³³ He differentiates art’s etymology in terms of an essentially humanist endeavour and goes to great lengths to defend art’s methodology against the encroachments of scientific methodologies, which for Nietzsche obliges the ‘forgetfulness of being’.²³⁴ Art is the product of the subjective process of poeticizing where it is the condition of the artist's being which comes into a language of form and asserts itself as a truth, capable of speaking to the truth of the 'Being of beings'.

In this light we can understand art as an epistemology, but not one be confused with the empirical epistemologies of science. 'Art presents knowledge', insists Gadamer, and experiencing art means sharing in that knowledge, but the binding nature of art is not to be trivialised, he argues, art’s knowledge is accessible only through developing a hermeneutic relationship with the work itself.²³⁵ The challenge facing the work of art lies in how its poiêsis is received, translated, and preserved.

²³¹ Ibid. 95.
²³² Ibid. 61.
²³³ Ibid. 87.
²³⁴ Ibid. xxxvii.
²³⁵ Ibid. 97.
Both Heidegger and Gadamer recognise the institution of art’s knowledge only takes place when its knowledge is translated back into common language. The work of art communicates with the viewer on the basis of common cultural knowledge, but art is not a tool of language used to communicate. Art does not belong to language, rather it is the other way about; language belongs to art. Although art, in contemporary terms, may be the realm where anything goes, Gadamer argues, artistic and poetic knowledge is not an arbitrary system. In the most primary sense art comes to the issue of the artist, where the artist’s will to existence stands in direct opposition to nihilism. Art stands ‘in explicit opposition to any conception of art as entertainment or pleasure in the sense of enjoyment and for that matter, experience. The origin of art is profound knowledge and must not be trivialised by the reduction of art to a diversion of leisure.

Art is not the reproduction of the lineages of taste and tradition, art is more than a mere mimêsis, a simple simulacrum or signifier of something other than itself. The artistic act is directly connected to the representation of the artist’s conception of truth; in this regard art becomes an ethical action, which is not to be conflated with political action. Gadamer characterises the method of art as ‘a process of aesthetic differentiation’, a process wherein the artist reconfigures all given knowledge in light of the artist’s subjective demands for truth. In this act the artist differentiates historical knowledge, distinguishing between what is useful to the present and what belongs to the past, whilst retaining the right to a self-righteous attack on the past as well as the liberty to refuse the terms of the present.

In his readings of Gadamer and Heidegger, Gunter Figal speaks of an ‘absolute art’ which is not tied to any specific social, political or aesthetic context, such as ‘a church, a grand gallery or a bourgeois home’. This absolute art, Figal describes in terms of Heidegger’s ‘setting up of the world’ which is not the picturing of ‘the world’, as much as presenting ‘a world’. The artist’s power is evident within their artistic form and the artist has a mysterious relationship with what they image. This artistic form, this sprachkristall, can come in any mode or material, but whatever

239 Ibid. 66.
form it takes it comes coded and capable of thinking through any viewer who steps forth into its lighting. 'When one genuinely experiences a work of art, one does not remain at a distance, as if judging a finished product for use'. Although the work of art takes a material form, its linguistic structure stands as the artist's mode of thinking. 'It is not so much a matter of a work being in-time as much as time being in-the-work'.

Meaning in art is not something formed after an act of knowledge, but rather something that is formed within the process of making-thinking, and the praxical processes of producing the work of art. The creative process simultaneously forms its conception of itself and itself through the production of the language of form. In this way art can be understood as an epistemology, the artist's method for the production of knowledge, where artistic/poetic knowledge is what the artist captures within the production of the work of art. In this regard the work of art becomes like a mirror in which poetic knowledge is made visible. Here Gadamer references St. Thomas' metaphor where 'art itself exists only as a mirrored image of its own idea of itself'. In this way the artist brings knowledge into being, an event which has a transformative effect upon themselves and also their viewer. This is not simply the act of generating some new idea or producing a novel innovation for its own sake, but rather the profound act of triggering the transformative event of coming into being of consciousness. This is how art constructs its social space.

The artist does not require a special knowledge of their audience to make art; the artist does not need to run a market-survey, art is not connected to the question of consensus. The work of art takes its viewer on the basis of the artist's common knowledge, all the artist knows, while the conceptual tools required to understand the work itself are embedded within the structure of the work itself. The artist's leverage is located in the artist's instinctive relationship with tradition's fault lines, determined by their subjective experience of cultural alienation, while the work of art's power lies in its ability to deconstruct the resistant structures of convention. In deconstructing the hermeneutic of art Gadamer argues the work of art demands its own interpretation; 'only because the work of art demands it, does interpretation

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241  Ibid.
242  Ibid. 125.
244  Ibid. 425.
take place and only in the way called for' by the work of art.\textsuperscript{245} The artwork speaks both the artist and the viewer alike and it is within the implicit dialogue of this hermeneutic process that the artwork sets the viewer to work.

The Graeco-German conception of the artist's performance is binding; in that the artist's poiēsis contains a hermeneutical truth.\textsuperscript{246} To imagine art as a simple aesthetic pleasure is to dismiss the profound seriousness of artistic production and misunderstand the value of artist's performance. In attesting to the truth of their own being the artist shows us the way things are, in terms of what is, but offers us a way forward into what will come to be. The artist challenges the limits of our being through language. In this regard Gadamer argues the construction of cultural knowledge (bildung) is the role that belongs to art.

The point of this selective deconstruction of Gadamer's work has been to establish an axis for the practice of art at a time when the concept of art has been destabilised. Significantly, these archaic models sustain retain their currency within the broadest contemporary context, that is within the politically determined frameworks work as well as the most popular artistic practices, alike. In summary, this view of the artist's role establishes two important conditions for the performance of the artist.

Firstly, the significance the artist's performance as the productive act of knowledge, here Gadamer's critique of the eighteenth century 'artist as unfettered genius' doubles as a critique of the problematic twentieth century model of artist as unthinking automaton; the metaphor of the room full of monkeys on typewriters hoping to challenge Shakespeare. Secondly, it introduces a considerable distinction between the production of cultural artefact and the production of art, in the Graeco-German sense of the poiētic act capable of engendering an enlightening way forward, through the production of linguistic form. This constitutes a significant difference between production based on the preferences of the given platform of cultural knowledge and the role which falls to the artist, which is the transformation of this given platform of cultural knowledge into new linguistic structure capable of enabling the becoming of Being and new social coding.

\textsuperscript{245} Ibid. 472.
\textsuperscript{246} Ibid. 488.
What is clear is that all given knowledge is already embedded within the experience of the present which provides the basic platform for understanding, on which the artistic event of the transformation of knowledge begins. Artistic practice is not a simple matter of dismissing all knowledge or, for that matter, the language systems which contain it, but rather reconstituting all given knowledge in light of artistic, poetic and philosophic insight.

This is the process of poeticizing, which calls upon deeply intuitive and personal resources and obliges the deconstruction of tradition and the reconstitution of new cultural knowledge. In this way art reconfigures the parameters of social knowledge, enabling us access to new social spaces and new ways of seeing, new ways of being. Through the material event of the artist’s truth coming into form, the sprachkristall, the artist re-configures our relationship with our own basis of Being.

This reconstitution of cultural knowledge begins in explicit opposition to its truth being dismissed as an entertainment; here is the significance of the double-refusal of the primary act of strife. The artist’s mode of introducing new structures of knowledge is based on an instinctive understanding of the cultural codes and implications at stake in the act of re-configuring them. Within Gadamer’s model, the production of generic cultural artefacts for a prevailing cultural taste does not constitute artistic practice.

The artist’s work is signified by a break with the predominant cultural patterning, the objective is to engender new social parameters. In this light we understand that the artist's way is never programmatic but remains a deeply complex, even chaotic, mode of knowledge production driven by subjective insight and intuition. Thus we recognise that unlike scientific or historical approaches to knowledge production, the artist's epistemology is driven by a fundamentally humanistic response to the culture at large. However it would be a mistake to marginalise art as a solely subjective experience, art's objective is to speak to the truth of 'the Being of beings'.

By rejecting and reinventing the disagreeable aspects of convention, in personal and often surprising ways, the artist's performative act seeks to adjust the implications of public knowledge to suit the displaced culture of their own sensibility. It is this indeterminate aspect of an artist’s production which is often confused with the production of novelty, but as we have seen art is not a trivial fabrication, neither is it simply a clever innovation. The artist's work is the production of new social space to engender the truth of the artist's own being. Their sprachkristall absorbs the projection of the imaginative spaces of others, and in this way art institutes itself
into the next layer cultural knowledge. This reconstitution of culture into new linguistic structures is never a complete rejection of cultural mores, but always a reconfiguring of them. Through the performative production of the truth of their own being in a form of language, the artist lights the way of their own becoming and in doing so lights the way forward for the ‘becoming of being’ for others.

2.4 Conclusions

As we have seen the political expectations facing contemporary art practice are changing. Medium-specific conceptions of artistic practice which dominated the twentieth century have become irrelevant to the discourses driving the public production of contemporary art. Given the advent of constructivism, conceptualism, video art, post-modernism, and post-colonialism, art’s boundaries are down and the contemporary artist can work with any discipline. However, while artists have been expanding their practices into a wide range of territories, all disciplines have been developing more inventive and creative approaches to art practice. This expansion of boundaries has led to the collapse of any definitive guidelines for art practice.

Art is now being generated from every quarter of our culture. However in the context of this concurrent collapse of art’s boundaries and the exponential expansion of its practice, art practice is coming under increased political scrutiny. Art is evaluated not in terms of its intrinsic value as art but its capacity for ethical pedagogy. This chapter has exemplified the complexity of these issues facing the artist along one single axis; the popular—political polarity. This polarity is axiomatic of the broader issues facing the practice of contemporary art.

As delineated in the previous chapter, at one end of this polarity are the opportunities of institutional patronage which are focussed upon those artists capable of creatively representing appropriate socio-political content to the broader constituencies; here we have noted the European arts policies and how they produce an art which speaks directly to their own political agendas, whilst abandoning those practices which have become irrelevant and or problematic to state objectives. At the other end of the spectrum the opportunities of commercial support are focussed upon those artists able to generate audience and/or produce a marketable product; here we note Beecroft’s alliance with the fashion and advertising industries.
At the both ends of this spectrum artist's profiles are determined by scales of economic opportunity while the concept of art is secondary to the politically or fiscally determined opportunities at hand. Where they concur is their respective capacity to engage mass audience/market on behalf of their patrons. Where they differ is their respective points of focus. The politically driven avant-garde engender projects for publicly funded networks while popular artists generate market-driven opportunities for neo-liberal culture. What constitutes art in both public and popular circuits is not determined by historical models of art practice. Rather art’s nominal title is acquired as a consequence of the artist’s ability to open up opportunities for public representation within art’s public infra-structures. Here we recognise the paradox of Dickies *Institutional Theory of Art* in action; art is whatever the artworld says is art, where art is economically determined by politics.

‘What does the young artist have to learn from this model?’ The answer which concerns art education is the artist has very little to learn from art's history but a lot to learn from politics, social science, advertising, design, marketing, product development and the social service industries in general. It is in this context that we returned to our ongoing interrogation of art’s etymology to ask the Hegelian question again; what was art before the concept of art became redundant?

Gadamer’s conception of art reiterates and expands on Heidegger’s concept developed in chapter one. Gadamer also defines art practice in terms of the subjective need to bring the truth of the artist's being into light. This model stands in contrast to the broader objectives of pedagogical production which, as we have seen, inevitably marginalises subjectivity in lieu of politically-determined objectives. From Nietzsche’s readings into the most ancient conceptions of art’s dynamic, discussed in the previous chapter, we understand that art is produced from subjective needs for truth which are left unfulfilled by predictable social morés. The artist's objective is to liberate a free space within the binding trajectory of the social, in which all production is committed toward a future from which the artist's sensibility has been exempted.

In Gadamer’s conception art comes to the self-presentation the truth of the artist's being through a language of form capable of affecting a shift in the artist's relationship with the world-at-large. Although what is presented as art might well have a profound political effect, from Gadamer’s hermeneutic perspective art cannot be determined by political, popular or pedagogical demand. Art’s original position within the lexicon of knowledge locates its specificity in terms of a subjective act. The artist’s objective is to intervene in the public process to bring an individual truth into radiance through a social act of language. In Heidegger’s
model the artist’s power lays in their ability to speak to the truth of the unfulfilled longings of the community. Although art is driven by subjective impulses, what art reveals is the dispassionate and objective nature of ‘the earth’. At origin art is a subjective act of truth. It presents as an objective act of language of form, embedded with all the hermeneutic tools required for its philosophic understandings to be decoded in the present. Art’s primal function is understood in contrast to the cultural trajectory of a society committed to the production of the future. Art’s role is to break the cultural bind to the future, reflecting the nature of ‘the earth’, which otherwise seeks concealment.

Significantly Gadamer’s conception of artist’s role involves the transformation of the platform of knowledge, all the artist knows, into a conceptual structure capable of challenging our or our ontological relationship with the world-at-large; the work of art is what he calls a sprachkristall. Landy’s Break Down, provides an excellent model of the power of the sprachkristall. We have only to imagine the transformative effect it might have had upon its audiences. In Break Down we can see the artist’s sprachkristall opening the way forward in light of the truth of the artist’s needs to come into lighting. However Gadamer’s hermeneutic methodology differentiates between those practices which reiterate aesthetic traditions which belong to the past and those practices which re-interpret historical knowledge for the production of ‘an untruth’ in the present. Equally he makes it clear that art practice is not the trivial production of novelty, entertainment, invention for its own sake or the commercial production of creative industry; much less the unthinking automaton of endless production.

In Gadamer’s model, the act of art produces a binding event which seeks to transform the artist’s relationship with the world about them opening up a way forward for the artist’s own becoming, within the truth of all beings. We have seen how this transformative event can affect an audience within the models of Bowery and Björk; by definition the poëtic act of art has a vicarious effect on those that step forth into its lighting, opening access to a free space which lights a way forward for the becoming of Being. The primary objective of the work of art is to liberate new social space; such as has never been before. In doing so, the work of art institutes its own mime within the conceptual structure of culture. In this way the artist institutes their profound contribution to knowledge.

For Gadamer, art is more than the politically effective production which we can see in Haaning’s Turkish Jokes. Art is not produced to serve a predetermined political function. Geer’s literal documentation of the security signs of the global gated communities (with or without their surreptitious threat of violence) may be the
revelation of a personal truth, but one which has been enabled by the politically
determined curatorial circuits which commission selected artists to engage and
inform their audiences in specific public discourses.

As public art drifts toward socio-political production we recognise contemporary art
practices are determined by economic opportunity and it is in this space where the
boundaries between political and popular practices begin to collapse; the
differences between Haaning's *Weapons Factory* and De Cock's interior designs for
*Commes des Garcons* become a matter of patronage. Although we must respect
the personal ingenuity and the visionary flair such artistic projects might ignite, we
also recognise that popular and political artists are both bound to economic
opportunity.

Here we begin to recognise the significance of Buchloh’s concern that as an art critic
and historian he would be unable to support practices which function outside the
neo-liberal economy. Given the neo-liberal conditions of the arts economy the artist
must find their own way into an economy of audience whilst instituting the truth of
their poetic knowledge. For Gadamer the answer to the artist’s conundrum lays in
their ability to transform their own platform of knowledge into the *sprachkristall*, for
here lays the tools to effect the structural shift in knowledge capable of recoding
the present. In their differentiation of what belongs to the past and what is useful
to the present, the artist develops their own notion of Being and becoming in the
present in accordance with the truth of their understanding of experience and
culture.

Art represents a culture which extends out from the present, without speculating on
the future; no end-gain. The artist draws their future toward themselves through
their production of an ontological truth. This is how the artist makes their
contribution to knowledge by offering a structural shift in our social space; which
brings us to the next question; the question concerning the artist’s subject.
The Issue of the Artist's Subject

‘Contemporaneity is most evident in the attribute of the current ‘world-picture’, encompassing its most distinctive qualities, from the idea-scape of global politics to the interiority of individual being.’

Terry Smith.247

3.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to consider the question of the artist’s subject in light of the demands of contemporary art. It argues the artist’s subject is the production of a ‘world view’ however there are two very different conceptions of ‘world-view’ which are relevant to this chapter. The first is the production of a ‘world-picture’ wherein the artist creates a new model of the world to determine their way through the world-at-large. The second is the curatorial production of a ‘global-overview’ i.e. art’s capacity for content and the individual artist’s ability to document subjective conditions of being and account for the nature of the world as it is. This documentary function of art has become significant in the context of the political role contemporary art is now called upon to play. Within the global context of advanced capitalism, neo-liberalism has reconfigured the playing field of contemporary art in terms of an audience-driven spectacle. Political networks determine what and how art is presented. The artist negotiates their way in the world trading their capacity for pertinent ‘world-picture’ in their bid to affect change. This chapter argues this concept of ‘world-picture’ is the artist’s proper subject.

In his recent essay ‘World Picturing in Contemporary Art’ (2006) Terry Smith characterises the entire project of ‘contemporaneity’ in terms of ‘world-picturing’. Regardless whether this project is artistic or political, for Smith, the best of contemporary art and the critical thinking both share this same concern with ‘world-picturing’. Whether project is the grand curatorial project of global modelling and the production of the ‘global-overview’ or individual artist’s project of ‘world-
picturing’, the very concept of contemporaneity is characterised by a concern with updating our ‘world-view’. In this regard we can confidently generalise the concept and say the contemporary artist’s subject is the production of ‘world-view’. However there are significant differences between mapping a ‘global-overview’ and the production of the ‘world-picture’ in the individual sense.

On one hand the individual artistic practice offers a small scale ‘world-picture’; the intimate and transformative view of a world from the inside-out. As Smith points out, ‘this is what artists mostly do’; differentiating, deconstructing and reinventing the world. Smith takes his reference to ‘world picturing’ from Heidegger’s quintessentially metaphysical conception of ‘world-picture’. Heidegger’s conception of the ‘world-picture’ is definitely not the production of a mimêtic image or documentary account of the world-at-large. Rather ‘world-picture’ means the production of a model of ‘everything in its entirety’ which also ‘includes history and any conception of time’. Heidegger’s notion of the ‘world-picture’ bears a close resemblance to Gadamer’s concept of the sprachkristall discussed in the previous chapter.

On the other hand, the curatorial production of the ‘global overview’ comprises various kinds of projective picturing in its bid to plot the interactive social, political, economic and cultural forces which are currently re-constructing our concept of the world. The production of this ‘global overview’ functions in terms of a documentary process which accounts for the state of the world-at-large from a wide range of perspectives to update our conceptual understanding of the changing conditions of the world we inhabit. The tabulation of these global conditions can happen through a wide range of media and disciplines from the social and geo-political sciences to economic theory to the choir of hard knocks and art; there is precedent for most of these practices to be presented with in the context of art.

However, there remain critical differences between the artistic concept of ‘world-picture’ and the curatorial production of the ‘global overview’. Art does not refer to life so literally, explains Derrida, deconstructing Heidegger’s conception of ‘world-picture’. Art does not refer to the geo-political nature of the planet, as in Africa, Asia or Australia. Derrida explains, ‘World-picture’ refers to the geo-politics ‘of spirit, a concept which Derrida takes up from Hegel’s notion of weltbild (world-

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248 Ibid. review.
249 Ibid. review. 42.
picture) or *weltpolitik* (world-politic), which Derrida translates as ‘a sort of compass for universal orientation’. Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida are also critical of literal representation of the world as art. The metaphysical concept of ‘the world’ must not be confused with the simplistic representation of ‘the earth’; Derrida argues the Heideggerian line on this point. ‘The earth obscures the world’ and leads the artist to what Derrida calls ‘the massification of man, the pre-eminence of the mediocre, the destruction of the earth and, finally, the flight of the gods’.

The everyday nature of ‘the earth’ is the basis of knowledge but the role of art is vision; without vision we become lost in the wasteland of the everyday. The role of art is to guide us through the everyday. For Heidegger the most fundamental challenge facing the artist is to envision the world as picture. The challenge of this ‘world-picture’ is the struggle to represent the fundamental truth of being which the artist sets before ‘the earth’ to challenge the guidelines of everything that is. Here we understand the clear difference between the development of the curatorial ‘global overview’ and the artistic vision of the ‘world-picture’: ‘world-picture’ is a metaphysical production, global-overview is a documentary process, where the two overlap defines the territory which I consider seminal.

The production of the ‘world-picture’ is the artist’s subject; it is all that an individual artist can ever hope to offer. The artist’s way of opening up the world-at-large, lighting the pathway within the truth of beings, is through this production ‘world-picture’. This is not an argument for the democratic power of the individual in face of institutional power; as we have already noted, the hegemonic power of politics is irrelevant to the artist’s performance of truth and their projection of a ‘world-picture’. Although many disciplines are capable of producing a view of the world, Smith reminds us that the performance of art has a unique capacity to ‘shine’ within a labyrinth of global imagery.

Given the complexities of the twentieth century discourses concerning the artist’s subject this chapter begins with an account of Jacques Rancière’s three historical models of art outlined in *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004). These models are: ‘the representative régime of art’, the aesthetic régime of the arts’ and ‘the ethical régime of images’. ‘The representative régime of the arts’ is art’s historical model,
which Rancière also refers to as ‘the true arts’. The representative régime of the arts functions in terms of the coupling of poiêsis and mimêsis, re-ordering the knowledge of world-at-large in terms of poiêtic vision through the production of visual language orchestrated in terms of a hierarchy of genres. ‘The aesthetic régime of modernism’ displaced both the world-at-large as the subject of art and the hierarchy of genres as the grammar of art, with a democratic surface of transcendent aesthetic indifference: ‘The ethical régime of images’, Rancière explains is not a régime of art but a simulacrum of art. It functions as an instrument of state for the distribution of the sensible.252

At issue in this discourse is what David McNeill calls ‘the vigorous critique of subjectivity’ which permeates the theoretical legacy of both modernism and post-modernism alike. 253 It is this critique of subjectivity which has led to the collapse of the value of the concept of art and the credibility of art practice. This chapter takes up this debate through its consideration of the historical progression in which the subjective production of ‘world-picture’ has been displaced by the objective production of the curatorial ‘global-overview’.

‘The aesthetic régime of the modernism’ retains the liberty of art although it does not engage the world; nor has it retained the language skills required to account for it. In considering the complexity of the twentieth century discourses surrounding the question of modernism, we take our starting point from two historical overviews of the period; Bernard Smith’s Modernisms: History (1998), Ernst Gombrich’s The Preference for the Primitive (2002). Both note the profound influence that the colonies had exerted upon classical European cultural paradigms. This influence set up a fundamental shift of taste, one which dislodged metaphysical conceptions of content from art and gave rise to a phenomenology of pure form. Although formalism claimed the aesthetic high ground, the preference for the primitive that hallmarked early twentieth century art gave rise to the reductive aesthetics of minimalism which in-turn lead to the progressive deskillling of the artist. In this reductive drift formalism met its teleology in minimalism. In pursuit of an absolute value, high-modernism bound art to formal processes rendering art practice incapable of articulating complex social content, leaving those artists following the

high formalist trajectory at the mercy of theoretical advocacy, which from the late
sixties began to shift its critical focus from aesthetics to ethics, as noted in chapter
one.

