

Towards a Layered Imaginary

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There are already a number of texts investigating the complex, cultural politics bound up in the work of John Young. In unravelling its rich iconography and interwoven poetic and critical themes, writers mostly locate Young's work in an abstract field of ideas. Investigating the inner conceptual development of his work is certainly vital to its understanding, yet there is no sense of the theoretical position overtaking the activity of art-making for Young. As much as his work incorporates strong philosophical dimensions, the process of production and the affect of the material object are of central importance. Emphasising the textuality of Young's work severs its deep connection to his experience of living across cultures. Even in its early stages, Young's work engaged contemporary art ideas through the lens of Asian cultural practices and wisdom traditions. His mature paintings reveal a mix of elements from disparate visual orders and cultural contexts, his enduring interest in the dialectics of seeing, knowing, and representing borne of first hand experience of the friction between cultures.

How is it, that works can become disengaged from the immediacy of the life and vocation of the artist? The reasons trace back to the changing nature of art writing in recent decades. For much of Young's career, different theoretical arguments undermined art's traditional metaphysics. Mythologies of cultural truth and authorship were seen to fix the meaning of artworks in the time and source of production, neglecting the fact that audiences as much as producers create meaning. Post-structuralism transformed artworks into texts to be decoded through semiotic analysis, deconstruction or ideology critique, the subjectivity of artist and viewer seen as already constituted in language and ideology. Art writing revealed its mutability by absorbing a diversity of ideas and approaches from fields as diverse as cultural studies, feminism, linguistics, psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory, often to the detriment of its customary objects of examination, artworks and artists being sidelined for the explication of theory.

The idea of art as a coded system of representation has, of course, generated important new conceptual frameworks for understanding art. The fabric of Young's work is shot with diverse intellectual threads including linguistic philosophy, epistemology, hermeneutics and Jungian theories of individuation.¹ However, interpretation directed exclusively at the level of textual meaning disregards the complexity of cultural phenomena and their relationship to the outside world. Many observers see recent history as marked by the intersection of all levels of social reality, so that cultural forces are simultaneously manifest at the macro level of the global and national and the micro level of the local and individual.² It follows that understanding the nature of artist's relationship with the art system and lived experience is as fundamental to conceptualising cultural politics in art as recognising the structural nature of representational mediums following the model of language. While Young's practice has developed according to an inner logic, artworld conditions have provided direct impetus and an immediate sphere of action for him. Through his involvement in self-publishing, curatorial projects and art writing, Young has negotiated the diverse ways in which the status of the artist plays out in contemporary art.

During Young's career, the Australian art market and the public cultural sphere have become larger and more complex, highlighting the role of institutions and economic relations in organising most aspects of life. Although there is an undeniable specificity to cultural politics, aspects of the art system reflect culture's formation by external forces. For example, culturally

defined ideas of ethnicity and gender have marginalised women and minority groups as artists. As an emerging artist, Young was acutely aware that no modern Chinese artist other than Zao Wu Ki had ever gained international recognition despite the esteemed status of China's cultural heritage. Later in his career, Young saw ethnicity and cultural identity appropriated by others in the artworld as useful thematic capital for acts of consciousness-raising in an ideologically multicultural society. The identity of the artist became largely performative as a new generation of curators took ownership of the discourses of Otherness and cultural and embodied difference, using artworks and artists to illustrate their premises on contemporary art and life. Young found these curators had little need for artist subjects capable of asserting the socio-cultural dynamics of their own situation.

Young's practice grows from an awareness of the social and historical influences at work on culture and the inherent connections between the politics of art and the trajectory of an individual practice. There are a number of reasons for this. Young's artistic education coincided with the period of late Minimalism and Conceptualism. Both movements depicted culture as contested territory. Conceptualism made critical reflection on the nature and purpose of art a central element of contemporary practice, examining every aspect of art's ideological architecture. Before going to Sydney College of the Arts in 1978, Young completed a degree in philosophy, art history and mathematics at Sydney University.³ It was there that he gained his interest in phenomenological issues of selfhood and consciousness, as well as the general explanatory frameworks behind art. Studying philosophy also informed him of the looming modernity/postmodernity debates that would change the direction of Australian art.