Contemporary art’s institutions now face global responsibility. As post-colonial and
subaltern cultural theorists, such as Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri
Chakravorty Spivak, remind us, twentieth century modernism flourished on the
economic spoils of colonialism. With the rise of first post-modernism and more
recently post-colonialism, many twentieth century aesthetic presumptions
concerning art and culture have faced a critique of racism and sexism and been
effectively disqualified from the discourses determining contemporary art. The
hybrid cultural models common to post-modernism have been expanded to
embrace post-colonial conceptions of politics where both contemporary and
traditional cultural practices all qualify for representation, but where cultural
production is quantified in terms of its capacity to raise content.

In the section entitled ‘the politics of post-colonialism’, his chapter extends the
interrogation of the avant-garde project implicit in Enwezor’s *Documenta 11*, begun
in chapter two. It considers the implications of the devolved concept of art utilised
in the post-colonial project of global knowledge production which employed the
widest range of cultural professionals. As one of the co-curators of *Documenta 11*,
Mark Nash puts it, ‘the avant-garde project of post-colonialism remains dedicated to
the destruction of any project of art which has abandoned any dialogue with
politics’.

It is in this politically determined context, where art’s public face has become the
ethically determined project that artistic subjectivity faces its greatest critique.
Artistic methodology may well be driven by subjective intuitions but its objective is
to speak to a broader truth. From a post-colonial perspective the role of the artist is
secondary to the political concerns of the broader social project, where ethical
cultural production is often better served by the research methodologies common to
the social sciences. The problem facing the artist is to do with the value of their
discipline and the confusion regarding the differences between methodologies of
artistic, cultural and socio-political production. This divergence between aesthetics
and ethics demarcates the difference between subjective and objective approaches
to art’s social function. These differences have destabilised historical approaches to
art production, ultimately handing the artist’s remittance to the broadest range of
knowledge production methodologies.
In this regard we turn to Rancière’s three historical models of the arts to help clarify this confusion. Rancière argues ‘the ethical regime of images’ must not be confused with art, for it is a simulacrum which masks the truth of art. It is only within the ‘representative régime of the arts’, what Rancière calls ‘the true arts’, does the artist retain poetic licence and the language skills to account for their own relationship with the world. In the representational regime the production of the ‘world-picture’ re-emerges as artist’s proper subject. If the concept of art is to retain its value in face of more conventional modes of knowledge production, the artist must look to the strengths of their discipline. It is only in their capacity for the reconceptualisation of ‘the world’ that the artist has anything at all to offer ‘the earth’. For Heidegger the artist’s subject is the production of the ‘world-picture’. In this respect the artist needs an articulate language system capable of accounting for their relationship with the world at large. This discussion brings us to the next issue, The Issue of the Artist’s Language, which becomes the subject of the final chapter.

### 3.1 The regimes of imaging

Rancière’s three models of art production are useful in developing a discussion concerning the different modes of art practice which now circulate and are easily confused. We first introduce them before defining them in broader terms and eventually bringing them into a broader discussion concerning the political issues at stake within the question concerning the artist’s subject.

Rancière delimits the parameters between aesthetic and political practices in The Politics of Aesthetics; the Distribution of the Sensible. He defines the fields of art practice from a historical perspective in terms of three basic régime which broadly correlate to pre-modernist, modernist and post-colonial modes of art production. These are; ‘The representative régime of art’ which models art’s historically determined domain, which Rancière also refers to as ‘the true arts’ and differentiates as ‘the poetic régime of the imagination’. The subjectively driven domain of ‘the true arts’ orchestrates its production of image, genre and style in terms of the demands of the artist’s subject. ‘The aesthetic régime of art’ models the formalist dynamic of modernism which abolishes the hierarchies of genre and
subject into an egalitarian process and surface and calls into question the distinction between art and many other roles including 'the ethical régime of images', but in doing so the aesthetic régime diminishes the role of art at the expense of its social relevance. ‘The ethical régime of images' which is not so much a mode of art but rather what Rancière calls ‘the political distribution of the sensible' which models the political conditions of image production in the context of post-colonialism.\footnote{255}{Ibid. 81 - 93.}

For Rancière the 'ethical régime of images' subsumes any idea of art under the ethical obligations to cultural production. This ethical régime represents a mode of social production which predates both art history and modernism. More recently this ethical regime has resumed its relevance in the context of post-colonialism. This ethical role for the arts had been delineated by Plato who argued for the social production of ethical images which represented the ethos of the community; ‘we can admit no poetry into our city, save only hymns to the gods and praises of good men’\footnote{256}{Ibid. 91.} We see this conception of art is played out in the innumerable public memorials to statesmen and soldiers. More recently we understand this mode of production underpins the use of public exhibition in the political distribution of ethical social knowledge.\footnote{257}{Giorgio Agamben, The Man without Content, (Stanford, Los Angeles: Stanford University Press, 1999). 3.}

More problematically ‘the ethical régime of images' serves to block any individualising instincts, which we understand from Heidegger and Gadamer, to be the very basis of ‘the true arts’. In this regard ‘the ethical régime of images' does not represent art at all but rather it functions as a politically determined simulacrum of art. Its objective is ‘to educate its citizenry in accordance with the occupations of the community’.\footnote{258}{Jacques Rancière, The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible, (London ; New York: Continuum, 2004), 86.} This model is of particular relevance to contemporary political discourses where ethical agendas have displaced theoretical conceptions of art as the central concern for art practice.

Historically speaking, ‘the true arts', broke with the political moralising of ‘the ethical régime of images', liberating art from the bind of its social, political and religious obligations.\footnote{259}{Ibid. 91.} Rancière identifies this representative régime of the true arts, in terms of the artist’s subjective methodology, aligning it with what he calls...
‘the very substance of art’, defining it in terms of the coupling of poiēsis and mimēsis.\textsuperscript{260} Rancière’s conception of mimēsis is not bound to ‘the yoke of resemblance’, but rather the mimetic facility takes its place within a hierarchy of genres and subject matters which adapt their modes of representation to the subject of the project of poiēsis. Art in this regard is certainly not reducible to a simple act of copying or the reproduction of a recognisable image, style or genre. The artist is expected to have mastered a broad spectrum of genres to bring to light artistic subject. In this respect this ‘poetic régime of the imagination’ aspires to a condition of speech, which privileges conceptual knowledge over form and social effect over the phenomenology of presence. For Heidegger the essence of art concerns the bringing of being into the open ‘as if for the first time’. This act is affected through the process of naming, for it is in the process of naming that brings beings out of shelter into question and lighting. This raises \textit{The Issue of the Artist’s Language} which will be taken up in the final chapter. Rancière argues ‘the true arts’, along with the aesthetic regimes have been displaced from the umbrella public support and left to survive the marketplace along with the popular arts. The question facing both the representative régime and the aesthetic régime of art becomes; are their respective methodologies capable of sustaining their practice within the marketplace.\textsuperscript{261}

Although its willingness to serve and its decorative neutrality leaves ‘the aesthetic régime of the arts’ more socially negotiable than ‘the representative regime of the arts’, has also been abandoned by institutional support. However ‘the aesthetic régime’ stands in direct opposition to ‘the representative régime of art’ and the poetic realm of the imagination. Rancière explains with the aesthetic régime the hierarchies of subject and genre are dissolved in an indifference to subject, and the focus shifted to ontology which surfaces through an aesthetic of pure form.\textsuperscript{262} Having displaced subject and the hierarchies of genre, the aesthetic régime abdicates political voice to ‘the democracy of surface’. Rancière positions this aesthetic mode of art in terms of a specific conception of ‘régime of the sensible’. This is not a simple theory of aesthetics, sensibility or taste, he argues, but rather it

\textsuperscript{262} Ibid. 81.
represents a conception of ‘pure aesthetics’ which determines itself as an ethical mode of production. 263

While the aesthetic regime of modernism remains politically neutral and democratic by association, the work itself is rendered mute by virtue of its refusal to engage with the world, although in its time its theorists claimed the aesthetic high-ground for this practice. As Clement Greenberg puts it ‘In a truly successful work of art, the content reflects nothing, the form everything’, 264 although as Bernard Smith and the Antipodeans pointed out in 1959 in the Antipodean Manifesto, absolute formalism reduces the living language of art to a decorative silence. 265

The problem for Rancière is the aesthetico-ontological mode has reduced art to a workman-like process of production, leaving its art inarticulate. At best this ‘aesthetic régime of art’ affects a speechless presence where the impasse fact of the ‘punctum’ stands as a silent obstacle to all forms of signification. 266 However, the problem faced by this ontological mode of ‘silent speech’ is that it signifies only when someone theorises the significance of its silence. 267 In this regard the aesthetic regime is dependent upon a heavily politicised theory, whilst trading on its decorative neutrality.

Whether the aesthetic régime's motives were anti-art, as in Russian Constructivism, or anti-communist, as in American formalism, the aesthetic régime 'disturbed the clear partition between art and the decorative arts'. Rancière characterises this partition as the difference between ‘the ordinariness of work’ and ‘the exceptionality of art’ and illuminates his point drawing a parallel between the decorative agendas of the Arts and Crafts Movement and Art Deco with the decorative and democratic agendas of Bauhaus and Constructivism. 268 While ‘the poetic régime of the imagination’ had imbued the flat surface of the canvas with the narrative equivalency of ‘speech’ or text, the 'anti-representative' régime of modernism reduced painting to the decorative surface of design. This democratic

263 Ibid. 22.
267 Ibid. 91-92.
268 Ibid. 42.
shift, Rancière maintains, ‘revoked the politics inherent in the logic of representation’ by equating the artist with the artisan and reducing art to décor.

The critical issue within ‘the true arts’ is the artist’s capacity to articulate both aesthetic and political sensibilities. In this regard Rancière draws our attention back to the linguistic capacities of the literary modes of pre-modernist painting and argues the need ‘to challenge the vain debates between ‘the autonomy of art’ inherent in the aesthetic régimes and the submission to politics’ complicit in the ethical regimes.269 For artists, this means a return to ‘voice’ and the linguistic capacity to articulate subjective responses to the world-at-large through artistic practice. This is the point where the Graeco-German conception of the artist’s mission proves critical. If art practice is to be anything more than the production of decorative aesthetics or a political service, if the practice of art is to survive the collapse of conceptual value, the artist must utilise the power of art to engender their own discourse concerning ‘the world’.

In dismissing any conception of content in art, modernism lowered a decorative curtain on ‘the world at large’ ultimately silencing the artist. De Duve is amongst those who are angry at Greenberg, ‘for having taken the pungent taste of negativity out of the avant-garde’; Greenberg effectively betrayed artists when he said ‘I like them better without the soundtrack’, leaving them like little children; to be seen and not heard.270 More recently the aesthetic mode of modernity has found its teleology in industry, where interior décor and architecture has assumed responsibility for the asymbolia of surface. Here modernity finds its fullest expression, here the parameters of pure form are determined by the structural limits of engineering and the economic demands of the market are all.271 Despite the institutional claims for the agency of the creative industries such as manufacturing design and architecture as art, we are left to wonder what do they have to do with the practice of art? The aesthetic aspirations of modernism reached their productive end in industry, but ultimately they have served to displace philosophical conceptions of art practice and arts potential for problematic subject and political dissent. This is the significance of Nietzsche’s notion of the visionary force of rausch and Heidegger’s concept of primary strife.

269 Ibid. 13-16.
In reiterating the ancient myths of Apollo and Dionysius, Nietzsche draws a clear distinction between cultural production as determined by the Apollonian empire and the production of art in the visionary Dionysian sense. The production of state-determined values much less government led arts initiatives does not constitute art practice. The artist must articulate their own relationship with ‘the world at large’ through their own performative act of poiēsis. In defaulting to the market values one can construct an aesthetic practice which abdicates artistic responsibility to public opinion. However when the generic values of the culture-at-large come into ascendency the concept of art has become irrelevant.

For Heidegger ‘there is always the possibility of the system coming into ascendency’ and the idea of art being ‘fabricated and pieced together’ to cater to the taste of a mass market however, he maintains, this happens only when the visionary ‘power of projecting is lacking’. This power of projecting, the visionary force of rausch, is the ‘driving forward toward its own possibility of being’ and has nothing to do with the production of decorative aesthetics. Art is not a compliant act of taste nor is it a politically determined project. As Heidegger explains, art does not ‘put an end to strife in insipid agreement’; there can be no art without the resistant act of strife, art’s theoretical function is to offer an alternative model of the world. The concept of art can not be displaced by collective notions of social industry, no matter how creative.

Despite the number of industrial manufacturers who have confused aesthetic production with artistic production, there remains a significant division between the production of decorative aesthetics and the performative act of art. The industrialization of modernity may have released the painter and decorator, the architect and the engineer, into aesthetic industry, but it has not meant the emancipation of the artist; quite the contrary. As Rancière points out, the industrial ‘factory of the sensible’ has done little more than reduced the artist to the historical silence of the decorative artisan; a worker ‘excluded from speech’. By collapsing the hierarchy of genres to a democratic indifference of surface, the aesthetic artist has abdicated art’s primary independence to the manufacturing industries of public taste, where art is evaluated in the same terms as any other commodity; market

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demands. Despite the neo-avant-garde’s call upon the theoretical high-ground of political correctness, their fundamental sacrifice of language to the democratic surface of silence has effectively marginalised the artist, condemning them to the purely material processes of a worker ‘doomed to material tasks’. This dumbing down of the artist’s language has segregated the artist from those political beings who ‘think and speak’.\textsuperscript{274}

In levelling the hierarchy of genres, modern art sacrificed the intellectual dexterity of its own language systems, leaving the artist in exactly the position dismissed by Duchamp and Broodthaers alike; dumb like an artist. However in the historical progression from modernism to post-modernist activities thinking artists made a lateral shift toward theory and politics, a decisive shift out of the cul-de-sac of modernism but for many into the obligations of politics. The post-modernisms which triumphed did so within the context of political discourse, as Elkins puts it ‘post-modernism cannot be understood apart from political critique’.\textsuperscript{275}

Within the ‘political turn’ of post-modernism art practice has been differentiated in terms of the hegemonies of political discourse. ‘The régime of ethical images’ have instrumentalised art’s public infra-structures as a pedagogical tool for the development of socio-political consciousness. Professional cultural theorists have come to recognise that art is certainly not the only tool for the production of social awareness, much less the best. In face of the political obligations facing arts infra-structures, art practice has been reconfigured to address public responsibility. Between the socially compliant practices of aesthetic modernism and politically determined arts practices, the concept of art has been effectively dismembered. The concept of social resistance, much less primary strife, has been disenfranchised. We recognise this in Papastergiardis’ critique of the anti-social behaviours of the avant-garde and Gibson’s preference for collective creative behaviour currently being workshopped within academic, military, industrial complex.

For Rancière, the production of a ‘political subject’ is not a generalised subject of political interest but rather an exact point ‘polemical point of struggle’ which he defines as ‘a wrong’. In this model we can see direct parallels with Heidegger’s concept of primary strife, although Rancière demonstrates his model in terms of a


particularly political point. That is, the exact threshold on ‘the borders of silence’ which are maintained by ‘the police’, the point beyond which nothing can be spoken.\textsuperscript{276} This concept of ‘the wrong’ could be exemplified by Apollo’s garden gate, or Marcel Duchamp’s tactical ‘Fountain’ (1917), Juan Davila’s provocative ‘Stupid as a Painter’ (1981). More recently this production of a polemical point could be represented by the American based Pakistani artist Alia Hasan-Khan’s whose ‘Gift’ (2003), comes in the form of a ‘humanitarian relief’ packages which opens to offer what appears to be an edible dessert, but quickly turns to evoke biological devices and cluster bombs, the weapons of mass destruction which have become preferred instruments of mass terror and global war.\textsuperscript{277}

The role of ‘the police’, by which Rancière means any institutionalised community of authority, is the distribution of the sensible and art has become a production of the state, which has inevitably dispensed with the concept of art.\textsuperscript{278} But the distribution of the sensible implicit in ‘the ethical regime of images’ can never placate the impossibility of equality.\textsuperscript{279} This institutionalisation of the arts inevitably leaves the gap for ‘the true arts’ to exercise the leverage in relation to the blind spot generated by the social model; ‘the representative regime of images’.

In this context we return to reconsider Rancière’s conception of ‘the representative régime of art’, what he calls ‘the true arts’. Here the objective of the artistic performance becomes the transformative act of poièsis which takes form through the coupling of mimêsis and poièsis; that is the transformation of the conceptual platform of knowledge which opens the way forward for the artist in light of a vision of the truth of being, within Beings. Although this act engages both aesthetic and political sensibilities, it is not determined by literal conceptions of politics or pedagogical purpose. Nor is it determined by conventional notions of aesthetics or taste. The act of poièsis is determined by a subjective projection toward the truth of Being, which has been left unfulfilled by social, political and/or aesthetic existence. It is through the nominal reordering of all structures of knowledge that this representative régime of the arts affects its transformational shift in social space which institutes new knowledge.

\textsuperscript{278} Ibid. 2.
In advocating a return to 'the representative régime of the arts', I do not mean not a simplistic return to the classical age of 'the fine arts' or the pictorial traditions of painting or sculpture *per se*. Rancière's coupling of mimêsis and poiêsis is not bound by cultural tradition, as we have already noted, the artist's performative act functions within the context of 'the world' as it presents itself in the present. Art's objective is to bring itself into alignment with the truth of being.

Within the poetic régime representation the artist differentiates knowledge through a number of language systems. 'It is the substance of the poem', Rancière explains, the re-fabrication of the knowledge of the world, which produces the mimetic model. This mimetic act is not characterised by the reproduction of any particular image, such as a face or a landscape or a photograph, but rather the wholesale reconfiguration of the nature of the world, to be interrogated for its allusion to the real and the glimmer of the true. This is what Heidegger refers to as the 'world-picture'. This production is the objective of the domain of the imagination, where the real is reconfigured through the imaginative act and 'the true arts' find their strength.

The representative régime of art draws its audience into the act of re-thinking the implications of being-in-the world, offering a seductive paradigm of what we know, which falls toward that which we do not know, so as to displace common misconceptions and rebuild cultural knowledge in light of new understandings. Ernst Van Alphen, in *How Contemporary Images Shape Thought*, argues a similar proposition which he believes is not properly acknowledged or adequately reflected in art history or literary studies. He maintains art is a performative event which creates the building blocks of culture and acts as an active historical agent.  

Van Alphen takes his reference from Hubert Damisch on this matter to remind us that 'art thinks both the artist and its viewer'.

The 'discourses of art' which have displaced 'the agency of art', fail to account for the primary motivations which determine artistic production; explains Van Alphen 'this is one of the most striking paradoxes of art, poorly accounted for in the work of critics and scholars'. Although the artistic process begins as a search for understanding, it soon drifts toward the negation of the power of the known. This

281 Ibid. xiii.
process ends when the artist arrests any vacillation between the polarities of the known, displacing given cultural coordinates and replacing them with the comprehensible signification of new knowledge structure, that is, a new world model. The idea that art simply constitutes alternative methodology for the reproduction of what is known, perceived or understood within the ‘realms of reason’, explains Van Alphen, or for that matter the realms of the senses, constitutes a misunderstanding of art’s function and what it represents.\textsuperscript{282}

In his paper on ‘The Subject of Art’ Alain Badiou, explains art is not merely something which happens ‘within’ the world, but rather it is something which is produced ‘for’ this world.\textsuperscript{283} Art is produced to generate an effect in this world. Art is the consequence of the creative event which seeks to have a causal effect on the world, becoming ‘something like a protest’, explains Badiou. The artistic creation is not the mere representation of the ‘world in general’ as in a mimêsis; the project of poiêsis, is generated ‘for’ the world, it develops out of a rejection of the world.\textsuperscript{284}

This is not to suggest the act of art is a simple act of nihilism, quite the contrary. From our readings of Nietzsche we have already understood that although art might spring from the contemplation of nature’s cruel indifference, art is the great stimulus of life.\textsuperscript{285} The artist’s subject is the poiêtic production of a ‘world-picture’; that is ‘a picture for the world’ as opposed to ‘a picture of the world’. In the poiêtic act the artist redefines the boundary between what is known and what is knowable, opening up a conceptual gap in the knowledge and offering a new ontological space within the field of the known wherein the artist’s own conception of truth can come into its shining. Art represents a paradigm shift; this is what an active work of art has to offer. Political and pedagogical obligations to cultural canon can only be confusing, as all worldly demands exert a corrosive effect on artistic methodology.

What signifies the artist is neither their work-a-day commitment to the production of artistic commodity, nor a political commitment to the documentation of a ‘global-overview’, but the ability to resolve the eternal body/mind conflict and to

\textsuperscript{282} Ibid. xiv-xv
\textsuperscript{284} Ibid.]. 2-3
meet ontological demand for essential Being. Art is a methodology for bringing the artist's conceptual experience of the world into being; it involves every aspect of the artist, their sensibility, their politics and their knowledge. Although art can take any form, any language and any medium, it manifests as a demand for the essential truth of the artist's own being which springs from a hunger for a life as it has not been understood before. The artist's subject is the production of a new vision for being in the world.

3.2 The aesthetics of modernism

In face of the loss of what he calls 'a binding definition of art' Hans Belting begins his book *Art History After Modernism* with the idea that whatever the implications of medium, technology or period style might be, ultimately they are secondary to the artist's *raison d'être*, 'whose functionality and information is not geared toward a spectator but toward the user'; the artist. Art is 'bound to the artist who uses it for his or her personal expression and place a viewer under this spell'. The way they do this is by reconfiguring their picture of the world, and by association 'our picture of the world'.

The artist's subject becomes the reinvention of the artist's own value system, which cannot be reduced to the superficialities such as a style, medium, technique or technology. Even the old masters were not simply 'exponents of period style', Belting argues, the renaissance artists mastered complex language systems, the complex hierarchy of genres, which enabled them to 'react to their respective societies in a number of ways'. It was this capacity to appropriate, annex, re-interpret and translate cultural knowledge, on the basis of personal insights that gave individual artists leverage within their communities.

The reduction of art to the status of aesthetic commodity or period artefact, Belting explains, has meant the work of art has 'lost any public impact'. Heidegger would concur; to reduce a work of art to its 'thingly nature' is to misunderstand the significance of its performative function. In the 1930s Ferdinand Leger expressed concerns that art had fallen under the influence of mass-media, noting the negative

287  Ibid.
impact it had had on the art produced. Leger had made it his mission to make an
art accessible to a broad cross section of classes by creating an aesthetic out of his
industrial age. His concern was that art should not be drawn into trying to compete
with mass-market commodity production; as if the masses had no sense of what
constitutes qualitative artistic production. ‘What kind of art would you impose on
the masses to compete with the daily allurements of the movies, the radio, large
scale photography and advertising?’ he asked. An ‘art popular in character but
inferior in quality, based on the excuse that — they will never understand anything
about art anyway — would be unworthy of them’ argued Leger, besides, such
production runs the risk of not being art at all.\textsuperscript{288}

Writing in 1914 Leger had noted that ‘all the artists who had shocked public
opinion over the last few years have always sacrificed subject to pictorial effect’ but,
he argued, the artist’s role is to capture the creative spirit of their times, which was
neither a matter of a new objectivity, as in \textit{die Neue Sachlichkeit}, or ‘placing a red or
yellow square in the middle of the canvas’, as in the constructivist conceptions of
picture-making.\textsuperscript{289} For Leger the artist must be capable of using all pictorial means,
to represent the spirit of the times. Art is not a matter of style but a fluency with
the hierarchy of genres. The year before, in 1913, Leger had already noted that
photography had marginalised portrait painting and literal realism was dying out,
‘killed off by their period’. For Leger producing a generic art dumbed down for the
anonymous masses was to not produce art at all; art was a matter of ‘realism of
conception’.\textsuperscript{290} This realism of conception was not the documentation of what
exists but the representation of what Hegel would call ‘world-spirit’.

Belting’s continues Leger’s critique, ‘the relationship to the world is intrinsic to all art
and can never be reduced to a formula’, he defends pre-modernist art practices
against the oppositional forces of modernism arguing they are not reducible to
simplistic principles. In many cases the only thing pre-modernist artists had in
common was a technology; painting. The idea that great artists were pre-occupied
with technical invention and innovation for its own sake ‘is an undeserved myth’,
Belting argues, and ‘an option too hastily pursued’. While artists often change

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tactics, technologies, mediums and style, for Belting, the artist's objective is always to innovate their conceptual basis of understanding, transform their relationship with the world, which must not be confused with technical invention or trivialized by more superficial tricks. Here we can see obvious parallels with Gadamer’s conception of the artist’s role, discussed in detail in chapter two.

The artist’s subject remains the production of the truth of their own Being. It is through this mechanism that the artist tunes their relationship with the world, not the other way about. Art is not reducible to the production of period style or a virtuosic act of skill; nor is it the creative act of technical or industrial invention. ‘The unrealizable aspiration of art is often confused with the compulsion to produce something truly new and original’, is how Belting explains the preoccupation with the new which ‘is often only a mask for an ideal that is still seeking its place in the world’. The artist's subject is nothing less than the production of the resonant truth of ‘Being’, any production which does not speak to this truth of ‘Being’, as Kocklemans explains Heidegger, leaves the viewer ‘wandering in the realms of arbitrary oddities’.

Contemporary art is a confusing world where all boundaries have been transgressed and the hierarchies of genre have been levelled by the politics of public representation. The concept of art has been lost in the simulacrum of promotional culture; both popular and political. Danto suggests this breakdown of artistic culture has been an institutional production, promoted under the banner of the avant-garde. In the destruction the basic platform of the discipline of art, the culture industry has been enabled to instrumentalise art’s resources for the production of social consciousness. This represents a fundamental about-turn on art’s democratic power, in effect a betrayal of the very principles of art and the appropriation of art’s considerable power bases by the state. This bureaucratization of the arts has been an inevitable consequence of the twentieth century modernism, where the various theologies of abstraction have stripped the artist of an articulate language and enabling theory to determine practice; leaving the artist dependent upon political will.

291 Ibid. 184-185.
Ernst Gombrich characterises the twentieth century art practice in terms of a simple shift in taste which he characterises as *The Preference for the Primitive* (2002). He argues the emancipation of formal values which signified the twentieth century led to the systematic reduction of the full expressive gamut of art leaving the artist's language inarticulate and impoverished. In effect he accuses twentieth century art of abandoning the project of language with disastrous consequences on art’s ability to represent complex content. For Gombrich great art demands mastery over the materiality of art’s language and wealth of conceptual and intellectual resources but when this mastery has been achieved, art is capable of almost transcending our capacity to comprehend it. Bernard Smith would share many of Gombrich’s views. We can see this as self evident in the *Antipodean Manifesto* (1959), penned on behalf of Smith Antipodean colleagues.

Smith’s *Modernism’s History* (1998) stands as an overview of Modernism, a period which he suggests would be better titled ‘the Formalesque’. Smith reverses the Eurocentric implications of Gombrich’s discourse and details the implications of the primitive influence which the colonies exerted upon European art. In brief, Smith’s thesis argues that whilst European processes of colonization were exporting an essentially classical culture, what returned in their ships, laden with silk, spices and tea were the tales of the sailors and the explorers and the spectre of a world which had been overlooked by European concepts of high-culture; namely the colonial world concept of ‘the noble savage’, the mystical ways of the orient and the far east, uncanny of the unconscious, the sexual liberations of pacific cultures, tribal societies without juridical law; in general the power of primitive. It was this fascination with the implications of the indeterminate colonial worlds which had European artists and philosophers re-thinking their conception of society and culture.

The European imagination was enthralled by the utopian vision inspired by the mysterious ‘other’ of its colonies by the mid-eighteenth century. Embedded within the exotic tales of Africa, Persia, India, the Orient, the East Indies, Australia, the South Pacific, the Americas, and the West Indies was the spectre of an alternative to the European model of society; an image of culture which the cultural aspirations of
le bourgeois gentilhomme had no place. Twentieth century modernism was characterised by a fascination with the primordial; Smith details the intellectual milieu which resulted in this preference for the primitive in the first chapter of *Modernism's History*, 'The Rise of the Formalesque'.\(^{298}\) A short list of influences would include; the political philosophies of Marx; the mapping of the unconscious by Freud and Jung; mathematical conceptions of the miraculous from Ouspenski under the influence of Gurdjieff; Krishnamurti’s Theosophical Society with their cross-cultural conceptions of enlightenment; Rudolph Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society with their concerns with the spiritual history of man; the mystics and psychics such as Madame Blavatzki and Madame Sosostris with their concerns with the fourth dimension, and astral projection; the sexual liberations encouraged by romanticised tales of the South Sea Islands. This fantasy of the colonial alternatives had the effect of inverting Classical culture, and precipitating the preference of all things primeval.

Gombrich ironically illustrates his point with two sculptures of the same title *The Kiss*. He contrasts Rodin’s larger than life sized figurative sculpture cast in bronze with Brancusi’s diminutive, but symbolic, stone block. What constitutes the definitive difference between these two periods and substantiates his argument for the modernist preference for the primitive. Where Rodin’s *Kiss* (1860) maintains all the passion and illusionism of nineteenth century romanticism, Brancusi’s *Kiss* (1908) offers a rudimentary symbol of a bonded couple. As Gombrich points out, even the prehistoric *Venus De Willendorf* (22,000 - 24,000 B.C.), which was discovered the same year that Brancusi carved his crude stone block in 1908, looks more sophisticated than Brancusi’s faux primitivism. Gombrich attributes this profound difference between nineteenth century high-culture and the twentieth century primitivism to the reactive shift of modernism which manifested as a fundamental shift in taste; one which ran counter to European conceptions of aesthetics.

Modernism was heralded by the refusal of European conceptions of high-culture and ‘the deliberate abandonment of classical standards’.\(^ {299}\) That period which Bernard Smith characterises as the ‘geniusism’, the Enlightenment movement which stemmed from Kant, Schiller, Schelling and Hegel, soon found itself forsaken in the


onset of modernism and doubly disinherited following Germany’s culpability both World Wars I & II. Despite their having laid a foundation for modern aesthetics, the Teutonic philosophers fell foul of favour as successive avant-gardes refuted any claims for art’s exceptional status; mimetic skills, technical virtuosity, outstanding ability, metaphysical content, elegiac gift, luminous genius; in fact any attribution of authority within the arts came under interrogation, before being discarded completely. In this process conceptual content was reduced to pure form, hence formalism and Smith’s argument for the *Formalesque*.

At origin the *Formalesque* was generated by an expressionism filtered through symbolism. We recognise this in Cezanne’s early work, cubism, expressionism. However in the end the reductive drift of formalism eventually led to the triumph of form over content. This led to the dumbing down and deskilling of the plastic arts, giving rise to the reductive aesthetics of modernity. For both Smith and Gombrich these developments were enabled by the preference for the primitive which, as Enwezor points out, were enabled by the economic spoils of colonialism. This manifested in terms of a preference for an art untouched by the maladies of western culture, the sacred purity of the spiritual, the transcendence of the theosophical, the simple gestures of the innocent, the ‘uncut diamonds’ of Art Brut, the unadulterated and untranslatable gestures of the primitive or the clean lines of decorative aesthetics. In summary, representation became unfashionable, form triumphed over content and ‘world-picture’ became impossible.

Of course there are a number of ways of detailing the significance of these shifts. The European avant-garde discourses begin with a revolutionary critique of the politics of aristocratic privilege and the complicity of bourgeois culture in maintaining the hierarchy of the class system. The Bolshevik uprising led to the functionalist discourses of art as agit-prop, design and architecture; where the discourses of ‘truth to materials’ triumphed over metaphysics.

The American neo-avant-garde reduced the question of the artist’s subject to the material discourses of studio based practice, where painting became a matter of surface rather than subject. In this modernist drift the artist’s subject surfaced at the place where content was displaced by the corporeality of pure form, as Greenberg puts it;

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The limitations which constitute the medium of painting - flat surface, shape of the support, the properties of the pigment, - were treated by the old masters as negative factors that could be acknowledged only implicitly and indirectly. Modernist painting has come to regard these same limitations as positive factors that are to be acknowledged openly. 301

Although the Cubists and the Surrealists maintained a representational logic through poetic form, by Minimalism, art had been condensed to a phenomenology of materials. Between the old European avant-garde and the neo American avant-garde art's capacity to represent any anything, much less 'world-picture', had been effectively neutered. We can see this in Carl Andre's preface to Frank Stella's stripe paintings; 'Frank Stella has found it necessary to paint stripes. He is not interested in sensitivity or personality, either his own or those of his audience. His stripes are the paths of the brush on the canvas'. 302 In this lineage the practice of painting quickly devolved into sculpture.

As Elkins points out, painting quickly exhausted its vocabulary to point where the only way a painter could have any impact on the artworld was to 'adulterate painting' in increasingly facile ways. With the advent of Conceptualism, post-modernism salvaged subject from formalism's slide into surface, but in Conceptualism's preference for photomedia and video meant the boundaries between art and popular culture would soon become problematic. By the seventies art was beginning to come under public arts control, which meant that post-modernism was to become an increasingly politically determined project. 303

Yves Alan Bois rallies a defence of formalism quoting Roland Barthes, 'the formalism I have in mind does not consist in ‘forgetting, neglecting or reducing content’, by which he means the human condition, but only in 'not stopping at the threshold of content’. At issue was the displacement of what he calls the ‘arrogant, ignorant, predatory’ idea of painting as a referent; as if image-based painting was nothing but a series of 'illustrations to be captioned'. Bois’ formailist defence names the critique facing the image-based languages of painting, although his understanding of what

is at stake in representational painting is limited. Besides conceptual art had already managed to sidestep Bois’ semiotic reservations as irrelevant. The formalist discourses of painting argued the value of the mute presence capable of a physical mode of address. 304

At what point did the project of modernism come to an end? Most art historians agree, both the end of modernism and the beginning of post-modernism is signalled by the events on the streets in Paris, May 1968. 305 The issue here concerns arts collapse of language and the artist’s ability to articulate subject at all in the context of modernism. For Bois the objective of modernism became the ‘atrophy of the function of symbolisation’ and painting’s strength became it’s refusal to symbolise, it’s dysfunctional asymbolia. 306

The word ‘desublimation’ acquires significance in this discussion. ‘Sublimation’ itself is a Freudian term used in reference to the pre-conditions of any form of artistic production, where libidinal drives are re-channelled into social goals. 307 This is the concept which we also recognise from Gadamer, in which the artist ‘self-alienates’ into form through language. The word ‘de-sublimation’ was a term originally coined by Adorno to describe the crisis facing creativity as cultural experience was already developing into a mass-media phenomenon in Nazi Germany. Adorno speculated that the artist would inevitably become confused by the increasingly complex field of cultural conditions until they would be unable to differentiate subjective experience from publicly received knowledge. In the ensuing state of confusion the artist would lose access to the sublimation required for the production of art. In this process subjective experience would be annihilated and society would become totally controlled by mass-media. Thus the artist becomes ‘de-sublimated’; creatively impotent. 308 This model forms the basis for Debord’s critique of The Society of Spectacle. 309

Herbert Marcuse developed a counter model of desublimation. He conceptualises a mode of creative resistance to all forms of cultural authority, institutional repression

308 Ibid. 682-683.
and mass-mediated control. Where traditionally an artist sublimates libidinal drives into artistic goals, Marcuse developed the concept of *desublimation* as a refusal to sublimate. Here the artist challenges the mechanisms of cultural repression directly with a physical response, ‘the emphatic invocation of the somatic origins of artistic production’.\footnote{Rosalind Krauss Hal Foster, Yves Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, *Art since 1900*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004).} Thus *desublimation* presents a mode of creative resistance specifically related to the Situationalists, the Beat Generation, Pop Art and all their partisans. In theory at least, following World War II *desublimation* became a subversive tactic used to undermine the tyranny of corporate opportunism and greed which came to signify post-war capitalism.

*Desublimation* becomes an anti-aesthetic strategy to debunk all repressive institutions, specifically what the editors of *Art Since 1900* call the ‘sublimatory triumphalism of high-art’.\footnote{Ibid.} The term could be used to describe a wide range of alternative social tactics such as; the strategies of the disaffected dandy, the hipster, the cool, the abject, the abnormal, the queer, performance and actionist art, various modes of dysfunctional automatism, deskilled and process-driven practices, the introduction of low-brow aesthetics and purely decorative imagery as well as the political and anti-social activists such as the Situationalists and the Punks. In refusing to repress the libidinal drive into the processes of sublimation demanded of high-art, *desublimation* became a mode of direct action capable of challenging the mandate of high-culture and all authority in general. This way the artist was freed ‘to generate an anticipatory moment of experience, liberated from all needs and instrumentalizing demands’.\footnote{Ibid. 30-31} In this way art became a dynamic force which responded directly in face of authority on the basis of opportunity or whim, without the filters of process or the need to embed ideas within complex structure of language. In these practices politics became central to the subject of art.

However, regardless of how desublimated the dematerialised art practices of the 1960s and 1970s may have been, their deliberately ephemeral forms reached only the most esoteric audiences in their day. Various efforts to sidestep the commercially-driven artworld and directly engage mass audience were ignored by the mainstream artworld and sidelined as irrelevant by public funding institutions at the time. As such, many of these practices failed as art in their day, leaving its
artists faced with a small range of options; popular culture, arts pedagogy and administration or direct political action. Many opted for the dynamic mix of political activism within the institutional frameworks of teaching, academia and arts administration and this way the dematerialised practices of the 1960s and 1970s have exerted a considerable influence on the culture which ensued.

Today conceptual, cultural, commercial and political practices all vie for attention within the world of contemporary art and are evaluated in terms of a wide range of perspectives. However, during the late-twentieth century the artworld witnessed a significant shift from the market-driven agendas of the commercial gallery networks to the audience-driven obligations to politically driven systems, and both public and private funding networks were linked in support of the needs for public education. This fundamental shift in conceptual frame is the consequence of the institutionalisation of the avant-garde. As Simon Ford explains in his paper ‘The destruction of the institution of the avant-garde’, the ideology of avant-gardism has since become the dominant model of artistic production today.313 Despite the critique surrounding the advent of the institutionalisation of the avant-garde, art has become an institutionally determined project.

### 3.3 The politics of post-colonialism

Before going any further it is important to unpack the three terms critical to this discussion, these are; globalization, neo-liberalism and post-colonialism. Post-colonialism defines itself in direct contrast to the homogenising economic forces of neo-liberalism which are determining the face of global culture. It is within the economic parameters of neo-liberal culture that post-colonialism struggles to voice the concerns of those cultures dispossessed by the imperial objectives of global capital. In this respect post-colonial culture is understood as a moral counter-point to the amoral forces of global capital.

‘Globalization’ is generally associated with the homogenisation of global values through the integration of financial markets, open flow of capital and international trade, opening up of migration and the integration of judicial systems toward a civil
global society. The argument for the advanced capitalism of globalism is that its democratic processes will lead to lower prices, increased employment, income equality and higher standards of living for developing countries and a more stable global economy all round. The concern is that the global integration of production and consumption will be determined by the financial interests of global corporate capital, which will ultimately seek to render the world population a global workforce/market. For Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, globalization is little more than an advanced form of colonization perpetrated by the imperialist ambitions of global capitalism, hence the title of their book on the subject; ‘Empire’. The concern is that despite the theory, the objective of corporate capital is far from democratic, ultimately globalization leads to a deeply unequal division of wealth. This is what is referred to as ‘the champagne glass effect’, observable within contemporary society, where the wealthiest 20% of the global population control 80% of the world’s income.314

‘Neo-liberalism’ is the political movement which is directly aligned with the economic objectives of globalization. It promotes the economic liberalism as the democratic means to fiscal independence and political liberty. It advocates the devolution of public control to private responsibility and argues that centralised government is inefficient, corruptible and ultimately undesirable. Neo-liberalism advocates democratic principles in the deregulation of both labour and trade markets, the removal of trade barriers in export-led developments and stands against any national, state or labour-based protectionist controls such as trade barriers, subsidies, tariffs and trade unions. Key political figures in the implementation of these essentially capitalist economic theories have been the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, the American President Ronald Reagan and the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Neo-liberal policies hand social responsibility to the free-market, which is inevitably dominated by multi-national capital interests. Under multi-national corporate management the world is witnessing the systematic equalisation of wages, leaving the bulk of the population the working poor, while a trans-national elite have established themselves beyond government control or economic hardship. Post-colonial critics argue that neo-liberalism is ultimately imperialist in its objectives and far from democratic.315

‘Post-colonialism’ represents a critical approach to cultural theory and production following periods of colonial rule, which includes the current period of multi-national empire building. It specifically critiques the ways in which knowledge of a subordinated people is developed to serve the privileging interests of their colonisers. In his book Orientalisim, Said documents the extent to which imperial forces encode their perceptions of the colonised to undermine their legitimate claims. Post-colonial critique challenges the presumptions of superiority implicit in the colonizer’s use of language and imperial rule. Post-colonialism offers a profound critique of 1st world power and stands a direct opposition to the colonialisistor’s self-perceived obligations to governance and the sub-ordination the destinies of the populations they colonize. Despite the democratic claims of the neo-liberal economists, the claims of the indigenous, the colonised and the working-poor continue to be dismissed as irrelevant to the capital interests of empire. Spivak, the translator of Derrida’s Grammatology, is one of the key theorists in subaltern discourses, that is the discourses of economically dispossessed. Spivak refers to herself as a ‘practical Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist’ who’s ethical political commitment has been to critique and reconfigure the institutional discourses which exclude and marginalise the voice of the ‘subaltern’, especially subaltern women. Post-colonial and subaltern theorists such as Bhabha and Spivak, argue that every deployment of power is ultimately met with resistance. Both art theory and practice have a significant role to play in this struggle for political rights and the parity of equitable values.

In the discussions concerning ‘The Predicament of Contemporary Art’, between the editors of Art Since 1900, acknowledge that there is general recognition of a looming crisis in contemporary art. The problem which Benjamin Buchloh describes is the ‘extraordinary overproduction’, multiplication and replication of artistic practices and alternative spaces which might be neither desirable nor sustainable unless they are ‘linked to the actual agendas of political articulation through cultural means’. This opens the question regarding subject in art within a broader political framework. Artworks, arts practices and art’s networks now come in every conceivable size, shape and form. This is not simply the re-run of every conceivable

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mode of twentieth century modernism all at once, which it is, but also the advent of politics as art, philosophy as art, social-science as art, community production as art. In this light, the art’s industry recognises its responsibility to rationalise the arts in terms of political priorities. In this context that we turn to consider the question of the artist’s subject in light of art’s role in the development of political consciousness.

By way of re-introduction of Enwezor’s Documenta11, Matthew Higgs concludes his 2002 review for Art Forum of thus;

Documenta11 seems suspicious of the potential and optimism that remains the privilege of youth. However given the turmoil that describes our global condition maybe Documenta11’s pessimism is an honest reflection of our times after all. If so its subtext seems to suggest that basically we’re all fucked and there’s not a lot we — or art, for that matter — can do about it.319

Documenta11 may well have been the first significant curatorial exposition concerned with taking the political pulse of our global futures, but it will not be the last. Since 9/11 in 2001 there have been a string of major exhibitions and biennales concerned with global projections. As Jill Bennett puts it in her essay poignantly subtitled ‘Art, Politics and the Political Event’,

‘World events are now back on the agenda for contemporary art. Major exhibitions, biennales, and art publishers have turned their attention to global politics. This is of course in large part the direct or indirect effect of the events of 9/11 and thus an instance of the state of politics determining what constitutes the political in art.’320

In this regard we revisit the project of Documenta11, this time considering the artist’s subject from the broader perspective of the four platforms for post-colonial research; Democracy Unrealised; Experiments with Truth; Créolité and Creolitization; Under Siege, Four African Cities, which preceded the final exhibition in 2002.

As we have already noted in chapter two, Enwezor’s curatorial practice can be understood as an alternative mode of artistic practice; the collaborative model of the ‘new avant-garde’. In this light, we reconsider Enwezor’s conception of the artist’s

subject. His political conception of the artist’s subject is not exclusive to artistic practice; rather Documenta11 is a collaborative project produced by a wide range of professionals. As we have already noted, what constitutes art practice now, is open to participation from a wide variety of alternative disciplines and professional practices.

The objective of Documenta’s five platforms was to open a window onto the state of the globe beyond the media-vested interests of the western artworld. If the curator is the exemplar of new avant-garde practice, the artist’s subject becomes a comprehensive global-overview. In this regard documentary digital mass media have become the basic technology for the post-colonial project of producing the global document. Acknowledging the increasingly common presence of documentary and avant-garde video within the gallery context Mark Nash, one of the co-curators of Documenta11, reader in art theory and film history at Central St. Martin’s University of the Arts, London, advocates what he calls ‘the documentary turn in contemporary art.’ That is the collaborative social project of documentary digital film and video production. In his catalogue essay for Documenta11 Nash reminds us that ‘the avant-garde project remains dedicated to the destruction of bourgeois project of art’ and to this end has ‘bracketed off contemporary art practices which have abandoned any dialogue with politics’.321

Nash quotes Hal Foster on the issue of the ‘neo-avant-garde’ who, Foster believes, ‘in bad faith negated the pre-WW II critique of the institution of art’. 322 This critique of art’s traditions is implicit in the discussions at the end of Art Since 1900 also; which suggests the divisions between the commercial and political arenas of contemporary art are set to become more deeply entrenched in some circles. Nash maintains that a social commitment to culture has nothing to do with historical conventions of art. He argues the avant-garde’s project now remains to ‘unpick’ its own institutionalised and hegemonic conditions which have developed with colonialism. Nash’s objective is to put an end to the subjectivity of art practice and facilitate the documentary capacities of cinema and video capable of revealing the broader cultural conditions which sit below the glossy media surface of globalism.

322 ‘Neo-avant-garde’ is detailed as American abstraction, Pop and Nouveau Réaliste, this list could also include the Trans-avant-garde of 1980s neo-expressionism.; Rosalind Krauss Hal Foster, Yves Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, Art since 1900, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004). 437.
Nash preferences art’s capacity to document, evidence and hold governments accountable for the gross human rights violations and disturbing rise in genocide, which have become a common political solution to complex social problems.\textsuperscript{323} This is evident in Nash’s own documentary program shown in Philadelphia 2005, which takes its title from Documenta\textsuperscript{11}’s second platform held in New Delhi, India; Experiments in Truth.

Considering Enwezor’s manifesto for Documenta\textsuperscript{11} it becomes obvious why art is but one of a number of disciplines brought to bear on the project for the production of new global knowledge.