If Young's sense of the social construction of art stripped its practice of naturalness, his experience of cultural dislocation fuelled his interest in the continuity and disjuncture of cultures across time and space. Young is a product of the Chinese diaspora. He was born in Hong Kong on 8 February 1956, the youngest of a westernized, Catholic family of four children. In 1967, with little warning, Young's parents sent him to boarding school in Sydney to remove him from the immediate consequences of China's 'Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution'.⁴ Aside from yearly trips back to Hong Kong, Young finished his education in Sydney, ultimately making Australia his home. In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie argues that an effect of migration is:

the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than in places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves—because they are so defined by others—by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves.⁵

If Rushdie is correct, the formulation of identity for the migrant is a reflexive process where the individual creates a narrative of self from the plurality of available options.⁶ Yet, identity formation is not without its risks and takes place within a complex field of possibilities and constraints. Despite the migrant's common need to create a new life and self from things lost and found, Ien Ang argues there is no singularity to the migrant experience.⁷ The diverse personal, economic and political circumstances through which people experience migration profoundly affect their relationship to their former identity and new situation.⁸ To an extent, Young's privileged background allowed him to transcend his Chineseness and find his place in the world as any other individual.⁹ However, his journey as an artist has revolved around the challenge to first locate then understand points of cultural reference in a world in which the sources of meaning are diverse and diffuse, and individuality threatened by the effects of global capitalism,

commodity culture and the growing bureaucratisation and rationalism of life. Vast cycles of works explore the relationship between Euro-American models of culture and experience and other modes of visibility, being and the cultural object.

Young's family background was cosmopolitan and outward looking, placing him at several removes from the cultural and geographic sources of his Chinese heritage.¹⁰ His family originated from Zhongshan, a small county slightly north of Macau noted as the birthplace of Sun Yat-Sen, the father of Chinese democratic nationalism. Advanced liberal thinking was a characteristic of many communities in Zhongshan, with free education introduced for all children by the end of the nineteenth century. Young's father was an industrialist of petroleum products. His mother was one of the first women involved in politics in Hong Kong. Yet, experiences from a historical China also punctuated Young's early life. As a child, 'old women with bound feet' surrounded him daily. His paternal grandfather was a philandering, landowning gambler with seven wives. Respect for Chinese cultural heritage was also stressed. While his mother was a progressive, well-educated woman, she was also a Cantonese opera singer. Much importance was placed on the fact that a grand-uncle was the locally celebrated poet 'The Thirteenth Literati of the Southern Sea'. From the age of four Young learnt to use the Chinese calligraphic brush. Later he learned to write Chinese poetry while developing a strong appreciation for the works of Chinese art in his home. These were mainly old master landscapes from his mother's and family collection, but also included calligraphic works and Ming and Qing Dynasty vases.

Many writers stress the fragmentation of contemporary subjectivities in a world of globalisation. For Young, social dislocation was a concrete reality, cultural involvement providing a strand of continuity in his abrupt relocation at such an early age from one cultural milieu to another. Attempts at writing poems in English supplanted Chinese poetry. Formal lessons in European painting styles and methods replaced instruction in Chinese painting. When his second school had no art program, the thirteen year old Young sought out a private art teacher. This was the émigré Russian Impressionist Peter Panow, who instructed Young in painting from life and the chemistry of colours.¹¹ Through Panow's encouragement, Young spent the weekends of his early teens studiously painting landscapes in an impressionist manner. A symbol of Young's emerging cultural dexterity was his success in a drawing competition conducted by Channel Seven's *Controversy Corner*, the rugby identity Rex Mossop presenting him with first prize of a football.¹² In upper secondary school, Young took painting classes with Eva Murray, who introduced him to abstract expressionism, hard edge abstraction and the work of John Passmore and Sidney Nolan.¹³ Murray encouraged Young to read *Studio International* and Jack Burnham's *Beyond Modern Sculpture*, where he learnt about contemporary developments like Happenings and performance art that challenged the authority of painting and aesthetics.