‘(The production of) an open encyclopaedia for the analysis of late modernity, the development of a network of relationships, the open forum of organising knowledge, a non-hierarchical model of representation, a compendium of cultural, artistic and knowledge circuits, engaging art in direct political action to develop a realistic model of the current state of global conditions’.\textsuperscript{324}

We can hear echoes of Enwezor’s manifesto in Papastergiardis’ argument for the absorption of the artist-in-residence programs into a broader conception of professionals-in-residence where ideas are developed in an expanded field of conceptual research, discussed in the first chapter. Here we recognise the practice of art is being absorbed by a broader social project, where art is judged in terms of its capacity to contribute to knowledge production in terms of the conventions of social science. Enwezor’s manifesto nominates the key issues; ‘the production of an encyclopaedic model of analysis, the development of a non-hierarchical network of cultural and artistic knowledge circuits, to develop a realistic model of the current state of global conditions’. Equally important is the implementation of art and other knowledge-based disciplines, ‘to update the perceptual model of global conditions’. In this regard the artist must begin to consider the practice of art in terms of its capacity as a knowledge production discipline. This conception of art’s role stands in line with Gadamer’s critique of Kant’s conception of ‘unfettered artistic genius’ and Gadamer’s own advocacy for art as a knowledge-based discipline capable of asserting the truth of the artist’s experience in light of their insight, discussed in chapter two.

\textsuperscript{323} Mark Nash, “Art and Cinema”, in Documenta 11, ed. Okwui Enwezor (Kassel: Hatje-Cantze, 2002). 132.
Documenta11’s five platforms for the production of post-colonial knowledge were developed across four continents of the globe, namely Europe, India, South America and Africa, and produced six publications with, as many as, twenty five contributors to each platform/publication. This does not include Documenta11, the exhibition itself, or its catalogue already discussed in chapter two. To recap, the publications stemming from these platforms for the production of knowledge included the four collections of papers produced in conjunction with each of the platform; Democracy Unrealised, Experiments with Truth, Créolité and Creolization, Cities Under Siege, the catalogue to the exhibition discussed in chapter two, plus an extra sixth publication Urban Imaginaries of Latin America.

Contributors to these platforms included historians, cultural theorists, anthropologists, lawyers, politicians, community workers, political activists, as well as artists. What this multi-valent approach to post-colonial global knowledge production brings to light remains significant. The Harvard Professor of Urban Planning and Architecture, Rem Koolhaas provides just one example of the social scope undertaken by Documenta11, and by implication, the challenge now facing art and artists. It also raises serious questions regarding the artist’s future.

Koolhaas’ Project on the City was developed in the context of Documenta’s fourth platform Under Siege: Four African Cities. He presented a model of the modernist city subsisting amid ruin, a model of urban existence which has, thus far, been invisible to western eyes. Koolhaas maintains his model of urban collapse is becoming common across the decolonised world from Africa and the Middle East through to China and South America, where capital interests are abandoning the imperial project of the modernist city, in preference for more expedient economic strategies. Although each city manifests different patterns, Koolhaas suggests, these models could be relevant to the future of western cities which also face post-colonial decline. The transformation of these collapsed cities has been radical and

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Koolhaas suggests the very concept of the city is mutating into a model which has no foundation in the western model. In this global snapshot, the period of colonial affluence which fuelled the development of the first word cities, such as London, Paris and New York has come to an end. If Koolhaus is correct the modernist city could well prove a thing of the past. This is the concern implicit in the title of the Empires, Ruins and Networks conference, convened at ACMI, which introduced Enwezor as the keynote speaker in 2004.\textsuperscript{329}

Like so many of the Documenta11 projects Koolhaas Project on a City provides a lesson in post-colonial geography to table an alarming social science report. Nigeria is a post-colonial African state with a population of over 100 million people. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. Its capital, Lagos, is currently emerging as one of the world’s largest cities in the world. Lagos’ population currently stands around 14 million currently, a little more than the population of London however, unlike London, Lagos’ population is estimated to be 24 million by 2020. Lagos’ growth rate, like that of many third world cities, such as Nairobi, Dar es Salaam and Kinshasa, is ‘dramatically exceeding the world’s metropolitan growth’ estimates.\textsuperscript{330}

Following the British evacuation in the 1960s, Lagos began to develop its own modernist vision of the city in the context of the affluence flowing from its oilfields. Concurrently economic rationalization and industrial farming began to strip surplus populations from the productive land. Rural populations flooded into the city looking for work, as wealth moved off-shore. Local financial interests abandoned civic commitments and public infra-structures such as water, electricity, sewerage systems collapsed. Mass poverty beset the city, leaving Lagos one of the most dangerous cities in the world.

The following is Koolhaas’ account of a traffic jam in Lagos, documented from his helicopter with video and verbal descriptions;

\begin{quote}
… very scary because the sheer pressure makes everything liquefy. Rivers of yellow buses and trucks trying to get through arterial roads too narrow, everything colliding and squeezing and in between them are the people, seething almost like cement … they begin to dismantle the
\end{quote}
vehicles that are caught in the jams … so its not just a traffic jam but actually a traffic jam turning into a car market for spare parts, turning into a smouldering ruin.’

This is no utopian vision of a communal state; life pulses in terms of its own selfish rhythms, everything surges in an organic state of relative chaos. In this deregulated condition the systematic schemes of state orchestrated functionality are not on the program, ‘the presuppositions of the historical avant-garde have no currency in this model’, Stewart Martin points out in the journal *Radical Philosophy*. This is a self-determining condition where the people are abandoned and left to fend for themselves; a vision of the city which ‘frames the beginning of the end of art’, he explains.332

Abdoumaliq Simone is another of the co-curators of *Documenta11*, project advisor for Platform #4 *Under Siege*, a social science academic with the New School University, New York, and the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Abdoumaliq characterises Lagos as a nebulous world, where ‘security operatives, freedom fighters, terrorists, corporate raiders, gangsters, rebels, activists, militants, smugglers, communications hackers, consultants, accountants and clerics’ are all alike, but never quite the same. An image of sprawling shantytown opens up to reveal into a vast tarpaulin mega-tropolis, where the only art is an art of survival and creativity is a tool utilised to seize opportunity or eek out subsistence. Institutions have no grip in this world and individuals lose all social ties. Living in such close proximity with each other, individuals develop a different kind of economy; a knowledge economy. Observations, impressions, hearsay, rumours and suspicions, become the basis of all cultural knowledge in this circuit. Relations become murky and parasitic and life is determined by a network of crossed values. Opportunities are quantified in terms of ‘who is available for manipulation or abuse, whose coat-tails can be ridden and what is there to steal’.333

Koolhaas proffers an optimistic view maintaining that there is an energy and resourcefulness in Lagos which if it could be harnessed would make Lagos a show piece for the world to see. ‘It’s like there’s some kind of function in the dysfunction.

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It is as if there is some illusive perfume in the air, if you could capture it and bottle it and spray it on yourself your life would be very different’, explains Koolhaas.\textsuperscript{334} One could be forgiven for imagining this is a problem specific to Africa or the third world but this is not a problem which is confined to the third world, as the Harvard Professor points out; ‘it is not a matter of Lagos catching up with us, but us catching up with Lagos’.\textsuperscript{335} While the significance of such developments must not be underestimated, in this example we can see how the documents of social science double as the documents of conceptual art and clearly illustrate Rancière’s proposition that so much of what is presented in the context of contemporary art does not belong to art at all, but rather belongs to what he calls the ‘distribution of the sensible’ or ‘the ethical regime of images’.

In re-presenting Bernt and Hilda Becher’s photo-documentation of German house structures, such as Facades Slatted (1960–71), as central to the genealogy of Documenta\textsuperscript{11} Enwezor drew the obvious parallel with the 1972 Documenta V the exhibition which introduced conceptual art and photomedia documentation as art. However, where Documenta\textsuperscript{11} advanced the documentary project was in producing so many projects which have been distributed throughout the global knowledge circuits. Not just the Inuit Igloolik Isuma documentary production team, the Democratic Republic of Congo’s Le Grupo Amos, the British Black Audio Film Collective or Steve McQueen's Western Deep (2002) but also the five extra publications which were produced as a consequence of the Five Platforms for post-colonial knowledge production.\textsuperscript{336} As we have already noted, collaborative research and socially affective projects, such as Documenta\textsuperscript{11}’s four platforms for post-colonial research, have become a frequent event on the arts horizon. From the example of Documenta\textsuperscript{11} we begin to understand why so many biennales, arts councils and curators feel the need to utilise arts infra-structures and resources to alert their constituencies to developing social problems.

The concerns which they raise extend to a wide range of social, cultural, humanitarian and environmental disasters; the perpetual treat of terrorism, the cumulative effects of global warming on weather patterns, depletion of fish stocks, diminishing fresh-water resources, the rising sea levels and various indigenous and

\textsuperscript{334} Rem Koolhaas, “Lagos/Koolhaas” First Run - Icarus Films,[accessed 2003].
\textsuperscript{335} Ibid.).
refugee crises. In this regard we acknowledge that social subject has become an insistent concern for many arts administrators who bear a public social responsibility to their audiences. We must also acknowledge why creative professionals from all disciplines are being currently called upon to develop creative research projects capable of presenting ‘world-overview’, in the sense of a return to imagery that pictures the global conditions that Terry Smith characterises as ‘the mark of contemporaneity’. Although a number of critics have questioned the ‘art’ status of so many of the projects presented by Documenta11 our perception of the project changes if we see Enwezor in the nominal role of artist; the conceptual producer of the ‘world-picture’, what Gadamer would call a sprachkristall, the conceptual structure capable of reconfiguring our relationship of our relationship with the world in which we live.

Enwezor argues that twentieth century discourses of art have been the product of a colonial legacy and have since been disinheritd. Enwezor’s post-colonial politics are evident in his selection of the singular Australian artist for Documenta11, the Aboriginal artist Destiny Deacon. In Enwezor’s discourse the indulged, and often abject, figure of the neo-avant-garde artist, as painter, has become an anachronism. In Enwezor’s model of the avant-garde, the artist is just another member of a multi-disciplinary taskforce engaged in the production of ongoing model of the global conditions of contemporaneity. Contributors to Documenta11’s four platforms included; curators, cultural theorists, sociologists, social scientists, art historians, general historians, anthropologists, economists, ecologists, environmentalists, urban planning authorities, architects, local politicians, judges, lawyers, linguists, philosophers, psychologists, social and community workers, publishers, political scientists and activists, artists, filmmakers, dramaturges and cultural content providers of all denominations. Their collaboratively developed ‘global-overview’ represents many things. For this discourse, it represents clear view of the artist’s subject as well as the predicament currently facing art production. The methodologies of the twentieth century art have little or no currency within this highly professionalised model of curatorial production.

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Martin, writing for *Radical Philosophy* argues; ‘*Documenta11* was one of the most radically conceived events in the history of post-colonial art practice’. Clearly Martin has little regard for the aesthetic discourses of twentieth century modernism, or the influence of ‘orientalism’. Rather he is concerned with arts capacity to contribute to the broader political discourse the production of the portrait global conditions. Axel Lapp writing for *Art Monthly* failed to embrace the broader implications of *Documenta11*’s platforms when he suggested ‘the theoretical discourse (of the four supporting platforms) seemed quite unnecessary; ‘Platform five could well stand on its own’. Whilst this may well have been true, Enwezor had already made his point clear; these preliminary platforms were not conceived for the production of art, they functioned as a post-colonial critique of the aesthetic regimes of western art. In this regard Enwezor’s collaborative curatorial methodology presents a working model for the ‘new avant-garde’, for whom political engagement is imperative and art optional.

For Enwezor the curatorial premise is not a matter of asking ‘what were artists doing during the period’, but rather asking what, if anything, can art contribute to this discourse. As Bennett puts it, *Documenta11* ‘did not simply ask how art responds to given or specific event but explored the way in which such events are constituted’. For many contemporary curators, such as Enwezor, art is no longer the subject of the curatorial project, just as art is no longer the subject of the artistic project as it was in the late-modernist period when form triumphed over content. Contemporary art is just one of a number of the tools, methodologies, being utilized to bring certain socio-political perspectives to light. Within this post-colonial context, art is best understood as a methodology for the production of content, which is nothing if not politically determined.

Parallels can be drawn between the practices of the historical avant-garde the Russian Constructivists, the *Situationalist International* and the socially-engaged practices of the new avant-garde. All of them address the subject of social change directly; none of them are defined by art in the historical sense. Many of

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these practices have developed within the socio-economic frameworks of the public art’s funding networks. What begins to emerge is the significance of not just ‘subject’ in general, but the specific significance of, a ‘socio-political subject’; that is a ‘political subject’ capable of provoking or facilitating a public consciousness.

Documenta11’s global perspectives and ethical concerns with post-colonial knowledge production emerge as an undeniably significant development in early 21st century. Art’s funding, infra-structures and institutions have become linked to the broader social research programs whose political agendas have little regard for the conceptual integrity of art practice. Documenta11’s portrait of the state of global culture reveals a picture of western culture which has been predicated on the unsustainable flush of colonialism. In the aftermath of the collapse of twentieth century modernism we recognise an upsurge in socio-cultural activities vying for attention.

As we have already demonstrated, Enwezor’s post-colonial model is seminal within arts funding circuits. Despite the plethora of Biennales and curatorial models on offer, the institutionalised artworld is a highly politicized arena wherein the concept of art is becoming secondary to the function which contemporary art is called upon to serve. The research methodologies social science and practical politics are in ascendency and the broadest conceptions of visual literacy and mass-media technologies provide the basic equipment for cultural production. Ethical demands oblige public art’s institutions to utilise their resources into the service of global knowledge production, and alert populations of looming environmental crisis and remediate social problems stemming from post-colonial inequalities. In this regard we understand the subject of public arts initiatives becomes knowledge production; the production of the ‘global overview’. Contemporary art mines the gap in knowledge, illuminates ‘the earth’. For many contemporary artists the research methodologies and social production strategies, currently being developed within the academic, military, industrial complex, often prove a more effective methodology for both revealing the gap in the knowledge and producing new social structures. The question facing the individual artist concerns their technology, their research methodology, their ability to account for the earth in the process of building a new world.

Undoubtedly Documenta11 has exerted a significant influence on public funding and curatorial programs since its presentation in 2002. As we have already noted, there has been a raft of multi-disciplinary exhibitions and conferences which have extended aspects of Enwezor’s model. The 2007 Documenta, Documenta XII, is one of them. Their manifesto begins; ‘The avant-garde has laid waste to the
project of modernism, whose name has been sullied with the violence of colonialism’. Taking Enwezor’s model one step further Documenta XII developed twelve platforms of research to support their exhibition at Kassel in 2007. Their promotional material suggest that the curatorial team of Documenta XII has shown little interest in subjective methodologies of artistic production. They have focussed their attention on art as an instrumentalised production of state. No doubt interesting exhibition material can be produced in a wide variety of ways; however the concept of art as a state production, raises primary questions concerning basic conceptions of art practice.

3.4 Conclusions

A number of key concerns emerge from this chapter. Firstly, we note a shift in the socio-economic conditions which determine contemporary art practice, from the first world prosperity which developed from the spoils of colonialism, to the socio-political conditions now facing the globe in the context of post-colonialism. This shift could be broadly defined in terms of a shift from the aesthetic concerns of modernism to the ethical concerns of post-colonialism. While modernism now finds its greatest expression in the industrial production of creative industry, post-colonialism has recognised the need to rationalise public arts funding to focus on more pressing socio-political concerns. This is the shift toward global politics articulated by Bennett.344

Secondly, we note that the new avant-garde has affected a major shift from producing art for public presentation to producing exhibition for public presentation within art’s funding infra-structures. Artists in this circuit work in collaborative teams to generate cultural events and conceptual content for a mass audience, utilising a wide range of research methodologies and presentation technologies to produce relevant political content. Here we see the avant-garde influence on art’s public infra-structures, utilising a devolved post-medium methodology to address

pressing political concerns directly. This commitment operates at the highest levels and exerts a significant influence on contemporary art’s obligations to subject.

Thirdly, although this production is facilitated through public arts infra-structures, art in-itself is no longer the key concern of this ethical production; rather art is evaluated in terms of what it can do for the project, the exhibition and its audiences. Although the methodology of art is numbered amongst the tools which can be utilised to generate appropriate content, it is certainly not the only tool available for the task, neither is it necessarily the best. Given the generic research methodologies and documentary technologies now common to a wide range of disciplines, the challenge facing the contemporary artist concerns their ability to generate content. This is determined by their capacity of their methodology.

At a time when many curators believe the concept of art and its historical discourses have become irrelevant to the role contemporary art is now called upon to play, the question facing art practice in the specific sense becomes; what constitutes art’s methodology? Considering the critique of twentieth century conceptions of art, indeed the very concept of art, within the avant-garde circuits which determine arts public profile, a contemporary artist must now seriously consider the value of their discipline. As we have demonstrated art practice is no longer judged in terms of what it can do within-itself; art is evaluated in terms of what it can do for its audience, society-at-large.

In a context where art’s boundaries have been expanded, many artists have gravitated to the display tactics of installation and mass-media technologies, community based socio-political activities and the more precise disciplines of the soft and hard sciences. Equally, as we have noted in the example of Koohaus’ Project on the City, artists can be recruited from a wide range of disciplines. In the context of contemporary art, art practice in the specific sense enjoys no special privileges. The funding criteria art faces are the same as any other discipline. Art, like any other discipline, is assessed in terms of its ability to produce new social spaces and its capacity to illuminate the gap in the knowledge.

As we have already noted in the first chapter, this Graeco-German reading of the role and method of artistic production shares the same expectations as the new avant-garde’s demands of contemporary cultural production. Where art differentiates itself from other knowledge production disciplines is in its methodology. Knowledge production within contemporary art’s circuits can be produced from a wide range of disciplines. At a time when the de-centralisation of art has led to the collapse of art’s centre, this developing Greco-German model
of artistic methodology offers a surprisingly pertinent model. In this most stable model the artist’s subject is the production of new worlds which reveal the true nature of ‘the earth’.

In this chapter we have discussed ‘the aesthetic régime of the modernism’ and ‘the ethical régime of images’ but given little attention to ‘the representative régime of the arts’. Within ‘the régime of the true arts’ the artist maintains a comprehensive relationship with the language of image and form enabling them to utilise both political and aesthetic sensibilities in the production of social change. This is the significance of the coupling of poiēsis and mimēsis which Rancière speaks of. The concept of poiēsis and the role of mimēsis, developed through Heidegger and Gadamer forms the basis of the artist’s methodology. Rancière draws our attention back to the linguistic capacities of the literary modes of pre-modernist art and argues the need ‘to challenge the vain debates between ‘the autonomy of art’ inherent in the aesthetic regimes and ‘art’s submission to politics’ complicit in the ethical regimes.345

In advocating a return to ‘the representative régime of the true arts’ I do not mean a simplistic return to the classical age of ‘the fine arts’ or the historical traditions such as painting or sculpture. The productive coupling of mimēsis and poiēsis is vitally concerned with the production of new social space and revealing the gap in the knowledge within the present. The performative event of art can take any form although it is primarily concerned with the performance of the truth of the artist’s experience of the world. This performative event presents as ‘world-picture’, but quickly becomes a linguistic event. This is all an artist can ever hope to achieve. Although this performance is not bound by conception of tradition or media, it does necessitate an articulate relationship with a conceptual knowledge which, as we have demonstrated, is directly connected to language. Poiēsis manifests as a protest, a counter-cultural event, which seeks to transform the artist’s relationship with the world by reconfiguring knowledge of the world-at-large. This event is determined by the artist’s instinctive relationship with the ontological parameters of their own knowledge. As Kockelmans puts it ‘being dictates poiēsis’.346

question which remains concerns the artist’s language, a subject which we take up in the next chapter *The Issue of the Artist’s Language*. 
The Issue of the Artist's Language

'A masterpiece cannot be invisible. If it were we could not discuss it.'

Hans Belting

4.0 Introduction

The objective of this chapter is to re-evaluate the artist’s relationship with their productive language base; their technology or medium. It argues that the development of language structure art is seminal to art practice. Given the reductive aesthetics of formalism and the post-medium tactics of conceptualism the deep connection between visual language and knowledge production has been underestimated within the visual arts; art remains an epistemology for the production of cultural knowledge. The artist’s objective is to generate a causal effect, in direct line with the truth of their own knowledge, which impacts on the world-at-large through a performative act of language. In this sense, the perceptual language of the visual artist is understood as the pivotal interface between the artist’s subjective experience and the collective truth of ‘the Being of beings’. This chapter concludes that regardless of what cultural or aesthetic values the artist represents, regardless of what tactical objectives they engage or social concerns they address art is a conceptual act of language.

The issue at stake in this chapter is the collapse of the artist’s basic relationship with the concept of language, medium or technology. This is most evident in the post-medium conditions of contemporary art practice, where the persistent development of an articulate relationship with any specific medium or technology has been discouraged. As Rosalind Krauss puts it, ‘the concept of medium has been cut free from the guarantees of artistic tradition and buried, like so much toxical waste as too contaminated, too ideologically loaded’. These post-medium conditions have

destabilised art’s productive base and many contemporary artists have since turned to a wide range of alternative disciplines for methodology.

These alternative methodologies include the sociometric tactics of mass culture, the technical vocabularies of new technologies and/or the archival processes common to a wide range of scientific and bureaucratic disciplines. While this conceptual development has liberated artists to engage the widest range of media, technologies and disciplines, it has also had the reciprocal effect of rendering art’s traditions and methodologies redundant. Giorgio Agamben details this predicament in terms of the division between ‘art — not art’ where contemporary art has aligned itself with ‘not art’. This development has created a rupture in the value of arts education which and as Agamben explains, could lead to ‘the eclipse of the concept of art’.

This chapter begins by tabling the argument for the significance of language in the production of poiêtic knowledge. It extends the Graeco-German concept of poeticizing; the presentation of the essential truth of the artist’s being discussed in chapters one and two, and delineates the profound connection between the production of knowledge and language. Art’s objective is to bring the poiêtic truth of the artist’s ontological knowledge into radiance within the present, but the social effect of this ontological event can only be achieved through the production of a linguistic event; that is an event which is capable of having an effect on the structure of knowledge. In this regard we understand art as an epistemology in which visual language is fundamental to the production of ontological and cultural knowledge. It is in light of this deep connection between poiêtic language, the structure of knowledge, we understand the artist’s relationship with their language, technology or medium need to be needs to be re-evaluated.

This brings us to the crisis which currently confronts contemporary artists. Art’s expansion into a widest spectrum of disciplines has accompanied the concurrent collapse of credibility for art’s disciplines and methodologies. Krauss argues the critical influences on the post-medium conditions of contemporary art practice are attributable to Marcel Broodthaers and Joseph Kosuth whose radical departure from the conventions of studio-based art practice is in turn traceable to the conceptual impact of Marcel Duchamp’s Readymades. Although it is impossible to discount the

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conceptual significance of the Readymade, this chapter reconsiders the conceptual conundrum posed by the Readymade; ‘What is Art?’ This is a complex question best answered by Duchamp himself, who’s actions speak louder than his words. In his secretive return to the privacy of his studio Duchamp made a singular commitment to the production of a complex visual language structure. A production which, Hans Belting argues, stands Duchamp’s work in a lineage with Renaissance masters, such as Da Vinci and Dürer. 350

By contrast, the function of his Readymade was that of a placebo, a conceptual blank, a random object to be selected on a prearranged day at predetermined time to be offered up as a pawn in lieu of a tactical game which served to draw his opponents into creative checkmate. Those who continue to champion the significance of the tactical Readymade seem to have forgotten that Duchamp himself had always maintained that ‘the contemporary artist’s only recourse is to be underground’ and overlooked the significance of his comment made twelve months before his death; ‘indeed as you rightly point out, in my whole life I have done but one work, *The Large Glass*.‘ 351 In re-presenting the Readymade, Duchamp had deliberately set into play a double-handed conceit intended to subvert the attention of all those who were too keen to follow his every move.