The complexity of cultural influences in Young's early life reflects Marie-Paule Ha's idea of 'the heterogeneity of diasporic experiences', which 'straddle multiple spheres beyond the West/Rest divide.'¹⁴ From an early age, Young was aware of the incompatibilities between contemporary life and an obligation to cultural heritage, especially as exemplified by his father's involvement in trade. This intensified as he became aware of contemporary art, realising that his native territory of Hong Kong, his adopted country of Australia and the former cultural giant China had no significance in modernist international art. Young's Australian education built on his sense of the importance of cultural and intellectual pursuits, a belief engendered in the sphere of his family, providing him with the conceptual tools to explore his connection to his ancestral culture and the implications of his identity for his work as an artist. However, it also complicated that basic

identity, diasporic—and for that matter Hong Kong Chinese—characteristically seen as less authentic than Chinese from mainland China.

In the late 1970s, when Young first began to make art there was little scope to explore anything other than art issues. There were few models of contemporary art based in alternative identity, excepting those developed by the women's art movement. The formal reductionism of late modernism made the person of the artist a redundant question. Conceptualism's critique of art's institutional status barely advanced the matter, even though some Conceptual artists had raised the issue of the class composition of art audiences. If Young recognised the limited nature of what was valid in contemporary art, he was not willing to bear witness to the erasure of cultural specificity in his practice. If his work is self-consciously conceived, this is a result of his interest in the role of representation in reproducing belief systems, forms of cognition and orders of subjectivity and experience.

The trajectory of Young's work reflects fundamental shifts in Australian and international art from Minimalism and Conceptualism through postmodernism's various crises of meaning and representation to the recent use of critical art practices to explore issues of identity, consumer culture and the real. In the early 1980s he had a principal role in Australia in establishing painting as a way of addressing cultural relations in postmodernism. His work was among the first to contest the coherence of modernism, suggesting its heterogeneity and potential contestation through the use of historical and compromised pictorial sources. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Young's interest in the interaction of cultures intersected with the desire for an active engagement with Asia in Australian intellectual and government circles. His recent investigations into the texture of contemporary life reflect broad concerns for the fate of cultures in an age of escalating globalisation and the ideological reinforcement of cultural divides.

Young's work has consistently embraced major socio-cultural questions; his concern for the reduction and abstraction of cultural reference points balanced by his efforts to invoke their historicity, contextual specificity and their experiential qualities. This is best reflected in his use of the 'double ground' format in his painting since 1993. The *Double Ground Paintings* address the paradox of competing worldviews and visual orders; a category of representational dilemma the late French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard addressed through his ideas of the 'postmodern sublime' and the '*différend*'—the untranslatability of one position in a dispute for another. In Young's most recent work, this includes the culture wars of the 1990s and early 21st century that have demonised otherness, especially the culture and peoples of Islam.

No individual reading of an artist's work can embrace its range of possible interpretations. This text examines the development of John Young's practice in relation to the broader context of Australian art, especially the changing organisation of art through the art system. It considers his work against the larger social and intellectual currents in which art and the artworld move. By consciously identifying art as a valid area of contestation, artists like Young reveal how cultural structures shape human experience. In contrast to modernism's view of art as an autonomous, aesthetic practice, recent artists have used art to explore personal questions of the self and everyday life and global issues of power and positioning, seeing culture as an important battleground for challenging dominant social scripts. Without regressing to traditional ideas of a transcendent, redemptive aesthetic, Young's work tackles the manifold, coincident and tangled nature of cultural determinations in recent society, providing insight into the structural foundations and historical dimensions of meaning.

The problem of next art

In 1978, John Young enrolled in a painting degree at the newly founded Sydney College of the Arts.¹ With his background in art history and philosophy, he had initially intended to tutor in art theory at the college and embark on a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Sydney.² The decision to go to art school revived an earlier interest in becoming an artist, following his involvement in art since early childhood. In 1973, he won a scholarship to study at the National Art School. His decision to go to university was a result of reading about the 'crisis in painting' in *Studio International*, painting's claims to legitimacy and relevance seemingly undermined by developments like *arte povera*, Conceptualism, Fluxus, Happenings, and Minimalism.³ Most devastating was learning about Marcel Duchamp's assessment of painters—or at least those concerned with aesthetics and representation—as 'dumb'.⁴ Duchamp's position, reinforced by contemporary artists' active dismantling of the values of established art, demolished Young's youthful illusions about painting, emphasising critical ideas over style, visuality and craft skills. The idea of the dumb painter also clashed with the Chinese literati tradition of deep respect for elevated thinking.

Young's preference for philosophy echoed this sense of the higher value of pure ideas. His return to art practice in 1978, while something of a snap decision, was eased by what he had learnt about art during university—that it could be a reflective undertaking open to a broad range of intellectual disciplines including philosophy (both Eastern and Western), sociology, mathematics, linguistics, systems theory, dramaturgy, new music, mysticism, psychology and leftist politics. However, on entering art school the problem of the character and purpose of art remained. Young's three years at art school coincided with transition from late modernism to postmodernism in Australian art. At Sydney College, he was well placed to encounter the basic machinery of this imminent shift. While Minimalism and Conceptualism's positivist and institutional analysis of art had considerable currency at the college, there was also an emerging concern for the way cultural systems structured meaning and positioned the viewer, leaving the immediate nature of art open to question.

At Sydney College Young worked and developed friendships with the British minimalist Robin Coombes, the Australian artists Richard Dunn and Imants Tillers, the architect Peter Myers and the late musician David Ahern. Coombes had the most direct influence on his work. Coombes's work was highly reductionist, consisting of flat, galvanised iron sheets. Young found the literal use of form and materials in his work an important initiation into serious art making. Coombes was uncompromising about the role of 'flatness' as a reflexive device in art, by which he meant the emptying out of form and content to remove all values and characteristics that made art an affirmative experience. In 1978, as an initiation into the minimalist ethos, Young staged the event *Deflagration*, burning one hundred artworks he had done up to that time.

Having attended Vivian Johnson's lectures on conceptual art at Sydney University, Young knew that Conceptualism represented the more radical position in contemporary art.⁵ Minimalism retained an emphasis on physical form, confirming the perceptions and corporeality of the viewer, coinciding in some ways with Chinese ideas of embodiment. Conceptualism's use of language and idea extinguished the last elements of traditional aesthetic experience in Western art. At university, Young had investigated the philosophical basis of important conceptualist texts, writing a critique of Joseph Kosuth's three-part essay 'Art after Philosophy'.⁶ Having studied the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, Young rejected Kosuth's careless use of Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy. Wittgenstein showed how philosophical problems arise from confusion about the

logic of language. Young saw Kosuth as denying this complexity by claiming simple verbal assertions and mere opinion as the basis of art status by invoking Donald Judd's provocative tautology 'if someone calls it art, it's art'.⁷

Young accepted the importance of Conceptualism's interrogation of art's discursive frameworks. Yet, Minimalism's empirical basis and analytical processes attracted him more, reflecting his interest in the links between art, science and philosophy in posing problems and advancing solutions. Young appreciated the clarity and humbleness of Minimalism. It seemed to exemplify an ethical approach to art suggestive of the moral metaphysics of Chinese thought. In early works such as *Limits-Paradox (for Magritte)* (1978), monochromy, transparency and abstraction underscore the literal nature of art. The series comprised two works, each a pair. The first pair consisted of a square canvas and a square wall work of equal dimensions. The canvas featured vertical stripes of white industrial paint on canvas with stretcher. The wall work had alternating vertical strips of canvas and wall. The second pair consisted of two squares of transparent plastic adhesive, one with a diagonal line inscribed over the adhesive and extending beyond the sheet onto the wall, the other with the diagonal line under the adhesive. Benjamin Buchloh argues that as a primary statement of 'visual-reflexiveness' artists from Malevich to Robert Barry use the square to abolish 'the traditional spatial parameters of verticality and horizontality' in painting, 'thereby cancelling the metaphysics of space and its conventions of reading.'⁸ Reflecting Young's interest in the philosophy of logical possibility, *Limits-Paradox* took a more equivocal position. The square format certainly invokes the pictorial. However, the use of transparency and the diagonal do not so much defeat illusionism as present visual puzzles to the viewer, which in bringing different possibilities into direct confrontation challenge common sense and straightforward explanation.