The objective of this brief re-counting of Duchamp’s manoeuvres is to give pause to enable us to rethink the implications of Duchamp’s own game at a time when so much is significance has been made of the aleatory device of the Readymade and their impact on twentieth century conceptions of art, Duchamp’s singular commitment remained his secretive production of what Gadamer would call a *sprachkristall*; that is a linguistic structure capable of reflecting and refracting all knowledge. Significantly, the mysteries contained by *The Large Glass* and its preface *Etant donnés*, have been embedded in a visual language of form produced through haptic and praxical processes unique to Duchamp. Most importantly, the knowledge they contain can only be unravelled through the hermeneutic process which decode their conceptual implications into common language.

Duchamp’s commitment to the sub-linguistic production of visual code brings us to the final question which concerns the balance between the performative act of art

and the productive act of language. The question here concerns the artist’s way through the labyrinth of language and the pitfalls entailed in technological mastery, performative virtuosity and the differences between the objectives of artistic and scientific methodologies. It concludes there is a major difference between processing experience to make it available in language and using language to bring being into radiance. This distinction is definitive for the practice of art; the production of the social event of art can only be achieved through linguistic effect.

Although art has a profoundly different relationship to language production than other epistemological disciplines, art is not exempt from the rule that there can be no contribution to knowledge without contribution to language. Regardless of which media and/or technologies the artist employs, it is only through the production of effective language structures that the artist can contribute to knowledge. Within the act of language the artist subverts the tyranny of the world-at-large, bringing the truth of their own being to light and instituting their own conceptual knowledge into the grid of language. Thus the artist generates new social space and liberates others from the structural limits of pre-programmed social knowledge. In this light we understand the significance of the artist’s language, medium or technology has been under estimated and needs to be re-evaluated. In this regard I argue the development of language is seminal to the practice of art.

4.1 The limits of knowledge

‘Every language is a view of the world’, explains Gadamer, language reflects like mirrors, that which cannot be seen; the patterns of our thoughts and feelings, our perceptions and responses to our experiences. This is a perspective shared by Ludwig Wittgenstein who famously said ‘to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life’. In constructing a new language in line with the demands of poïetic knowledge the artist does not simply contribute to knowledge through the visual languages of image and form, but to the structure of being itself.

Language is critical to our understanding of the world. Not only does it contain our entire world-view but it demarcates the limit of our being. We contribute to knowledge only by bringing experience into language. Each language signifies a way of seeing; each language is marked by a specific history of thought and knowledge. The parameters of our cultural perspectives are determined by language, just as our subjectivity is generated from within the internal logic of whichever lexical or corporeal language systems we generate. In this regard Gadamer maintains that once we are working within a particular language system, form and content can no longer be separated.\textsuperscript{354}

Each language becomes a system for processing knowledge, experience and time. Each language comes already coded much in the same way software packages are coded to process specific information. The same is true of all other language systems, French, fashion, figurative painting; they all come pre-coded, culturally embedded with their own ways of seeing and being in the world. To speak any language is to locate a discourse within a specific cultural context. To communicate effectively, common points of reference must be established before any ideas can be exchanged. Within twentieth century art, these codes became evident in the discourses of the genre end-games played out by various movements Futurism, Suprematism, Conceptualism.

Each artist extends the grammar of their own culture through their use of language; however what the viewer encounters in any individual artist’s work is determined by the broader cultural parameters of language well before the viewer encounters the world of the individual artist. In this regard we understand language precedes experience. The artist presents a ‘world-view’ but this presumes the artist not only has a ‘world-view’ in the first place, but more importantly that they have a language system capable of re-presenting it. The reverse is also true, continues Gadamer, ‘language has no independent life apart from the world which comes to light within it’.\textsuperscript{355} What we can not communicate we can not claim to possess as knowledge. In this regard the limit of our knowledge is determined as the exact limit of our language.

Our concept of being-in-the-world is primarily a linguistic act, explains Gadamer, our conception of the world has no structure independent of the language used to


\textsuperscript{355} Ibid. 443.
represent it. In this regard 'knowledge of the world' becomes 'knowledge of the language of the world'. However language, like creativity, is not the exclusive domain of art, the creative use of language is central to a wide range of disciplines. Art's specific relationship with language requires some differentiation for this is where art distinguishes itself from other knowledge production disciplines.

For Gadamer this distinction is exemplified by the difference between the methodologies of science and art. Science, he defines in terms of a research process which develops knowledge through the processing of data into language and transforming information into ideas. By contrast, the artist's objective is to bring 'being into luminosity' to assert the fundamental ontology of their being. The artist does this by differentiating what is useful in the present from what belongs to the past. Although the artists, their languages, media and the worlds they represent are always changing, for Heidegger, the objective of art remains a constant; to bring the truth of being into a language of form. In this regard Gadamer draws a distinction between 'theory' and what the ancient Greeks called 'theoria'.

Gadamer defines 'modern theory' as a research tool for the construction of totalising ideas about phenomena and experience. The objective of art is not the production of 'theory' but the production of the ancient Greek notion of 'theoria'. Unlike theory, which is the production of knowledge 'about being', the objective of theoria is to inspire 'being-for-itself'. The ontological event which John Ruskin defines as 'neither sensual nor intellectual but moral' is theoria, which Aristotle defines as the 'highest manner of being human'. For Gadamer theoria was the 'sharing of the total-order' of things, a conception which has parallels in Heidegger's concept of art as the production of 'a world', and his concept of 'world-picture'; the conceptualization of 'the world in its entirety'.

Today art and science are likely to use the very same research processes and the same presentation technologies to develop and represent their respective 'world-views'. We have only to contemplate Damian Hirst's literal dissections of animal

356  Ibid. 443.
360  Ibid. 98-100.
anatomies as a quasi scientific project to recognise Gadamer's concern that the intuitive processes of metaphysics and art would end in the ratiocinatic processes of science. In Gadamer's differentiation of art and science he distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge production; instinctive and logical. Gadamer delineates a psychological distinction between the instinctive methodology for the production of 'Being', which belongs to art, and the rational means of producing structural knowledge, which belongs to science.³⁶¹

Gadamer argues that art is not a discipline which needs to compete with science, rather art is to be understood as a subject worthy of the study of science.³⁶² Much like the extraordinary perfumes of plants or the exotic plumage of tropical birds, the artist intensifies their identity. Art comes to flower in the production of an alternative ontology within the linguistic context of the world-at-large. What constitutes art practice is as different as each individual artist.

What artists have in common is the capacity to generate an ontological event which attests to the truth of their own being and enables us access to our own ontological needs for becoming. The concept of art is not reducible to any particular culture, genre, aesthetic, medium or technology. Despite the generic production of genre, art is not a programmatic production. Each artist engenders their own world in their own way. Within this act of language the artist presents their own understanding within a form of language, as a resistant act for the survival of their own species. The act of language always stands between the artist and the world at large, between the artist and their audience.

With each performative act the artist engenders a language of difference; with each move the artist gestures toward the specificity of their own identity. Each work delineates the specific limit of the artist's condition exactly determined by the artist's capacity with language. This, Gadamer explains, is not because language is incapable of expanding toward 'the divinity of the infinite' but rather because 'language is simply language' and will always be bound by the specifics of time and individual culture.³⁶³ While the artist uses art to escape the social trajectory of time, they remain defined by the very exacting limits of their own ability to differentiate.

³⁶¹  Ibid. 5.
³⁶²  Ibid. Introduction xxxvii.
³⁶³  Ibid. 457.
knowledge through language. The differentiation of knowledge, whose objective is to engender the truth of the artist’s being, is primarily an act of language.

Aristotle, Novalis, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Agamben all considered the act of art as ‘a vital act of will’, but there remains a question regarding what is meant by their conception of the will to art. In his thesis on the subject of art *A Man Without Content*, Agamben points out that the work of art emanates from a state of ‘self annihilating nothing’. Wilfred Dickoff reiterates the same point; every true work of art is constructed out of an aimless desire, an ‘undirected homeless yearning that knows not where to go’. Art springs from a need to generate solid ground amid the shifting sands of ill-fitted options. The origin from which art springs is a condition of abject subjectivity; a condition in which the world becomes all and the artist — nothing. The future that art envisions is the present.

Art does not belong to the same methodological logic as science. Arthur Rimbaud, Antonin Artaud, Jean Genet, Patti Smith and many artists of their ilk, dissolved externally imposed criteria in ambrosial states where language broke down and erupted into lucidity, out of sheer necessity. We can see this in Patti Smith’s poems to Rimbaud and this fragment from her poem ‘a fleet of deer’;

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  i have been deprived of communication in english.  i am the eye of the
eagle circling the arena of life.  i am the eye, liquid, sour, poked and
sucked from the curious bird.  trembling to express the inexpressible.  i
am incapable of plot.  skin graphs perhaps, but not plot.  we pray to
break our fear of submission to sensation.  to give in.  to scream. to
offer up oneself to the sacred bull, charging and tearing into the skirts
of repression.  to lift ourselves up to the greedy assault of the stranger.
i would do it all, rape, morte.  give in totally to the rhythm all for the
rush of unveiling just one letter of the ancient alphabet.
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In this poem we can sense the artist’s need to break with the conventions of language whilst at the same time we understand that her bid for freedom remains bound by language. Smith’s need to break with the conventions of language and transgress social etiquette opens up new spaces in language; spaces between incoherent gesture and eloquent articulation; between nonsense and consequence,

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between chaos and lucidity. This is where the artist’s contribution to knowledge defines itself in opposition to the reasoned productions of logic and science. Dylan Thomas illuminates the problem eloquently in his poem ‘Find meat on bones’;

Rebel against the binding moon
And the parliament of sky,
The kingcrafts of the wicked sea, 
Autocracy of day and night, 
Dictatorship of sun.
Rebel against the flesh and bone,
The word of blood, the wily skin,
And the maggot no man can slay…367

Rebellion, for the artist, is not a matter of differentiating a specific point of juridical law; the artist is not a notary. The artist’s role is to dispute the social conventions which conspire against the individual; the entire repressive regime of life itself. In this moment it is not a matter of being right or wrong; it is a matter of cutting to a condition of ‘being-for-itself’ despite the social and natural patterns of the world-at-large. This is Heidegger’s concept of the ‘untruth’ at work, where life throws up a truth which has never been seen before which must claim itself despite its not having had a heritage. The artist remains what Agamben calls, A Man without Content. The artist falls back from what is already known, while yearning toward that which has not yet been listed; namely, their own needs for becoming. Regardless of what method the artist uses, they must disengage both convention and expectation, if they are to liberate that which Agamben calls ‘a primal hunger to be’ and Iggy Pop calls a ‘Lust for Life’.368 Although the performative act of art is spurred on by what Nietzsche calls rausch, the ambrosial rapture of reciprocal communication discussed in the first chapter, art is not wilful in any conventional sense.369

This is the paradox, explains Agamben in his philosophic account of the nature of the artist; the artist is only an artist on the condition of their being doubled and not ignoring the dual nature of their primary condition.370 Art is engendered by the artist’s intoxication with the conceptual process of poeticizing. It is this process

which enables the artist to go beyond themselves. However art is not a wilful act to determine the artist as something which they are not. Nor is the artist’s nihilism an antagonistic act motivated by a simplistic damnation of the world; nor a bombastic bid to conquer the world. Excessive use of ‘expressivo’, explains Nietzsche in his *Will to Power in Art*, is not a sign of strength but of a mark of weakness. The precondition of art is that the artist becomes lost to the demands of world-at-large. The artist’s nihilism is impelled by their inability to find a co-respondent for their own truth within the language of the world-at-large. In this light the artist steps back from the world but the artist’s fall toward nihilism is not quite what it might seem. Nietzsche maintains nihilism is the final mask of the spirit of their true being. For the artist this first step back from life becomes the first step toward the articulation of knowledge; language.

Art is wilful in the sense that it resists the totalitarianism of the world-at-large and the tyranny of the metaphysical body-mind dichotomy. Art falls to its own strengths to re-configure the world in line with its own truth in the form of language. It is within this act of falling back onto self, the encirclement of concatenating concentric circles that the artist reaches the very limit of their being, enabling them to redefine ‘Being’ within the form of language.

The methodology of art becomes thus a circle within a circle of circles, a ‘ring’ within the totality of philosophy, explains Hegel. Art encircles itself, falling back from all other knowledge toward the centralising force of ‘being-for-itself’. Agamben concurs on this point art falls to ‘nothing but itself’. This is what Nietzsche means when he refers to the ‘will of wills’. Art is doubly wilful in that it longs for nothing but the truth of its own being to come to light. However, as we have already noted this will has nothing to do with the bombastic and offensive ‘wilfulness’, which attempts to bend the world to its own will. The ‘will of wills’ lets go of the world, relinquishes the duplicitous battlefield of the world and in doing so frees man from the oppressions of world; state, god, history and time. The ‘will of wills’ re-sets the clock at zero and enabling art to spring from its own origin. ‘Art is in its essence ‘an origin’ explains Heidegger, art springs from a demand for a truth which is in alignment with the artist’s own sensibility. This is what dissolves the formal protocols of language and gives rise to new ways of being and new

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language of form. In this way we understand art—not simply a nihilistic rejection of all that is, but the life-affirming assertion of being-for-itself. This is why Nietzsche says 'art is worth more than truth; we possess art least we perish of the truth'.

The world-at-large can represent a tyranny of authority which the artist must reorder for their own sense of being come to light within it.

What the artist's performative act reveals is their own kernel of truth, their own point of origin, their genus, the artist's own genetic specificity buried deep under the ubiquitous authority of the world. This is where Thomas rebels against ‘the parliament of the sky … the dictatorship of the sun’. Agamben reminds us that the work of art cannot to be understood as a cultural value, nor is it to be revered as a privileged object. Rather the work of art offers us the gift of poiēsis and returns its viewer to their original grounding. This is what Agamben details as the uncanny production of presence where the past and the future are both at stake and the act of being-in-the-world claims its proper meaning. Here is Badiou's conception of art as the eternal war on the terrorism of the body/mind dichotomy. ‘Etymologically art, poiēsis, is the pro-duction of origin; art is the gift of the original site of man’.

Art offers a conceptual mime which identifies the specificity of the artist's genetic species; and enables those capable of recognising its truth, access to the specificity of their own genus.

However to arrive at this existential point of origin is not the artist's sole objective. The artist is not a priest for whom enlightenment is the objective of their practice.

Nor is art the rudimentary act of creating something new, like some novel widget for a market. The artist's objective is to make a contribution to knowledge capable of enabling its truth to take its place in the world; to institute the poiētic essence of their own knowledge through an act of language. What distinguishes the artist is their capacity to bring the poiēsis of their own primary condition into language in a way which is capable of effecting social space. Gadamer explains:

We can now see that this activity of the-thing-itself, the coming into language of meaning, points to a universal ontological structure, namely to the basic nature of everything toward which understanding can be directed. Being that can be understood is language … thus we speak of

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a language of art, but also a language of nature — in short any language that things have.\textsuperscript{375}

This is the production of the \textit{sprachkristall} discussed in chapter two. The linguistic structure which compels by virtue of its ability to confound, intensify, refract and reflect whatever knowledge is directed toward it,\textsuperscript{376} The artist's objective is to conceive, deconstruct, develop or divine such linguistic structures which do not belong to logic, which cannot be easily decoded, but attest to the truth of the artist's being.\textsuperscript{377} Art comes down to the production of linguistic structures capable of dazzling through their ability to generate a conceptual brilliance. The artist generates the refractive intensity of their own truth of being through the assiduous exercise of language. In this light we understand the artist's fluency with their own cultural knowledge structures is pivotal to the production of any art. This reading between the work of Gadamer and Agamben delineates philosophy's conceptualization of the significance of the artist's language which stands to contest the laissez-faire attitude engendered by the post-medium conceptions of art practice.

\textbf{4.2 The post-medium problem}

While 'the post-medium condition' has opened art practice up to a wide range of alternative and cross-disciplinary activities, this development has also trivialised art's relationship with knowledge production and led to confusion, as a wide range of objects and effects were presented as art. From the early1970s with the rise of conceptual art, art made a linguistic turn, privileging theory over practice. The ensuing the collapse of credibility for art's traditional disciplines was concurrent with the advent of a wide range of new media. Many artists, taking their cues from Marcel Duchamp's Readymade, began to drift across a wide range of media without sustaining a productive relationship with any specific discipline. Art defaulted to the generality of 'creative activity' wherein anything became possible and the concept of

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art lost any sense of defining parameter. In this context, as Belting and Danto have noted, the artworld was beset by wide range of engaging, sensational, and often quite trivial activities. With the rise of the ethical discourses currently determining contemporary art, many artists have turned to more reliable disciplines.

As Rancière puts it 'contemporary art is quintessentially, defined by the erasure of medium specificity, indeed by the (erasure of the) visibility of art as a distinct practice'.378 As we have seen, art’s public profile is now governed by political responsibility. Visual art’s determining authority has been handed to curatorial politics and contemporary art has become indistinguishable from conventional knowledge production. In this context we recognise the problem facing the visual arts; lack of defining discipline. The expansion of art’s boundaries has led to the collapse of value for traditional conceptions of art practice and a deep sense of confusion within arts education.

To unravel this problem we must go back to its source. If painting had once been art’s defining technology, with the triumph of formalism came the recognition of painting’s exact limit. As Rosalind Krauss puts it, ‘the medium of painting had been reduced to zero such that nothing was left but an object’, artists were confronted with the absurdity of the idea that any ‘unworked physical support’ could define art practice. Pure paint proved no more of a solid foundation for the idea of art, than pure concrete.379

Conceptual art displaced formalism in art on the premise that idea was central to the art experience. In the shift to photomedia image, text and the phenomenology of installation values conceptual art displaced haptic modes of creative activity. However as Krauss points out conceptual art in installation became indistinguishable from promotional display.380 In effect the conceptualists constructed a new language for artists and audience alike; one capable of engaging both the body and the mind of a mass audience, but this mode of art practice has given rise to another state of imbalance between form and content, between art, politics and promotion—which many recognise as ‘anti-art’.381

380  Ibid.12.
381  Jacques Ranciere, “Art of the Possible; an Interview with Jacques Ranciere”, review Art Forum (2007).
Joseph Kosuth, like most conceptual artists, saw Duchamp's Readymade as the origin of conceptual art. The Readymade represented a fundamental shift was from 'art as appearance' to 'art as idea'. As Kosuth puts it 'all art (after Duchamp) is conceptual because art only exists conceptually'. What Duchamp's Readymade represented was a shift from the production of the art object to the production of the conceptual event. Eventually this led to a shift in the artist's focus from studio production to the museum production.

Krauss argues the seminal reference in this development becomes Marcel Broodthaers. 'The post-medium condition (conceptual mixed-media installation) traces its lineage not so much to Joseph Kosuth but to Marcel Broodthaers'. This opens the discourses regarding art's tactical engagement with the politics of the museum industry. However, whether the key figure in this conceptual shift into post-media was Kosuth or Broodthaers matters little to this discussion for it was Duchamp's work which set this line of thought into action. Both Kosuth and Broodthaers took their inspiration from Duchamp.

Duchamp's poetic tactics have an enormous impact on our conception of contemporary art, however conceptual art's claim for purifying 'art's traditions by producing art as a mode of theory, has pushed contemporary art to the point where it has become indistinguishable from anything else' explains Krauss. Duchamp has given rise to the practice of art as the tactical event of displacing expectations but in this context the defining frame of art shifted to the tactical event of the artist's career. Although this tactical freedom has liberated artists to work with the widest in the widest public arena, as noted in chapter one, it has led to the collapse of any stable conception of artistic methodology or what Krauss calls 'any coherent set of rules'. Most importantly this has led to confusion regarding artistic objectives and the collapse of value for artistic methodology.

Duchamp's Readymades have been instrumental in the displacement of the studio-based practice where the artist's conceptual knowledge is embedded within the object through the praxical process of manufacturing the event of visual language,
however, Duchamp's role in this development remains ambiguous. Now, almost one hundred years since Duchamp first introduced his Readymades, art has become indistinguishable from many other modes of mass-media production and vice versa. Almost forty years since Kosuth published *Art After Philosophy*, and Broodthaers first presented his *Museum of Modern Art*, we understand what Krauss means when she says what began as 'a form of self-promotion for the idea of conceptual art' has led to the instrumentalization of the arts. As we have already noted, this problem becomes doubly complex when much contemporary art now aligns itself on the side of 'not-art' in the distinction between 'art — not-art'.

The problem this raises is that when art has no foundation but rather becomes just what is being promoted as art, there is little point in the study of art. As noted in the first chapter, there are many who argue the concept of art is now part of the problem facing art, not the solution. Art in this context becomes little more than a promotional political event without any foundation in its defining discipline. This is the crisis which Agamben insists that, if it can not be resolved the entire concept of art will eventually dissolve, the idea of art will be lost, and those institutions which define themselves in relation to the concept of art will find themselves dismantled. We can already see these developments within the university system as the schools of Art History, Visual Arts and Creative Arts are bracketed under broader denominations such as Culture and Communication. This is the problem which De Duve attributes to Duchamp, in acknowledgment of his genius.

Duchamp’s work is pivotal in the progressive expansion of art’s boundaries. However, there remains a question regarding whether the conceptual displacement of art was the objective of Duchamp’s tactical manoeuvres? I argue Duchamp had laid a conceptual trap for the artworld of his day, a trap which has had major implications for art practice in the late-twentieth century. This is the problem which Duchamp set into play when he offered up his snow-shovel to the New York artworld, *In Advance of a Broken Arm* (1915). At issue is the role of language in art’s production of knowledge.

'Art doesn't interest me', Duchamp explained to William Seitz, curator at the Museum of Modern Art, although it might have been more correct to say that the

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art of his day held no interest for him.\textsuperscript{389} Amédée Ozenfant, the author of \textit{The Foundations of Modern Art}, maintained Duchamp had 'deliberately launched a nihilistic protest against art', although it could be more correct to say that Duchamp had little regard for the New York artists of his day.\textsuperscript{390} John Canaday, chief art critic for the New York Times, maintained in his obituary to the master that ‘Duchamp was the most destructive artist in history’, although Canaday's comments have had little effect on Duchamp's reception with successive generations of artists who followed.\textsuperscript{391}

Duchamp's plurality of practice has meant that his work has had an enormous impact on both 'artistic practice and his reception within art history', explains David Joselit in his introduction to Duchamp's critical years 1910-1941; \textit{Infinite Regress}.\textsuperscript{392} It is not easy to separate the conceptual impact of Duchamp's tactical production from the significance of his singular masterpiece, \textit{The Bride Stripped bare by Her Bachelors, Even} (1915-1923), the work that Duchamp usually referred to as \textit{The Large Glass}. The enduring paradox of this masterpiece stands in direct contradiction to the ephemerality of his Readymades which, it must be remembered, were all discarded as throwaways by Duchamp himself. This is not to underestimate the complexity of his double-handed game, his 'good cop — bad cop routine', since both strategies must be seen as working hand in hand in a tactical engagement with the artworld of his day.