Limits-Paradox made no direct reference to the ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Young had no interest in using the weight of Wittgenstein to legitimate his work, acknowledging this link only recently. However, the work reflects the philosopher's concern for the relationship of language to human experience. Young's honours thesis at the University of Sydney was in epistemology and posed a defence of cognitive pluralism via a reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. The dedication of *Limits-Paradox* to René Magritte was a coded reference to Wittgenstein, Young regarding Magritte's *The Human Condition* as revealing a similar concern for paradox.⁹ The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein's first presentation of his picture theory of language, distinguished between what could be *said* (scientific facts and common observations) and what could be *shown* (all transcendent questions of metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics and logic). This suggests a traditional Positivist division of the world into facts (science) and the mystical (arts). However, Wittgenstein was principally concerned with the limits of representation in language as exemplified by tautologies, paradoxes and contradictions. *Limits-Paradox* dealt with questions at the edge of factual, scientific propositions, reflecting Wittgenstein's famous proposition, 'What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.' Rather than making statements about the nature of art, Young's early work explores the limits of determinacy, explaining his attraction to the work of artists like Mel Bochner, Robert Mangold, Sol Le Witt and Magritte over more discursive artists like Joseph Kosuth. It pre-empts his mature interest in the pursuit of immanent cultural experience and understanding through visuality and the aesthetic function.

Subsequent photographic works such as *When the Shadows are Parallel (the height of the photographer can be determined)* (1979) show how Young's philosophical interests set him on a different track to Conceptualism's concern for art critique.¹⁰ *When the Shadows are Parallel* compares the 'objectivity' of photography to mathematical and scientific propositions, suggesting that the truth of

representational systems depends on how we 'see' reality. This is very close to Wittgenstein's position in the *Tractatus*, which asserts that 'the preconditions of representation [are] not in a transcendental mental machinery which constructs experiences out of incoming raw data, but in a system of linguistic rules.'¹¹ In reflecting the linguistic turn in twentieth century philosophy, which saw 'truth' and 'objectivity' as effects of language, Young's work exceeded the modernist quest for formal essence moving on to postmodern questions of meaning and representation.¹² His interest in Wittgenstein's work was also for its implied cultural politics, which Young read as challenging the Eurocentric norms of modernist aesthetics.

In privileging abstraction, formal truth, progress and universality over ornament, narrative, historicism and referentiality, modernism placed strict constraints on artistic creativity, especially in terms of the expression of cultural and embodied differences. Paul de Man has argued that modernity gave form to 'a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier, in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure.'¹³ As a profoundly Eurocentric set of discourses and practices, modernism's aspirations to abstraction and universality meant erasure for anything that came from outside this true present. These issues were catalysed for Young in late 1979 when on the urging of his father he went to China, travelling to Beijing, Manchuria, Changchun, Shenyang and Harbin where he created a number of conceptual and environmental works. The China he encountered was still in a thoroughly socialist state, devoid of any western influence as if 'frozen in the '40s'.¹⁴ An officially sanctioned socialist realism had replaced historical Chinese art and Chinese modernism of the pre-War period. In a place where international contemporary art was effectively unknown, Young had a deep feeling that he was an Australian artist. During the trip, he executed *Manchurian Snow Walk* (1979) as an existential affirmation of himself and contemporary art, trudging back and forth through deep snow and photographing his tracks. Like the walks of Richard Long, the context of China gave the activity meaning. The work underscored the issue of art status being a product of the institutional frame. It also questioned Young's relation to his ancestral homeland and the Western cultural practices he had been inducted into—his double-bind. To participate in the art system he had to trade in the concepts and practices of international contemporary art. Yet, this took him further away from his background and place in the world. In constituting a primary experience of the body¹⁵, *Manchurian Snow Walk* expressed his longing for a relationship with China, with a culture deeply connected to nature and materiality. It established his need for a mode of practice capable of exploring the condition of divided identity. Serial photography, with its dispassionate approach to subject matter, was a practical way to begin to 'get to grips with China'.¹⁶

The work Young produced on returning to Australia began to subvert the status of modernist and vanguard art as universalising cultural forms. Young knew that minimalist musicians like John Adams and Phillip Glass, in his collaboration with Ravi Shankar, had reintroduced content into their work, refuting the systematic reduction of contemporary music to a limited set of reflexive possibilities. He was also aware that Asian art, like African and Oceanic art, had been an important stimulus to Western artistic innovation, learning about the work of John Cage and Nam June Paik through his friendship with David Ahern.¹⁷ In late 1979, Young began to develop forms of contemporary practice that included a Chinese worldview and addressed everyday experience, starting from the lineage of Cage and Paik.