The conceptual significance of a random object, selected 'on such a date, at such a minute' to be inscribed as a Readymade, must now be understood in direct relation to his singular masterpiece. Unlike his Readymades which required no production, Duchamp's multi-layered masterpiece was embedded in a praxical process of language production where meaning is bound to the production of form. Unlike his Readymades, \textit{The Large Glass} along with its footnote \textit{Etant donnés} were both produced in total secrecy. The final complexity of Duchamp’s conundrum ‘What is Art’ was not revealed until twelve months after his death, such that Duchamp himself would be unable to influence or directly benefit from its reception.

To understand the complexity of Duchamp’s tactical end-game we must look more closely at Duchamp’s own example. As Joselit points out, the best way of understanding Duchamp’s endgame is in terms of his relationship with the games of tactical strategy and chance; chess and roulette. In Duchamp’s case ‘the fight between two opponents’ is played out in the roulette strategy of the martingale; a tactic where the probabilities of chance are delimited within a more comprehensive framework. Joselit characterises Duchamp’s game in terms of ‘the same sort of immobilization as the Bride’s liaison with the Bachelors in *The Large Glass*. Duchamp’s metaphor of the bachelors driven to a frenzy of chocolate grinding (a French metaphor for masturbation) by the cinematic blossoming of their illusive Bride evokes many associations, not least of all, the artist’s impotent relationship with the archival industry itself.

While Duchamp’s tactical Readymades have been seminal to late twentieth century art discourse, his ephemeral production has been persistently privileged over the significance of his clandestine masterpiece; *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelor’s, Even*. The problem this has engendered has been the trivialisation of art production which, as we have demonstrated, has led to the considerable confusion for many artists and the collapse of credibility of art practice. There is no doubt that the breadth of Duchamp’s activities stand as art, however I argue that Duchamp set up his Readymade as a decoy, a tactical conceit, to lead his followers into an impasse, a cul-de-sac. Duchamp himself transfer his own operations underground.

While Duchamp’s Readymades have opened-up one space, they have in effect discreetly closed off access to another; much like his *Door, Rue Larry, Paris* (1927) which opens one room only to close off another. What is closed off by the ubiquity of the Readymade is the significance of the work which underpins Duchamp’s artistic authority; *The Large Glass*. Unlike the Readymades, *The Large Glass* is a work deeply embedded in praxical processes of knowledge production where new understanding is produced through the production of new language. The conceptual authority and metaphysical resilience of this final work is often underestimated by those who draw their practices in line with the Duchampian lineage. The issue at stake concerns the pivotal role that language plays in complex knowledge production. Although art remains a fundamentally different discipline, it...

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393 Ibid. 174, 178.
is not exempt from the rule that there can be no contribution to knowledge without contribution to language.

In 1913, Duchamp caused a sensation in the New York Armoury Show with his Cubo-Futurist painting *Nude Descending the Staircase* (1912). By the time the artist arrived in New York two years later, Duchamp had become a celebrity to be greeted by a surge of protégés; who he immediately dismissed as ‘a lot of little cubist monkeys following the motions of the leader without any comprehension of their significance’\(^{394}\). His next move dumbfounded the New York artworld. This, of course, was his scandalous urinal; *Fountain* (1917) which was removed from public exhibition at ‘The Society of Independent Artists’, before the show opened. Simultaneously Duchamp had begun making his quips about the olfactory masturbations of oil paint and ‘*la patte*’, the paw of the painterly touch, propagating his infamous one-liner ‘stupid as a painter’, taunting what he saw as a gullible artworld with his Readymades, common objects found by chance within a predetermined time-frame, ‘chosen on the basis of visual indifference and the total absence of good or bad taste’.\(^{395}\) The objective of the Readymade was to pose the conundrum ‘What is Art?’ and usher those artists whose only conception of art was to follow ‘the next big thing’, into a cul-de-sac.\(^{396}\) Duchamp’s diabolic game had become the ludic amusement of cornering his competition — checkmate.

From this perspective we begin to read the Readymade as a seditious gift; a Trojan horse, intended to breakdown the heavily fortified preconceptions of the artworld of the day, ushering into its gates a mode of practice which it was ill-equipped to comprehend at the time. We catch a glimpse of the level of Duchamp’s critical distance at the time from William Carlos Williams, the American modernist poet’s tale of his first encounter with Duchamp in the Arensberg’s circle.

I finally came face to face with him as we walked around the room and said; ‘I like your picture’, pointing to the one I mentioned. He looked at me and said ‘Do you?’ That was all. He had me beat all right, if that was the objective. I could have sunk through the floor, I ground my teeth, turned my back and spat.\(^{397}\)

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\(^{395}\) Ibid. 157.


Duchamp had set out a number of traps for those naïve enough to imagine they could comprehend his game. It is easy to read such intentions into the early Readymades such as Trébuchet (1917), the coat rack which he nailed to his studio floor to trip up unwary visitors. As Joselit puts it, ‘Trébuchet functions as a trap or a strategem in a game, it forms a game where ordinary life is convulsively transformed by an unforeseen paradox’.\textsuperscript{398} The literal translation of the French word Trébuchet is ‘to trip’ and carries the connotation of the chess term; trébucher, to give up a pawn in order to trap your opponent.\textsuperscript{399}

Duchamp’s strategy defied simplistic definition. He blocked and bewildered any trivial conception of art, and dismissed the popular aspirations of the society painter. Even before leaving Paris he had made his dissatisfaction with the artworld clear;

\begin{quote}
I have disliked this artistic life … it is the exact opposite of what I want … I had tried to escape from the artists … I felt increasingly uncomfortable in this milieu … I refuse to envision an artist's life for myself… I am afraid to end up needing to sell canvases, in other words, to be a society painter.\textsuperscript{400}
\end{quote}

Many critics continue to cite Duchamp's incisive deployment of the Readymade as a bid to destroy the aesthetic paradigm. We can see this perspective in Krauss' final comment on Duchamp's last work in \textit{Art Since 1900}. She describes \textit{Etant Donnés} (1946-66) 'lying within the citadel of the museum itself' setting up a contra-model which 'went right to the heart of the aesthetic paradigm, critiquing it, deconstructing it and demystifying it'.\textsuperscript{401} However, I argue there is a profound difference between \textit{Etant Donnés} and Duchamp's Readymades and challenge Krauss's conclusion; that \textit{Etant Donnés} de-mystified the aesthetic paradigm.

Krauss's conclusion is correct if drawn on the basis of the Readymades alone, however I argue it is a mistake to confuse the intentions of his Readymades with those of his final work, for they represent very different strategic agendas. If anything \textit{Etant Donnés} serves to re-mystify the aesthetic paradigm. The critical

\begin{footnotes}
\item[400] Ibid. 142.
\item[401] Rosalind Krauss Hal Foster, Yves Alain Bois, Benjamin Buchloh, \textit{Art since 1900}, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004). 499.
\end{footnotes}
difference is Duchamp's commitment to the production of language embedded in his Large Glass.

Publicly, Duchamp had engaged in a poetic divertissement with the world at large, a poetic taunt, intended to trip-up popular presumptions about art. Privately Duchamp put into practice his own advice and went underground. While offering up his pawns, his Readymade throwaways, Duchamp returned to the privacy of his studio in absolute secrecy; setting up a hermetically-sealed practice to develop a single work of art whose full implications did not come to light until twelve months after his death.

On closer examination of Duchamp's life and work what begins to emerge is the double-handed tactic, on one hand a public game played on all fronts with the artworld of his day, on the other hand the master game, which he played in absolute secrecy; 'a little game between I and me'. Between these two strategies Duchamp managed to checkmate, not so much his contemporaries as much as successive generations which followed. In order to comprehend this development we have to go back to 1912, two years before he moved to New York, when Duchamp took a working holiday in Munich. What comes to light is Duchamp's singular focus on the praxical production of a language of form which laid the foundation for The Large Glass.

'Munich was the scene of my complete liberation', Duchamp explains, 'when I established the general plan of a large-sized work (a production which was to come to fruition in The Large Glass) which would occupy me for a long time, on account of all sorts of new technical problems to be worked out.‘. During those two months he produced two of his most important paintings, The Passage from the Virgin to the Bride (1912) and The Bride (1912), and four complex drawings including the first study for The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (1912). What becomes clear is that his entire time in Munich was spent working; 'I lived for two months in a little furnished room. I never spoke to a soul, but I had a great time'. We are left to ask what constituted Duchamp's 'liberation'. Although Duchamp was always evasive on this point, late in his life Duchamp revealed to the French documentary film maker Jean-Marie Drot, 'In 1912 it was a decision for

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being alone; everyone for himself as in a shipwreck’. We understand that his disregard for other practices enabled Duchamp to commit himself to complex language production determined by subjective insight.

The revelations of his solitude enabled Duchamp to commit himself to a course of action wherein the material process of language production became the integral means by which an indeterminate subject was brought into form. This complex process of language production stands in direct contrast to the simplistic nominative production the Readymade. Within The Large Glass, cogitative, theoretical and material knowledge was extruded through the haptic processes of ‘practical engagement with materials, methods, tools and ideas’. However, it is important to note that Duchamp maintained an indifference to the distinctions between abstraction, expression and representation, believing they were all just ‘tools to be used and never exclusively’ it was just not necessary to draw distinctions between different aspects of visual vocabulary.

The year before he died, Duchamp was proof-reading the final manuscripts for Arturo Schwartz's two volume catalogue raisonné of his work when Duchamp commented to Schwartz 'Indeed as you rightly point out, in my whole life I have done but one work, The Large Glass'. However, despite having worked with Schwartz on his catalogue raisonné for the previous twelve years, Duchamp died without ever mentioning the final piece in his mystery. Following the completion of The Large Glass, it appeared that Duchamp entered a period which John Moffitt called 'a period of diminishing returns'. However although this period appeared to extend until the end of his life, it concealed one further piece; Etant Donnés, Donnés - 1. La Chute d’ eau 2. Le Gaz d’ eclairage, The Given: The Waterfall and The Illuminating Gas (1946-68).

In effect Etant Donnés functions as a preface to what Duchamp acknowledges as his only work of art. This final piece lays out the pre-conditions under which it is possible for the bride to be stripped-bare. This last piece in the conceptual jigsaw

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405 Ibid. 93.
had been referenced in his *Boîte Vert*, the *Green Box* in which he kept his cryptic notes for his masterpiece before he had begun work on *The Large Glass* itself.

What I am arguing here is that following his time in Munich, Duchamp kept his artistic production confidential. The Readymades served as a tactical decoy concealing his major production and trivialising the value of language production, at exactly the time when Duchamp had cemented his own commitment to the praxical processes of language production. While Duchamp’s public play was the Readymade, the throwaway, his masterpiece remained a covert production. Any attempt to follow Duchamp’s public manoeuvre quickly finds itself confronted with the conceptual problem contained by the Readymade; the work of art as throwaway.

This is the paradox of Duchamp’s genius that De Duve brings to our attention. Duchamp offered up his pawn, the Readymade, in lieu of his master-game. The answer to his conundrum, ‘What is Art?’ contained within his Readymades can only be understood in terms of Duchamp’s own example. That is, his secretive return to the studio to articulate a revelation which is couched in a complex production of language. In Duchamp’s masterpiece metaphors abound but meaning remains illusive. In the reflective surface of *The Large Glass* we see the preoccupations of a period; automobiles, alchemy, sexual innuendo and the apotheosis of enlightenment bachelors and their illusive bride, however as we look deeper things are not what they might appear; meaning has been refracted and bent. Here we find Gadamer’s metaphor of the *sprachkristall*, discussed in chapter two, most apt.

Duchamp’s answer to his own conundrum ‘*What is Art*’ is to be understood in terms of his final refuge within the praxical production of language to fabricate and illuminate a complex conceptual understanding, a metaphysical truth. What Duchamp offers is a mischievous thesis on the illusive nature of enlightenment. However the poetic knowledge contained within *The Large Glass* is only accessible through the translation of Duchamp’s artistic language into a more easily accessible mode of understanding. As Joselit puts it ‘words are the fuel on which the large glass runs’. The implications of the work of art must be translated into a common language before the work of art can gain popular currency. Here we recognise Gadamer’s hermeneutic understanding that the poiêtic knowledge

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contained by art is profoundly different to that espoused by rational logic; art sets up a hermeneutic dialogue with common language to enable its understandings to enter into common usage; ‘a work of art is brought out of its alieness only because the object itself demands its own translation’.411

In effect, productive methodology of The Large Glass represents the complete antithesis of the methodology of the Readymade. The aleatory methodology of the Readymade blocked any discourse concerning the value of language or its development. Duchamp’s double-handed conceit led his competition into a cul de sac, a dead end, from which the production of complex meaning would be virtually impossible. This sly act was performed as he demonstrated himself With Tongue in My Cheek (1959) and left his major production unassailed by competition.

Hans Belting asserts that The Large Glass reveals ‘a Neo-Platonic rigour beneath the camouflage of playfulness’.412 Belting argues that Duchamp advances art’s highest aspiration by offering a witty play between Da Vinci’s scientific approach to perspective and the cubist idea of foreshortening of space. Belting illustrates his thesis with reference to Albrecht Dürer’s woodcut Unterweisunder Messung, Manual for Measurement (1538), where we see the artist drafting up a female model, through the grided frame. The analytic artist, the bachelor, is separated from the sensuality of his model, the bride, by a grided window through which two modes of being can never meet.413 In The Large Glass Duchamp had flattened any illusion of depth into a diagram and embedding the image directly into the glass itself, bringing illusion to a surface effect. In this respect, The Large Glass is easily positioned within the lineage of modernism. However, Duchamp was not a modernist in the formalist sense. As De Duve points out ‘for all the talk of paradigm shifts The Large Glass remains an allegory in the most traditional sense’.414

‘Who is this salon revolutionary — Un anarchiste de droit?’ asks De Duve, ‘Are we all just pawns in his game?415 Despite his tactical gamesmanship in the end Duchamp placed his faith in the linguistic power of the work itself and its ability to speak for itself long after his ability to defend it. This singular work, The Bride

413  Ibid. 326.
415  Ibid. 454.
Stripped bare by her Bachelors, Even along with its preface, Etant Donnés, which lays out the terms and pre-conditions under which the Bride can be stripped bare, becomes a poetic act of language which is left to stand or fail in its own terms. The final effect of his master work was not revealed until 12 months after Duchamp had died, when these two works were revealed installed side by side at the Philadelphia Museum leaving the final reception of the work unaffected by Duchamp's charismatic presence.

Duchamp articulated his position on this matter of poetic judgement in an address on the question of The Creative Act, presented to the American Federation of the Arts in 1957, ten years before his permanent installation at the Philadelphia Museum was revealed. Duchamp's paper was developed with reference to T.S. Elliot's essay Tradition and Individual Talent; it is an argument for the absolute independence of the work of art.416

In the end the artist has no say in the significance of their work, the artist can shout it from the all the rooftops that he (or she) is a genius, but they will have to wait for the verdict of the spectator in order that his (or her) declarations take on a social value and, finally, posterity includes him (or her) in the primers of art history.417

In the end the artwork is left to do its own work. Whatever implications the work of art may contain they are finally left to their own device. Paintings sit in their museums like hats on the wall, manuscripts lie in the storerooms of publishing houses like potatoes in cellars; there they await the rising of ‘the earth’, as Heidegger puts it, to be discovered.418 Although the cult of personality and public hype may draw us into the spectacle of an artist's work, no amount of justification can make us respond to the thingly object if the work itself is unable to speak to us after the artist has passed away. This process 'becomes more obvious when posterity gives its final verdict', explains Duchamp, when artists are dead and buried.419 The work of art must be capable of generating its own effect; communicating with its viewer directly. In this context 'artists are sometimes rehabilitated', Duchamp reminded us before his death in 1968. As Heidegger puts

in the epigram to his treatise on *The Origin of the Work of Art*, 'only the image formed keeps the vision. Yet the image formed rests in the poem'.

Duchamp’s Readymades served to mask the value of language in the production of poetic knowledge. This generated a blind spot which enabled Duchamp to return to the studio to develop his own poiêsis through the production of language without the self consciousness of competition. The consequence of Duchamp’s conceit has been that the production of language continues to be underestimated within the visual arts to this day. The function of the artist’s language is to embody the artist’s poetic knowledge but the production of poetic knowledge is itself a linguistic production. Regardless of what form an artist chooses meaning can only be generated through the production of language. Ultimately, the act of art is an act of language which cannot be completed by the artist. Although Duchamp’s œuvre offers a radical break with tradition, Duchamp’s seminal work affirms the most archaic conception of art’s role. The poiêsis contained by the work of art is eventually abandoned by the artist and left to stand its own ground. Despite the thingly nature of the work of art, it is this language of form which must be capable of speaking to its audience, directly. In this context we return to the discussion concerning Terry Smith’s conception of *The Iconographic Turn* and Heidegger’s notion of the ‘world-picture’.

4.3 The axis between the artist and the world

The act of art is an incisive social act, contingent on the adroit use of language. However within post-Duchampian context of contemporary art, the significance of the artist’s language is often neglected. The concept of an artist’s language has been confused with Greenberg’s notions of medium and ‘buried’, as Krauss puts it. More recently Krauss has extended her concept of the artist’s ‘medium’ to the artist’s ‘technical support’, which expands visual arts language base to include a wide range of technologies. However, regardless of which technology the artist

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422 Rosalind Krauss, “Two Moments from the Post-Medium Condition”, *October* 2006. 56-57.
uses, language remains the tactical interface between the artist and the world-at-large and therefore requires greater consideration.

Art is not the simple matter of generating some novel effect with paint or any other technology. Art is a conceptual experience which is engendered through visual language. Regardless of which language, medium or technology the artist chooses, art remains a conceptual experience which surfaces in direct relation to the work itself.

The Heidegger scholar, Joseph Kocklemans, draws our attention to the question regarding the domain which art illuminates. It is art’s role to move into the radiance of unconcealment, *A-lethêia*, but what is illuminated by art’s openness can be darkness — ‘for darkness also needs open place’, he explains. ‘The world’ generated by the work of art is firmly grounded in ‘the earth’. Concealment and non-concealment belong together, Kocklemans reminds us, things lie in concealment so that they may gather themselves toward manifestation. That which is unconcealed becomes least important; what is most important is what lies hidden. The objective of any epistemology, be it art or science, is to illuminate what is hidden, the gap in the knowledge. The work of art also draws what lies hidden to the surface but it is only language that can enable life itself to emerge from the depths ‘of the pondering heart’ and come into form as new knowledge.

Kocklemans concludes his discourse on *Heidegger on Art and Art Works* with the notion that language precedes all action; language is all we can know and in this regard language determines all. 423

The structure of the work of art itself is language, the basis of all communication and the basic platform on which all understanding is established and contested. As we have already noted this concept of the artists ‘language’ is broad, it extends to ‘any language things have’. 424 Language can take any form, use any medium, instrument, media or technology, however, art’s purpose is not arbitrary nor is it to be confused with the utility of other productive disciplines. The function the artist’s language is to enable the truth of the artist’s understanding to come into language and into knowledge, into being, into light. In this regard we understand the artist’s language system is seminal. Language is the structure on which the artist’s truth is

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communicated, the basis on which the relationship with the world is re-fashioned and the artist’s contribution to knowledge is founded.

As already noted, for Gadamer, this concept of language refers to ‘any language things have’. It matters not whether the language system is written or visual, digital video, installation, political action or publication; what is important is that the artist develops a clear relationship with the performative power of whatever language they choose. It is only through an incisive act of language that the performative event of poiēsis can achieve its transformative social effect and art’s contribution to knowledge becomes possible. Only through the sustained development of language can the knowledge of an artist’s vision come to light, equally only through a sustained development of language can an artist contribution to knowledge come into being. The concept of language is the axis between the artist and the world; language is seminal to both contemporary and traditional conceptions of art. Regardless of which side of the ‘art—not art’ divide the artist stands on, language remains the critical interface between the artist and the world-at-large.

Although the merging of art and other disciplines has been in effect for many years now, it is only relatively recently that the school of art has been brought under the umbrella of the academic system where all disciplines are evaluated in terms of the question of their capacity to contribute to knowledge. In a contemporary context, where ‘art’ identifies itself in alignment with ‘not art’, we witness the elision of differences between art and other disciplines. This constitutes the problem addressed by this thesis. However, as we have already delineated, there remain significant differences between artistic methodologies and academic approaches to knowledge production; which reach their limit in the ratiocinatic methodologies science.

Contemporary art accepts its role as an alternative epistemology, but it is the similarities and differences between artistic and academic approaches to knowledge production which is the subject of broader concern within both art and academic networks. These questions concerning art as epistemology were the subject of the conference, ‘Concerning Knowledge Production Practices in Contemporary Art’ held in Utrecht, Netherlands, December 2006. 425 The four key themes this conference addressed were as follows: 1/. ‘Knowledge Production in Art’, which serves to differentiate a relevant history of visual art’s contribution to knowledge. 2/. 'Inter-
Discipline or Non-Discipline?’ which raised issues facing conceptual artists working without productive disciplines. 3/. ‘Unclaimed knowledge’, which brings up the topical question of ‘gap in the knowledge’ and also the issues facing those haptic practices which work with the ‘unsayable’. 4/. ‘Artist as Public Intellectual’, which concerns the artist’s capacity to account for the times and the future of art as a knowledge based discipline — art as epistemology. The point here is that whatever form art takes, within the funding circles which determine contemporary art’s future, art now faces the same criterion as other epistemological disciplines namely: ‘contribution to knowledge’. The issue facing the art education becomes, does it have a methodology capable of sustaining itself within this knowledge-driven economy.

This is significance of the dilemma delineated by Agamben, where ‘work of art is identified with the non-artistic product’. Since public support for the arts is quantified in terms of art’s ability to engender key social responses and make particular contributions to knowledge the artist, no less than the school of art, must consider the effectiveness of their discipline and the value of art as an epistemology very seriously. Within the politically driven arena of public funding, we recognise the concurrent rise of scientific modes of knowledge production and decline of artistic methodologies. The problem facing the future of art concerns the value of art as its own discipline. At a time when many media, technologies and disciplines are able to document and archive the image of the present, it is important not to confuse the curatorial production of the ‘global-overview’ with the artistic production of the ‘world-picture’.

On this point, Heidegger raises The Question Concerning Technology and articulates the subtle divergences between the ‘enframing’ of technology and the ‘unconcealment’ of art. In her book ‘Beyond Representation’ Barbara Bolt summarises the difference between ‘the way of technology’ and ‘the way of art’ thus; ‘whilst enframing concerns an ordering and a mastery over ‘what is’, poiësis involves openness before ‘what is’. Art is not, Heidegger points out, a discipline for the processing of the world and ordering it for use. In this act ‘man no longer lays himself open to the world and can no longer experience ‘what is’ as Being. The

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problem is entrapment; as Bolt puts it, ‘the failure to reflect our ’Being as beings’ which results in self-deception and blindness’.\textsuperscript{429}

Heidegger reminds us that technology is like language, they are both systems for making experience available as resource. Unlike art, neither technology nor language has any binding ontological or metaphysical agenda; rather they are simply systems for processing natural resources, experience and knowledge.\textsuperscript{430} Ultimately technology and language both process, collect and order natural resources making them available as ‘stock-at-hand’, ‘standing-in-reserve’. Technology and language are powerful tools to be mastered but they also present a danger. Man can become ‘entrapped’ by both technology and language.\textsuperscript{431}

The danger is that, pushing either at the boundaries of technology or the limits of language, man might imagine that he is on the brink of some great discovery. However in both the pursuit of technology or language, nothing reveals itself except a labyrinth of possibilities; a classless network of infinite options. Eventually, what comes to light is not the nature of truth, but the structure of the system. The real danger explains Heidegger, begins when man sets his standards on the basis of this system and imagines all life to be product of a linguistic or technological process. Heidegger exemplifies this idea as the point where divinity is represented by an archive of theological concepts which reveals no wisdom. The ’divine’ becomes a simulacrum of all that is holy, totally disconnected from any conception of the sacred.\textsuperscript{432} This is the problem exemplified by Nietzsche’s model of Apollo and Dionysius outlined in chapter one. Having mistaken the system for spirit, the simulacrum for the real, poetry for love, television for life, the map for the territory, man finds his or herself entrapped unable to access the flow of life.

The supreme danger is that man himself will become himself processed, classified and left ’standing in reserve’. Man develops technology to harness nature and in doing so becomes ’lord of the earth’, but this is exactly what gives rise to the final illusion. Man can make the mistake of imagining the world-at-large is all his own construction, everything a reflection of his or her will but fails to recognise that ‘precisely nowhere’ does man encounter his or herself ’in essence’. In this way man

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\textsuperscript{429} Ibid. 23-28.
\textsuperscript{431} Ibid. 15,17-18.
\textsuperscript{432} Ibid. 26.
\end{flushright}
becomes caught ‘processing and ordering the mark of enframent’, standing in attendance on the grand illusion of his or her triumph,’ but fails to understand that he, or she, is the one being spoken to’. 433

This is the condition Bolt refers to as ‘blindness and delusion’, where man may control a vast amount of information but is unable to differentiate subjective desires. This is the condition that Adorno refers to as ‘desublimation’, discussed in the previous chapter. With both technology and language man can harness nature, order the flow of knowledge and may very well become ‘the master of the universe’, but can easily find themselves entrapped, blocked from access to the primal experience of truth. This is where art ends in science, which leads to the ‘forgetfulness of being’ which Nietzsche prophesied. 434 The problem which Heidegger acknowledges is that, ‘enframing blocks the shining forth and holding sway of truth’. 435 The processing of knowledge is no substitute for the production of radiance, epistemology is no substitute for ontology; science is no substitute for art.

The primary difference between ‘the way of art’ and ‘the way of technology’ is to be understood in terms of their respective objectives. The objective of art is to bring being into radiance, while the objective of technology is to make the resources of nature available. If we mistake the labyrinth of the system for the mystery of life, then we will become lost. If we mistake the roar of our machines for the harmony of the spheres we risk failing to recognise the ontological force of being itself.

This is the significance of Nietzsche’s model of the myth of Apollo and Dionysius; when man sacrifices the present for an indeterminate future, freewill is rendered null & void and the performative act of art becomes impossible. This is the danger inherent in the pursuit of mastery over either language or technology; the risk entailed in the pursuit of virtuosity. Although the artist must master of their own language, preoccupation with mastery over either language or technology blocks access to instinct and leads to delusion. As Heidegger reminds us, ‘the more we

433  Ibid. 27.
ponder the essence of technology, the more mysterious the essence of art becomes'.

Günter Figal, writing on politics, aesthetics and metaphysics, reminds us that for the ancient Greeks 'the arts were not derived from the artistic, works of art were not appreciated aesthetically, art was not a cultural activity'. The role of the arts was to enable a dialogue with the 'divine' and align human destinings with 'coming into being of radiance'. This meant neither the institutions of god nor man could establish the standards by which all values can be measured, but rather it is the relationship between man and god and the recognition of the limits of both which determined human values. In this regard Figal argues Nietzsche's conception of the last god, Dionysius, must be interpreted as a hermeneutic principle, 'deus is the circle of interpretation'. This is the hermeneutic that Gadamer articulates, discussed in chapter two.

The objective of the performative act of poiēsis is to bring 'the splendour of the true into its purest shining'. The more brightly we shine, the more we are enabled to surpass the self and the more remarkable the world is allowed to be; the more open and questioning we become. Etymologically speaking — this is what constitutes art's way forward, although this performative transmission of ontological knowledge is embedded in a poiētic act of language. Most importantly, the primary objective of this poiētic act is to institute its own conception of truth into the structure of knowledge, essentially a hermeneutic proposition.

For Gadamer, the performative act of poiēsis is nothing if not a hermeneutic act. This methodology of truth incurs the transformation of all that the artist knows into a new structure of knowledge. This process can only begin when the artist rejects the totalitarianism of 'the world'; letting go of all attachments and allowing themselves to fall back into the conceptual black hole of pure consciousness where all light belongs to the world-at-large, this is where the artist becomes a 'no-thing'. It is the recognition of this black hole of consciousness which enables the transformation of the platform of language into a vortex of knowledge, a blur,

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436 Ibid. 35.
wherein the artist is able to discern what is critical to the present and what belongs to the past. This metaphor represents the door to artistic production.

From this condition of 'no-thing' the artist is enabled to re-configure the essential nature of the present in a poëtic form of language, privileging what is useful to the future, while abandoning what is not to the past. It is exactly this restructuring of 'what is' in terms of the artist’s own demands for radiance in the present which compels the viewer. The given conditions of being are reflected, refracted and ultimately reconfigured in terms of the artist’s subjective needs for radiance. In this way, the work of art draws the viewer out of themselves into an open space of wonder, into the space which the artist has, out of necessity, constructed for themselves.440

The artist intuitively redefines the present on the basis of their subjective needs for becoming. This is what impacts on the viewer setting-off a chain reaction which is experienced, at first as disbelief, then as a hermeneutic code which demands its own interpretation and finally as emancipation. In this way the performative event of art institutes its own contribution to the structure knowledge directly into the conceptual space of its own culture.441 However, the work of art itself, the equipment which has enabled this transformation always remains embedded in language and thus expands toward public knowledge eventually becoming historically finite. The connotations of this expansive linguistic event eventually stabilize and whatever knowledge the work of art contains becomes bound by historical circumstance.

However, the artist’s capacity to engender this transformative event of language is not a given. The understanding to be articulated evolves only over the course of time, just as the structure of language required to articulate complex knowledge must also be developed. The impact of this structure is more radical when it is not simply a given text, explains Figal, but ‘develops as a way of expressing oneself in one’s own way’.442 In this praxical progression, the artist develops a language capable of engendering their own conceptual liberation, one which is socially encoded such that it impacts upon others. This is what distinguishes the work of art as a work of art; the capacity of its linguistic code to unlock the temporal bind of

the social condition. This is what constitutes the artist’s contribution to knowledge. This event is only possible through a hermeneutic act of language; because language is the structure of all knowledge.

4.4 Conclusions

As contemporary art practice faces increased political instrumentalization and academic rationalisation, art is confronted by the same criteria as any other discipline namely ‘there can be no contribution to knowledge without contribution to language’. While many artists have abandoned the idea of art for more rigorous methodologies in the production of pertinent public knowledge, others have abdicated the idea of art as a knowledge-based discipline and defaulted to random creative activities drawing upon the Dadaist lineage of Duchamp’s Readymade. Within this division, art practice has lost any conception of its original value and for many, any credibility as a sustainable discipline. This is the problem addressed by this thesis.

As we have demonstrated in chapter one, the political challenges facing contemporary art and pre-Socratic conceptions of art’s role are in alignment. Although art’s tactical methodologies are fundamentally different from other knowledge-based disciplines, the objective of art practice is the production of profound knowledge and therefore art remains bound by the truism; ‘no contribution to knowledge without contribution to language’. In this regard we have argued the significance of the artist’s language has been underestimated and needs re-evaluation.

In light of this concurrence of contemporary art’s obligations to knowledge and art’s most ancient function, we come to the concept of poeticizing, which both Heidegger and Gadamer remind us, constitutes the very essence of art. Poeticizing is the process by which poiētic knowledge is embedded into the structure of language. At its most abstract level poeticizing is a conceptual act and involves the differentiation of all the artist knows into what belongs to the past and what is useful to the present. At the material level, this process of poeticizing embeds its knowledge into the work of art and presents itself as a conceptual structure which demands to be decoded, reflecting, refracting and restructuring knowledge in light of the artist’s ontological act of truth. Regardless of what medium, media or technology the artist uses to effect this poiētic differentiation, art’s function is to generate an ontological experience capable of impacting upon our knowledge
structures; for only in this way can the act of art effect the change which is art’s raison d’être.

This conception of how art functions has significant implications for art practice. At a time when many artists have abandoned any conception of medium or visual language system in preference for the ‘post-medium condition’, the objective of this thesis has been to return the artist to reconsider the significance of a platform for their production of knowledge in light of the imperative of art’s impact on the structure of language and public knowledge. It matters little what medium, media or technology the artist chooses to work with, the important thing is that the artist develops a linguistic framework capable of differentiating and instituting conceptual knowledge into the structure of poïêtic knowledge. Although the artist’s world, their experience and values change, what develops consistency is the artist’s productive language structure, which remains capable of evolving in light of experiential changes.

Ultimately the work of art is a piece of equipment for the production of a social effect. More than the manufacture of an object or product, the artist’s production is a linguistic structure created to cause a conceptual shift in the way we experience the world. However this conceptual shift is only possible if the linguistic structure of art is capable of instituting itself into the viewer’s structure of knowledge. The artist’s language can take a wide range of forms, however whatever form art takes it must be capable of impacting upon the viewer’s basic structure of knowledge, which is of course embedded in linguistic structure.

This conception of the artist’s language has little to do with the self-conscious production of ‘signature style’ common to pre-modernist practice or the ‘genre aesthetics’ of modernism or those ‘post-medium’ practices where artistic methodologies have been devalued or dismissed. Rather, at a time when many artists have become confused about what constitutes art practice, ambivalent about the commitment to any medium, and tempted toward the more reliable methodologies of social science, this location of language as central to contemporary art practice re-evaluates the significance of developing a productive structure capable of sustaining the development of knowledge over the course of the artist’s life’s work.

This ‘linguistic shift’ has significance for both sides of the ‘art — not art’ divide. When understood within the artistic methodologies delineated in the discussions concerning the Greco-German scholars, art practice comes to light as a profound methodology for the production of new knowledge and social space. In its
capacity to open a way forward in light of the essential nature of the sheltering earth, art offers a methodology capable of sustaining its discipline in face of those more pragmatic practices whose objectives are to open up new social spaces and reveal the gap in the knowledge. When understood within the methodologies of social sciences, ethical art faces social responsibilities which are answerable to the same objectives; to open up new social spaces and reveal the gap in the knowledge. Although there remain profound differences between artistic and non-artistic methodologies, both must manifest as modes of language if they are to affect change.

The virtue of this subtle shift, from the post-medium confusion to a clear acknowledgement of the significance of language, is that it clears up the confusion currently facing the artist and the education of art alike. By re-instating the significance of a productive language system as central to art practice, that is the two-fold development of The Issue of the Artist’s Subject and The Issue of The Artist’s Language, the two-fold process of poiēsis and mimēsis, the artist is enabled to build knowledge structures capable of affecting regime change within the world, without forfeiting their primary discipline. This is the significance of this chapter.

In the end the artist's production is quantified in terms of one single question; what was their contribution to knowledge, the answer is qualified in terms of their production of language. Despite post-medium claims of conceptualism, knowledge is simply not possible without the production of linguistic structures capable of sustaining knowledge and engendering a paradigm shift in the viewer’s conceptual framework. Regardless of which medium, media or technology the artist choses, the production of this hermeneutic event is seminal to both contemporary art’s expectations of art practice and Graeco-German conceptions of art’s role.

Language, in the broadest sense, is the central axis for the two-way flow between the subjective experience of the artist and the objective knowledge of the world-at-large. Language is the axis on which the artist’s practice turns. In this regard the artist’s language is understood as seminal to both the function that contemporary art is now called upon to fulfil and also primary to the artist's way in the world.
Conclusions

‘No amount of campaigning and conniving can make you popular. The will power that might make you rich can’t make you charismatic. Social success and influence is bestowed by others.’

Rene Richard – World Crown: Bodhisattva with clenched fist.443

5.0 The conditions of contemporaneity

Contemporary art is a publicly instrumentalised culture; an ethically determined production held in place by public funding mechanisms which endorse strategic curatorial initiatives, facilitating key artists for corporate and/or private funding support, while discreetly filtering those practices which are irrelevant to the publicly determined agendas. Despite the plethora of artists at work today, Enwezor reminds us, there is virtually no life for artists working outside these politically determined networks.444 Although Enwezor was speaking on behalf of artists marginalised by colonialist preferences of modernist and post-modernist hegemonies, these conditions now apply to all practicing artists. Art in the key public arenas has an obligation to speak to its audience regarding key socio-political concerns. In this arena we note the various modes of digital projection with, or without, value-added installation effects, have become the predominant art media of our times. This is the production that Yve Alain Bois calls ‘the Esperanto of globalism’.445

That having been said, public funding for contemporary art is evaluated beyond discipline-specific concerns. Contemporary art is evaluated in terms of its ability to ‘transform the way we think and feel about the world we live in’.446 Contemporary curators face increasing ethical responsibilities and take an active role in nominating

444 Okwui Enwezor, Documenta 11, (Ostfilfern-Ruit: Hatje-Cantz, 2002). 42.
avatars of art and generating events which draw attention to key local and global issues facing their communities. In this light we understand the shift, from art practice a market-driven production, to art practice as a politically-determined audience-driven event. While the collector’s market for the aesthetic object remains active, art is no different to fashion or furniture; market share does not constitute social significance. Art’s Investment networks follow curatorial initiatives and museum determined interests.

The value of both the artist and their art is established in terms of their provenance within the public circuits and private networks which represent them. Although currency on these circuits is no guarantee of commercial viability, an artist’s credentials are usually established within these influential public circuits before an artist is taken up by the commercial networks. This represents an about-turn on the idea of art and artists, represented in the public networks, as signifiers of market trends identified within the commercial circuits. This development could be characterised as a shift from market-driven practices to audience-driven practices. While neo-liberal commodity practices are determined by market, audience-driven programs are developed in conjunction with curatorial initiatives to suit politically determined programs and public funding objectives. Public funding initiatives determine both contemporary art support networks and investment schemes.

Here we acknowledge a major shift in the focus of contemporary art production. The conventions of aesthetic connoisseurship have been displaced by ethical criteria such as the capacity of the performative event of public exhibition to give voice to new or neglected cultures and communities, and/or engender social awareness concerning local, national and global issues. More broadly, contemporary art practice now faces the same criteria which determines most public funding; that is art’s capacity to generate new social spaces and/or its capacity to contribute to knowledge. With the expansion of art’s boundaries and the development of interdisciplinary funding initiatives the concept of ‘art’ is no longer privileged within public circuits. Art is evaluated in terms of what art can do for the artworld not what the artworld can do for art. Within the highly politicised global circuits of contemporary art, modernism’s traditions are widely perceived to be outmoded if not redundant.

In this context we understand why contemporary theorists and curators, suggest there is little point in looking to art history for answers. While twentieth century art was appropriating popular culture to engage broader audiences, popular culture was appropriating art-culture to engage its increasingly art-savvy markets. Art history is virtually irrelevant to the role contemporary art is called upon to
perform. In the context of public funding circuits which determine public art production the differences between ‘art — not art’ are irrelevant and a wide range of creative cultural activities now qualify for public profile and funding. It is in this context that theorists, such as Buchloh, recognise that cultural practices which are not linked to some form of political articulation could find themselves unsurportable.  

As we have seen, a wide range of disciplines are capable of contributing to the cultural discourse of contemporary art; various modes of urban planning, architecture, interior and industrial design, fashion, film, manga, game-culture, documentary video, political and promotional photography, pop, popular and commercial culture in general, text, dance, theatre, social and political events all qualify for contemporary cultural representation. The public criterion facing the practice of art is a matter of the project’s ability to generate relevant cultural content, public debate and excite the museum’s target audience. Given the glut of artistic and cultural production the public criteria for evaluating contemporary art production is the same as any other discipline; the capacity of the work to provoke social awareness, its ability to generate new social spaces and the work’s ability to illuminate the gap in the knowledge and contribute to public language.

Art schools have begun to develop broader cultural and visual literacy programs to address socio-cultural problems based in the generic research methodologies common to social science. By preference they utilise the display technologies common to all promotional cultures. Contemporary art is becoming a collaborative social project for the production of public awareness of post-colonial global concerns. As noted in chapter one, there is a rising number of public artists who argue that the collaborative models currently being developed within academic, military, industrial circuits have more to offer creative practice than the anti-social tactics of the old avant-garde.

Despite the exponential growth of the arts industry, new politically determined and audience-led curatorial initiatives have marginalised most historically determined artistic practices as redundant, regressive or fundamentally conservative. This is not to suggest that art can not, does not or will not happen within these circuits. Nor is it to suggest that this is the end of art, those practices promoted through this

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system will come to redefine our concept of art. Rather this is to acknowledge the complexity of the problem outlined in the introduction to this thesis: What are you to say to your friend’s son or daughter in answer to the question; ‘What do I study in order to become an artist?’

While there is no simple answer to this question we must acknowledge that even within art’s own circuits, most historical conceptions of art have become problematic. In this context we begin to understand why curators recommend the study of politics, science or popular culture. Twentieth-century modernism with its revolutionary fervour, reactive end-games and radical history of reinvention has led to the expansion of art’s boundaries and the exponential growth of art’s industries. However, these developments have precipitated the destabilization of the concept of art. As if the star of art has begun to implode, the question facing the artist of the future becomes, what value is the study of art now?

5.1 What art is

In this context we have turned back, like De Duve, Danto, Dickie and Hegel before us to ask; what was art? The objective has been to reconsider the question of art’s defining discipline, art’s pivotal axis in the context of its broadest boundaries. While contemporary art practice continues to defy twentieth century conceptions of art practice, what has emerged from this research is a concept of art which has maintained a surprisingly consistent identity through the Graeco–German lineage of aesthetic philosophy.

In this deconstruction of the philosophical origins of the concept of art, we have traced the etymology back through Heidegger, to Nietzsche, Hegel and the pre-Socratic myths of the ancient Greeks. What emerges from this study is a radical conception of art’s role, one capable of stabilising the discourse currently determining art practice. Although this conception of art binds the artist to participation in public discourse through the production of a language of form, it provides a methodology capable of challenging the hegemonic nature of culture. Despite the fact that this conception of art is European in origin, it is not bound by the specifics of any specific culture, language, medium or technology.

The seminal concept of art is a performative action set to adjust public understanding in light of a poïêtic conception of truth. This performative action affects social space through its projection of a new world and in doing so casts
light upon the way things are, the specific nature of the sheltering earth. The work of art speaks from the gap in the field of social surveillance and ushers a way forward for Being; in light of past orders. The work of art engenders ‘a world’, produces a ‘world-picture’, a sprachkristall, capable of silencing the preoccupation with pre-given futures. This act of art is essentially a performative action. Its function is to liberate a space wherein the truth of its poiētic knowledge can come to light. Art is determined by the conceptual act of poeticizing; the differentiation of that which is useful in the present from that which belongs to the past, to engender a way forward in light of an existential truth. The subjective act of art is thrown to the public act of language; its objective is to affect a shift in classification, to institute the poiētic knowledge gleaned in the act of poeticizing. Significantly, this conception of art, which pivots on the poiēsis/mimēsis axis, maintains its stability through our readings of more contemporary philosophers such as Gadamer, Agamben and Rancière.

This model also retains its currency across a wide range of contemporary art practices. It offers a seminally artistic model capable of serving both political and popular practices without being surrendering its discipline to the ubiquitous research methodologies of the social sciences. It offers a dynamic model of artistic performance whose objective becomes the transformation of the basic platform of cultural knowledge in light of instinctive needs for becoming. In this model of art’s power is leveraged in direct relation to the socio-cultural compulsion with the production of predicable futures. Art is concerned with the production of poiētic knowledge; which is the originating institution of all philosophic knowledge.

Art generates an ontological experience capable of restructuring those social moirés which oblige the displacement of existential experience in the production of future. It intervenes in the social compulsion with the future production, offering a way into the present. Art’s function is the liberation of new ways of being through the reconfiguration of the knowledge patterns of the dominant cultural milieu. This model is radical, challenging and liberating. However, despite the volatility of its conceptual dynamic, it offers a stable model for the study of art at a time when most historical conceptions of art have been deemed redundant. Ultimately, the objective of art is to institute new knowledge and in doing so the work of art can be understood as a bridge between subjective and objective knowledge. In this regard a comprehensive understanding of social language is implicit in any artistic practice; the development of artistic practice can be understood as concurrent with the development of the artist’s language structures.
Art practice is primarily concerned with the assertion of an ontological experience wherein the truth of the artist’s being comes into radiance through an instinctive methodology within the present. Art proceeds from the praxical process of poeticizing. Art comes into being through the production of a language of form capable of affecting social space. Both the work of art and the artist are defined in relation to this symbiotic act of poïèsis and mimêsis; the production of a public language of form to affect social and knowledge structures. Here we understand the pivotal axis where art’s philosophic model maintains the same criteria as the socio-political agendas determining contemporary institutional art production. That is art’s capacity to illuminate the gap in the knowledge, its capacity to open up new social spaces, and its potential to institute its self into the structure of language.

Art’s specific leverage is to be understood within its existential foundation in the truth of being. Art is not the arbitrary production novelty, nor can it be trivialised as a merely decorative practice. Although art may engage a wide spectrum of modalities, art is no longer defined by its specific materiality, technology, language or culture. According the the ancients art is not produced for the service of political, social, cultural much less pedagogical agendas. Rather art inspires its institution into these circuits on the basis of the resonance of its poïèsis; its philosophic truth. Art generates a new world in accord with subjective needs but ultimately the artistic project speaks the most disinterested audience; its objective is to institute new knowledge. Art builds its world from ‘all the artist knows’ and in doing so casts light upon the nature of ‘the earth’ and affects a paradigm shift in our relationship to the world.

This way art illuminates the gap in the knowledge. However it would be a mistake to imagine that art is primarily concerned with illuminating the gap in the knowledge. Art is driven by the artist’s own needs to open up a way forward into the ‘Being of beings’ within the present. Although this effect must be produced through the affect of a language of form, art is always the production of a language of form in direct relation to conceptual act of poeticizing. Art shifts subjective knowledge into an objective language of form capable of affecting those who step into its lighting. Art’s objective is to open a space for the truth of the artist’s own being to affect the ‘Being’ of beings, such that its mime might prosper.
This is where we recognise the truth in Belting’s assertion that the linguistic parameters of the concept of art are not easily reassigned and Danto argues from a philosophic perspective the concept of art as a linear progression is a false idea, 'not one step has been taken since Aristotle'.