In the late 1950s, Cage advanced his practice through two separate Asian sources. Zen allowed him to reject the oppressive seriality of vanguard music by embracing the sounds of everyday life.¹⁸ His reading of the *I Ching*—the ancient Chinese book of divination by chance processes—saw him

use chance in opposition to conscious aesthetic decision-making. Cage's appropriation of East Asian culture, like that of other modernists, was as an intellectual Other to re-energise Western art. He did not explore Zen and the *I Ching* on their own terms or for any issues they raised for their original culture. For Andreas Huyssen, Eastern influences also 'provided the illusion of spirituality that had been drained from Western civilisation.'¹⁹ Of course, Young and Cage occupied different positions in relation to Chinese culture. Among educated Chinese, culture is a general literacy. Rey Chow argues 'one acquires it not as a skill but as an *upbringing* in standard written texts and well-aged artistic practices (such as ... music, chess, calligraphy and painting) [that] act to define the limits of centralised culture, even if the practitioners of that culture are dilettantes only.'²⁰ It would have been naïve for Young to repeat Cage's invocation of the *I Ching* thirty years after the fact, by which time chance processes no longer had the same disruptive implications in art. Young adopted it as someone who was both an insider and an outsider to Chinese culture, using the practice to introduce a complexity into his work around issues of ethnocentrism and competing cultural agendas.

During this period, Young spent many hours discussing the possibility of bi-culturality with Imants Tillers who well understood the experience of living between cultures.²¹ Committing himself to live by the *I Ching*, Young began to investigate the subject of his mature work; the cultural, social and epistemological factors that shape distinct world views in specific historical contexts. On leaving art school, he threw himself into the idea of life as a total work of art, exploring the privatisation of dominant social systems and modes of thought in the individual. For the whole of 1981, he worked during the day in a picture-framing factory. Refusing to separate work and leisure time, at night he made large 'weaving' drawings by repetitively drawing horizontal and vertical lines across sheets of paper. As he worked, he practiced Tai Chi breathing rhythms and listened to the music of Philip Glass and Steve Reich. Repetition suffused the production of the drawings, the experience of difference in sameness a way for Young to feel the complex fault lines between cultural universes. The basis of the 'weaving drawings' in Chinese culture was not evident in their outward form. They looked like standard examples of process art, the reduction of art activity to its basic manual elements mirroring the division of labour in industrial capitalism. In replicating the logic of industrial production, the drawings challenged Western art values. For Young, however, it was more important that they challenged the limits of what one could do in contemporary art in terms of cultural specificity. In not stating their 'Chineseness' overtly, the drawings reflected Young's growing belief in a world of inner meaning. Yet, they also suggested a reticence about his identity.

Like other artists in the early 1980s, especially women artists, Young had begun to relativise matters of art and the art system as just one set of issues in the vast field of cultural politics. However, the immediate way forward for him was not clear. Modernism had offered no artistic breakthroughs since the mid-1960s, only decorative variations on the themes of flatness, colour and edge. Its authority was also badly damaged by Conceptualism's examination of the ideological and economic uses of autonomous art. Yet, by the early 1980s the general view was that Conceptualism may have exposed the problem of art but had itself been readily co-opted. This position was most cogently argued by Ian Burn in his important 1981 essay, 'The 1960s: Crisis and Aftermath' which first appeared in *Art & Text*.²² Burn characterised Conceptualism as a significant but 'transitional' movement.²³ He commended its role in challenging art's institutional condition but judged its focus on aesthetic values, the art market, and the gallery to be too limited in addressing art's social problems. In lacking the requisite 'materialist analysis of the conditions of art production', he represented Conceptualism as 'overtly utopian', demonstrating little awareness of how a genuinely socially instrumental art practice might be developed.²⁴ He thus

declared, 'perhaps the most significant thing that can be said to the credit of Conceptual Art is that it *failed*. In terms of its development, it failed to fulfill certain initial expectations and ideals, and its goals were in many ways unattainable.'²⁵ Unable to escape the limits of the artworld, Burn argued that by the early 1970s Conceptualism had become a thoroughly 'institutionalized style.'²⁶