5.2 The significance of language

Despite art’s often mute approach to the unsayable, art functions within the framework of social knowledge structures, which are constituted within language. The artist asserts their own conception of truth through a reactive production of language in direct response to the given knowledge structures. In this regard we understand that the act of art maintains a primary relationship with social knowledge; although this concept has been neglected by the discourses of both late-twentieth century formalism and the post-medium discourses of post-modernism.

Art in the philosophical sense is not reducible to the manufacture of genre aesthetics, it is not the arbitrary production of novelty and not the public promotion of political propaganda or pedagogy; although art can appear in any of these forms. The objective of art is to liberate an open space within the structure of the known to enable the truth of the artist’s understanding to come into its own shining. It is this enigmatic act which lights the way forward for the becoming of other beings and this act which when acknowledged institutes its own understanding into the framework of language. This is how the work of art makes its contribution to knowledge. In this regard we understand art is an alternative methodology for the production of knowledge, although quite a different one to the epistemologies of science.

Art’s objective is to step into the insubordination of its own shining. Art does this by intuitively differentiating knowledge in a bid to break the social lock which binds ‘Being’ to the production of the future and blocks access to poïëtic truth. In this respect the artist’s performance of truth is, by definition, an act of language. The act of art sets an ontological truth into a language of form, to affect change. The
fundamentally linguistic act of art carries a mîme capable of redefining the artist’s relationship with the world.

The social space which the artist generates does not belong to cultural production, in the sense that it is the reproduction of the known. Rather art is concerned with the production of the unknown, the ‘untruth’ discussed in chapter one. For it is only this ‘untruth’, the truth which has never been seen before, that art is capable of liberating us from the ‘all too familiar’, from the hegemonic structures of social knowledge.

The artist’s objective becomes to affect a shift in their own relationship with the world, but not in a way which can be easily quantified. They do this through the production of a new world, the sprachkristall, their ‘world-picture’. The artist is never in a position to guarantee the relevance of their production nor can they ever ingratiate themselves with their audience/market. The act of art entails an instinctive challenge to the structural foundations of social convention, which would be undermined by premature reconciliation with the known. Although art may well engender a new political consciousness and/or produce an object capable of establishing a currency for itself, art does this by breaking open a new space within the linguistic structure of the known. It is this act of primary strife which enables the artist to institute a new mîme into the structure of social knowledge. Inevitably art practice is classified within an institutional catalogue and must accept its place in the context of the ‘all too familiar’. The work of art is conceived to produce affect; however this affect is contingent upon the artist’s fluency with their own language of form. In this way we understand the artist’s use of cultural language is pivotal to the production of contemporary art.

Despite the destabilization of twentieth century conceptions of art practice in preference of more politically pertinent models, a stable conception of art’s objectives and methodology can be gleaned from philosophy. The Graeco-German model, deconstructed in this dissertation, is capable of serving both political and popular expectations of contemporary art practice. This is the significance of this thesis.


Melbourne — Moderne

Appendix - See 'Exhibition: MELBOURNE - MODERNE' document

‘One must always apologise before talking about painting’

Paul Valéry

Exhibition:

MELBOURNE-MODERNE

Maroondah Art Gallery, February - March, 2007

Gary C. Willis

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of the 'Doctor of Philosophy'
(by Dissertation and Exhibition)

Dissertation:

Contemporary Art: The Key Issues

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University of Melbourne
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Abstract

This submission comes in two parts; the written dissertation, *The Key Issues Concerning Contemporary Art*, and the exhibition *Melbourne—Moderne*. When taken together they present a discourse on the conditions facing contemporary art practice and one artist’s response to these conditions in the context of Melbourne 2003-2007.

The Exhibition; Melbourne — Moderne

*Melbourne — Moderne*, consists of a series of large oil paintings set to demonstrate painting’s capacity to reflect upon a gap in knowledge, raise issue and engage a broad audience at a time when the practice of painting is widely discounted as inappropriate to the political objectives of contemporary art.

These paintings establish a local vocabulary of architectural and artistic reference to align neo-liberal ambition and rising class divisions, with the preconditions of terrorism. *Melbourne — Moderne* is layered with reference to both art and popular culture and concern the ‘cinematic blossoming’ of all the aspirational classes might desire of sociability. Specifically referencing Marcel Duchamp’s master work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), these paintings raise the spectre of the ‘the bride’ as a metaphor for the goal of artistic ambition, the temple of art and culture, the National Gallery of Victoria. The references contained in ‘The Bachelor’ painting set the frame for discourse in terms of *Laocoön*, in this case an older Laocoön, which signals a discourse with Clement Greenberg’s essay on the limits of poetry in painting *Toward a Newer Laocoön*, and equally a discourse with the original *Laocoön*, the Greek marble sculpture by Hegesandros, Athanedoros, and Polydoros; circa 150-175 B.C.

*Laocoön* is the sculpture of the sons of Laocoön who were devoured by Sea Serpents sent by Poisidon to avert their warning regarding the Trojan horse. Robert Graves suggests the snakes were sent to cleanse the boy’s ears to grace them with
the power of prophetic vision.¹ In this contemporary world where the Macheavellian art of corporate war is backed by the law and their agents, the war of the gods becomes a battle of ideologies, a battle of wills and wits, in a world of Spy Vs Spy during a time global of terror.

In Duchampian terms, *The Bachelor*’s impotent game becomes to take shots at ‘The Bride’. In this regard *Toward an Older Laocoon* sets up the conditions of the ‘first person shooter’, common to military, game and popular cultures alike, to confront the viewer with the warning echoed in the film *The Matrix* (1999 - 2003); who is responsible for these terms of total war? Ambition engenders the conditions of alienation which economic systems exploit, binding individual production to the generation of an endless future. Herein is the difference between art and culture. Culture is bound to the production of social futures, while art defaults to engender an existential truth.

*Melbourne — Moderne* cites an artistic instinct within the architectural of landscape of civic ambition to engender the paradox faced by the character of ‘Neo’ from *The Matrix*. Culture becomes a self-generating spectacle which alienates artist instinct and masks the existential conditions of ‘Being’. Ambition engenders division which leads to death and destruction.

This essentially post-colonial project constructs a uniquely Melbourne genre, steeped in reference to Melbourne's artistic and architectural legacy, to localise questions of cultural identity and marginality, in the context of the globalism and the war on terror. In this regard *Melbourne — Moderne* offers its contribution to knowledge.

**The Dissertation; Contemporary Art: The Key Issues.**

This research has been impelled by a personal need to unravel the confusing conditions of contemporary art. Contemporary art can come in a myriad of different forms, however most historical and twentieth century theories of art now prove irrelevant to contemporary art production. Many contemporary artists, curators and theorists argue the ‘concept of art’ is superfluous to the political role which falls to contemporary art. The question this raises for the prospective student of contemporary art practice becomes; what relevance is the study of art now?

This research examines the problem from the broadest perspectives looking at concepts of canon, contemporary theoretical and curatorial directives as well as the political and economic conditions determining contemporary art production. Concurrently, it turns to philosophy to trace the etymology of art in a bid to locate the linguistic parameters of the concept. Eventually it draws a significant parallel between the most contemporary notions of art’s political responsibility and the most ancient conception of art’s function.

It argues that art’s role is to open up new cultural spaces and enable new ways of ‘Being’, although art’s primarily subjective motives are bound by the objective conditions of social knowledge and language. We could say that art practice illuminates gaps in knowledge and institutes its understandings through a performative act of language. Significantly, these criteria bear remarkable likeness to the ‘contribution to knowledge’ conventions common to all public funding criterion. However these criteria are secondary to art’s instinctive objectives. Where art differs from other disciplines is in its existential conception of time, its instinctive methodology and its subjective motive. The performative act of art serves to open an existential way forward for the artist, in light of a subjective conception of truth which is capable of establishing a resonance within the broader social context.

The problem facing art practice is that within the discursive field that constitutes contemporary art, ‘the concept of art’ is becoming irrelevant. Aesthetic practices are being displaced by ethical public production and contemporary art practice is no longer determined by art’s historical conventions and disciplines. The history of art in general and the history of twentieth century modernism in particular, now prove unreliable platforms for the study of art practice. Since the sixties art’s boundaries have been extended to embrace the broadest spectrum of cultural activities and knowledge production disciplines; new technologies abound.

However, this exponential growth in the reach of art’s umbrella has brought with it new limits. Faced with the glut of cultural practices which now vie for representation, contemporary arts institutions rationalise funding in terms of their own political objectives and ethical responsibilities. It is within this politically determined field that art’s historical conventions now find themselves marginalised. Art’s traditional materials have been replaced by mass-media technologies, haptic modes of production have been displaced by more rigorous research methodologies and individual subjectivities are secondary to collaborative cultural production.

For those philosophers who read the ancient Greeks, there is a clear demarcation between the production of culture and the production of art. Culture is
determined as the community production of a better future, while art is an individual intervention in the hegemonic thrust of culture, to bring existential truth to light. Art's function is to keep culture open to existential knowledge and generational change. At a time when historical conceptions of art begin to fail, this pivotal difference between art and culture could prove useful.
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Melbourne — Moderne

Appendix 1 - Project Overview

'It will be a great day when the air force has to hold a cake stall to buy a bomber'

Women's International League for Peace - T-Shirt
Project overview

This exhibition presents a series of paintings entitled Melbourne — Moderne, exhibited at the Maroondah Art Gallery from Thursday 22nd February — Saturday 10th March 2007.

1. - The Gate, 2003; oil on linen, 370 cms X 180 cms
2. - Toward an Older Laocoön - The Bachelor, 2006; oil on linen, 218 cms X 218 cms
3. - The Bachelor’s Domain, 2004; oil on linen, 341 cms X 200 cms
4/b. - The Bride’s Domain (diptych) 2005; oil on linen, 166 cms X 400 cms
4/a. - The Bride Stripped Bare, 2005; oil on linen, 200 cms X 166 cms

The issue at stake in the studio component of this thesis concerns painting’s capacity to generate visual language and contribute to knowledge-based discourses currently determining contemporary art. This suite has been developed to demonstrate painting’s ability to engage audience and engender discussion at a time when painting is widely considered irrelevant to discursive field of contemporary art. However, Melbourne — Moderne makes no attempt at transgressive form, no attempt to re-configure the materiality of the medium. Rather, it returns the practice of painting to its original strengths; the power of image as visual language, prophetic vision and socio-political relevance. Given its commitment to complex semiotic structures within the visual language of painterly form Melbourne — Moderne could be accused of representing a deeply conservative paradigm for painting. The key issue at stake in these paintings is not painting’s ability to compete with installation and new media practices, or simply orchestrate an abstract pattern to emblify a social predicament, but painting’s capacity for prophetic vision and socio-political relevance. In order to do this painting is a perfect medium to annex the world-at-large and offer a cultural critique; in order to do this painting must re-activate its capacity for visual articulation. This is not painting as a simple referent to that which it is not. Rather it is painting as a poiètic act of conceptual performance.

The methodology employed in this production can be understood in terms of the discourse contained in this dissertation, evoked by the readings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Rancière and Agamben. The work of art establishes its
currency by virtue of its capacity to reflect ‘a glimmer of the true’. It proceeds from outside the dominant discourse in a state of ‘self-annihilating nothing’ transforming all the artist knows to differentiate a truth whose name is not yet known.² It is impossible to articulate the specific conceptual process or final meaning of these ‘world-pictures’. Processes of poeticizing and intuitive differentiation remain embedded in their final form; the exhibition Melbourne — Moderne.

This is not to imagine the artist as simply or purely a romantic poet. Much like some of the more political modes of contemporary art, discussed in The artist’s political context in chapter two of this dissertation, these paintings are best understood in terms of ‘relational aesthetics’; where art becomes a tactical game whose form and function are developed in direct relation to specific social contexts and political events.³ Melbourne — Moderne is not a simple mimêtic act, it engenders a complex poiêtic structure which challenges modernity’s self-generating spectacle which alienates instinct and masks the existential conditions of ‘Being’. In this suite modernity presents as illusion in which humanity is displaced by the imperative of industry, in whose name ambition leads to alienation and, in-turn, ethical meltdown. In this cycle the enemy is no longer ‘out there’ but quickly becomes ‘the enemy within’. Here is the issue concerning aesthetics and ethics. The question concerns whether art determines its own representation or is appropriated into the service of civic determination. As Derrida reminds us ‘the world’ must not be confused with the simplistic representation of ‘the earth’, warning ‘the earth obscures the world’.

In understanding the complexity of this project we could take our cues from the original ‘Laocoön’ attributed to Hegesandros, Athanedoros, Polydoros.⁴ This painting signifies a reversal of Greenberg’s formalist agenda, returning articulation to the language of painting.

The broader context surrounding the production of these paintings concerns with the ubiquitous forces of globalism, the forces of Empire which manifest as an architectural archive which classifies our everyday existence. Within the architectural realm of property, notions of right and wrong have been carefully delimited by law. Any action in contradiction to these heavily determined parameters is

³ Nicholas Bourriaud, Relational-Aesthetics, (Dijon, France: Les Presses Du Reel, 2002).
disenfranchised, dismissed as irrelevant or punished as crime. Outside the security gates and surveillance systems of Empire, lay the disenfranchised who’s right of reply is strictly limited.

_Melbourne — Moderne_ can be seen as a protest against the excesses of globalisation with its counterpoint in militarism, in this regard it signifies this historical period. _Melbourne — Moderne_ is intimately concerned with the right of reply, although ultimately the content contained by this body of work is only accessible through the experience of the paintings themselves. Words do not adequately represent them, they speak best for themselves in a language of poiētic and political knowledge. The issue at stake for painting in _Melbourne — Moderne_ is both a theoretical concern with the technological development of the language of painting as well as the artist’s access to a language of retort.

This retort is not simply contained in a discourse with art’s historical concern with the mytho-poiētic, _Melbourne — Moderne_ opens up a synthetic world of virtual reality and game culture; Gameboy, Playstation, Nokia and I-POD. The dilemma presented by _Melbourne — Moderne_ is not unlike the aleatory predicament faced by Raskolinkov, in Dostoyevsky’s of _Crime and Punishment_; the moral dilemma of the self-determining act of the ‘first person shooter’, whose marginality aligns them with no particular faith, no particular community. These paintings take their viewer into the psychology of transgression to confront them with the implications of a cultural act of insurrection; that signifies ‘cultural critique’. However, painting in this mode remains an act of fiction, where its mix of poiēsis and mimēsis grounds the viewer in the contemplative act of deciphering code, the hermeneutic process of unravelling painterly languange, within the secure context of the art gallery.

Agamben reminds us that Nietzsche’s oft quoted line, ‘we posses art least we perish of the truth’, does not refer to the common conventions of cultural production. As Agamben reminds us, the generic signifiers of taste without inspiration embody ‘the very principle of perversion’. The art Nietzsche had in mind was not an art produced for either market or audience but the art produced for the artist themselves. This is the ‘Subject of Art’ that Alain Badiou refers to where ‘the artist

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wages a war against the terror of the world’. 7 For Agamben the artistic experience always contains a risk that threatens to destroy the artist, he quotes Baudelaire, Van Gogh and finally Rilke on this point, ‘works of art are always the product of a risk one has run, of experience taken to its extreme limit, to the point where man can no longer go on’. 8 For Agamben the flight from ‘the terror of the world’ is a flight from the rhetoric of the world. However it is this encounter with ‘the terror of the world’ that ultimately returns the artist to the challenge of rhetoric; the challenge of language. Conversely, the recognition of the ‘terror of the world’ grounds the viewer in their original Being, and resolves the dichotomy between sides.

The Melbourne — Moderne paintings double the question of the ‘terror of the world’ in that they were produced during a time of real war in the context of the terrorist attacks on New York, Madrid, London, Bali and the protracted global ‘war on terror’. In this regard this suite offers an alternative report on the effects of war in times of global terror. However, these paintings make no attempt to account for the events of war or the industry of war. Rather they represent a psychology of alienation in times of global terror. In this respect they function as a protest but unlike conventional protests, which tend to focus on peace, this project serves to amplify the conditions of fear in a bid to provoke a rethink and reverse the cycle wherein the humanitarian project is marginalised by military claims on national economies.

Most importantly, Melbourne — Moderne offers the viewer a frisson with the political act of being-for-itself challenging viewer to take a stand for themselves. Within the safe-house of the gallery, this act of public protest manifest as a public mode of visual poetry which serves to reconfigure the times in light of their capacity to speak back; to present an alternative ‘world-picture’. The objective of this project has been to offer a challenge which pivots on an act of primary strife, the insubordination of appropriation, to speak of things in image and mark. As one guest to the launch of Melbourne — Moderne was heard to remark;

‘I am used to going to openings where people take a quick glimpse of the work and return to the gallery convention of ‘drinks’. At this opening everyone is intensely engaged in discussing the work itself’.

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Although art, architecture, cinema, game culture and fashion references abound in this project, its objective is not to compete with popular culture but to utilise painting’s historical strengths to annex and critique the broader world drawing its viewer into discourse with more complex socio-political concerns. Its references are layered from very obvious to very obscure. Most obvious could be its representation of contemporary Melbourne architecture. More complex is the reference to Neo’s predicament from *The Matrix* (2003), where the terror of the world is a direct product of public desire. For those interested it re-opens a discourse with Greenberg and the ancient Greeks. More obscure is the relevance of Marcel Duchamp’s *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923) whose impotent game is stirred by the bride - but not vice versa.

The drop down menu pictured in the first painting in this suite, locates the terms of its discourse; *Painting; Melbourne, analogue, Post-Neo-Popism*, as if it might have just as easily been *Istanbul, Digital, Neo-Colonial-Post-Globalism*. *Post-Neo-Popism* is a double allusion to both Juan Davila’s (1983) painting *Neo-Popism* and Paul Taylor’s curatorial project of *Popism* exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria (1982). In its re-appropriation of the genre Paul Taylor calls ‘second-degree’ (after Roland Barthes), this project acknowledges the problems of provincialism nominated by Terry Smith and Imants Tillers, switching the internationalist aspirations of eighties Australian painting to locate issues specific to local cultural experience. In this way these paintings denote a boundary between post-modernism and post-colonialism. 9

Any reference to the catalogue of artists exhibited in the *Popism* exhibition, Davila, Tillers, Jenny Watson, John Nixon, Maria Kosic, TSK TSK TSK, Richard Dunn, Peter Tyndall, Robert Rooney etc., is extended to a broad cross-section of Melbourne specific paintings and painters. A short-list could begin with Arthur Boyd’s *Melbourne Burning* (1946-47) and John Brack’s *5 O’clock Collins Street* (1955) and extend to the work of contemporary Melbourne painters whose work features architectural subject such as Jon Cattapan, Lyndell Brown and Charles Green Stephen Halley, Tony Lloyd, Clair Firth-Smith, Tom Alberts, David Ralph and Darren Wardell. In this regard *Melbourne — Moderne* cites its specificity within a uniquely Melbourne discourse; Appropriation. However unlike the highly conceptualised

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appropriation of ‘the second degree’ which is more concerned with the referent rather than the real, *Melbourne — Moderne* deconstructs an active political identity as subject.

My own use of appropriation dates back to the early-seventies when my work centred on a conceptual critique of the conventions of style and the economic of artist’s signature. This history is referenced in my book; *Diary of a Dead Beat Modern Art Type*, Gary Willis 1972-1982. We can see its origins in conceptual works which represent John Cage’s influence, such as *Seeing-Art* (1977), which double-croseed flat reproductions of images from the history of art, returning the viewer to the self-reflective experience of seeing through art. Objective conceptual production eventually gave way to subjective painterly process wherein complex hierarchies of genre, were orchestrated to foreground post-modern questions of cultural origins and *raison d’être*. Projects such as *Thinking of Doing a Little Painting* (1977) *The Tattooed Art Tram* (1978) and *The Flying Trapeze Café* (1979-1980) are worthy of note. From 1979 I returned to specific account of personal preoccupations in works such as, *Is this what you call Love?* and …. and the *Leopard looked like Me!* Eventually the mask of appropriation demanded more complex social identification.

This mask of appropriation where identity is submerged in public identity, it dates back to 1977 and locates my work within the post-Modern discourses common to my gneration and has been a ruse in my work for many years now. It becomes most obvious in the *Quixotic* (1992-1995) project begun in Spain, which echoes Jorge Luis Borges' short story *Pierre Menard; Author of Don Quixote*. My own *Don Quixote* appropriated 19th century modes of painting, drawing and etching common to Francesco Goya, Gustav Doré and Honore Daumier to extend the representation of the Quixotic, 'as if by an undiscovered contemporary'. More recently *The Myth of VOSS* (1998—2002) appropriated the genre of Antipodean painting to develop a painting project based on Patrick White's novel *VOSS*, engaging audience in questions concerning the ongoing colonialization of Aboriginal territories.

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11  Gary Willis, *Like a Masked Traveller Drifting through Time*, ed. Kate Challis (Saarbreucken: 1997.Dagmar Eichberger.)

Melbourne — Moderne continues this tradition, submerging subjectivity into public language in a bid to draw the viewer into more complex questions concerning conceptual content. The four basic paintings of Melbourne — Moderne do not maintain a stable aesthetic much less the production of a static iconic motif, common to some painterly conventions. Although they are bound by a specific relationship with the technology of their production determined between the gestural marking of abstraction and the glazed layering of representational painting, they are not bound by either abstraction or representation. Rather they exercise an extensive visual vocabulary to generate a narrative structure more common to time-based media and text alike. This is not to suggest that these paintings are exempt from the responsibilities of political responsibility, aesthetic presence or conceptual legibility particular to the static role that painting claims for itself. They are not exempted from ethical discourse. Quite the contrary, each painting has been resolved as a stand-alone event, capable of drawing its viewer into a dialogue with the ethical dilemmas facing contemporary culture by confronting the viewer with a wrong; what Jacques Rancière would call le tort. Their objective is to challenge the boundary which has delimited the practice of art by appropriating it into the social project of the Apollonian. They stand to echoe the warning implicit in Laocoön with the Dionysian retort to King Midas when he turned to the gods of art for answers to Apollo’s curse of gold; ‘Oh, you humans you ask for too much. It is better that you ask for nothing.’

These four paintings focus on four key Melbourne architectural sites. They are; 1/. Gate - the Denton Corker and Marshall, Melbourne Gateway (2000); 2/. The Bachelor’s Domain - the chemistry laboratories at Melbourne University; 3/. The Bride’s Domain - Lab Architecture and Bates-Smart collaboration of Federation Square which houses The National Gallery of Victoria and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (2002); 4/. Toward an Older Laocoon - The Bachelor - The Minifie Nixon, Centre for Contemporary Ideas at the Victorian College of the Arts (2004). This series of locations has been selected to take the viewer on an ambiguous journey from outside the city gates into an encounter with the heart of its neoliberal culture — globalism.

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Gary Willis, installation view, 'Melbourne - Moderne', Maroondah Art Gallery, 2007

Melbourne — Moderne

Appendix 2 - The Paintings

‘One must always apologise for talking about painting’

Paul Valéry15
1. *The Gate*, 2003, oil on linen, 370 cms × 180 cms

*The Gate*, details.
Toward an Older Laocoön - The Batrchelor, 2006, oil on linen, 218 cms X 218 cms

*Toward an Older Laocoön*, detail.
3. - *The Bachelor’s Domain*, 2004, oil on linen, 341 cms × 200 cms

*The Bachelor’s Domain*, detail.

Gulag studio environment - The Gate, detail.
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