Young was well aware of the schisms and debates around modernism, art critique and social commitment in late 1970s art, as different artist groups in Sydney questioned the context for artistic action. Many radicals, including Ian Burn, Peter Kennedy, Nigel Lendon, Ian Milliss, Ann Stephen and Terry Smith shifted their focus to community arts, media analysis or the trade union movement. Linking radical cultural perspectives to the processes of class struggle and anti-hegemony, they sought to validate the cultural life of everyday people and challenge false consciousness. Leftist community artists found ethnic Others rather than class Others, transferring the skills they had developed as artists to their work with culturally marginalised groups. The founding of the Artworker's Union in Sydney in 1979 was an attempt at radical cultural politics through the collective organisation of artists and other artworkers, and advocated for things like broader state support for the arts and better representation for women artists in public galleries.²⁷ Opposing socialist artists' direct intervention model was a new theory-driven criticality emanating from post-structuralism as evident in the work of artists like Michiel Dolk, Richard Dunn and Marilyn Fairskye. This emerging branch of post-Conceptual art took the position that if culture was a hegemonic force in society then cultural critique was a crucial form of resistance.

Young was familiar with the split between social praxis and deconstruction from his time in the General Philosophy Department at Sydney University. On one side sat the Althusserian Marxists. Althusser had added the idea of ideology to dialectical materialism to explain the maintenance of power in capitalist society. His followers at Sydney University explored ideology as a top down force fixing inequality by asserting beliefs advantageous to dominate social groups. On the other side were the followers of Deleuze, Feyerabend and the political anarchists. They were more culturalist in their outlook, exploring the conditions of subjectivity, individuation and creativity as well as the potential for contestation at the level of meaning. Young did his fair share of marxism in the philosophy department but emerged from university a pluralist, rejecting the idea that any one theory could explain the world.²⁸ Where Sydney art in the late 1970s and early 1980s was dominated by artists and intellectuals agitating for the socially disadvantaged, Young looked to other logics of action based on the play of meanings. *ZX*, the magazine he co-founded in 1978, and other contemporary magazines such as *Cog(n)ito*, *Slug* and *Xerox Dream flesh*, opposed the Marxist worldview that saw class relations and materialist struggles as the basis of everything, the thesis of ideology leaving little potential for change. Given what Marxism meant in Young's life it is not surprising that he would take a contrary position. In Communist China, a statism founded on Marxism-Leninism had seen class struggle become the basis for the repressive official culture of the nation.²⁹ The Cultural Revolution, which had displaced Young from his family, sought to rid China of important influences of the past, notably Confucianism and its emphasis on intellectual hierarchies.

Young left Australia for Europe at the end of 1981 with socially concerned art in the ascendancy in Sydney. Yet, he also sensed an imminent shift in Australian art beyond routine generational change in the work of a broad group of artists developing vital contemporary practices from a heightened awareness of earlier vanguard art. This group included artists from a half a generation before Young, like Peter Cripps, Joan Grounds, Tim Johnson, Lyndal Jones, John Lethbridge, John Nixon, Robert Owen, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall and Jenny Watson. It also

included Young's early contemporaries, Tony Clark, Dale Frank, Jackie Redgate and Vivienne Shark LeWitt. Informed by feminism, media and film theory, psychoanalytic theory, semiotics, pop culture and subcultural practices, their different artistic projects explored formerly discrete cultural formations, advancing new versions of cultural politics and the artistic.

The problem of postmodern art

Young arrived in London in November 1981. He took a small, basement bedsit in Willesden Green, near Kilburn, and began going to museums. His first direct encounter with European painting was a revelation, reigniting the deep-seated respect for cultural heritage taught to him as a child. Young had previously looked at easel painting from the perspective of Minimalism-Conceptualism.¹ The old master and modernist works he saw in London, especially the work of Vermeer, revealed important new dimensions to Western painting, suggesting that modern artists had overlooked its emotional and philosophical complexity. In 1982, Young received a scholarship from the Power Foundation at Sydney University, enabling him to live at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris. On most days, he went to the Beaubourg or the Orangerie to study a single painting. These were mainly works by Matisse, late paintings by André Derain and Kasimir Malevich, late Picasso still lifes, and works by Pierre Klossowski and Yves Klein. Otherwise, he would study the façades of *Notre Dame* and take strolls on the *Pont Marie*.² Like the paintings of Vermeer, these works of architecture evoked a pre-modern resonance he had only previously experienced when looking at the Chinese ink scrolls on the walls of his home in Hong Kong.

However, historical culture did not completely take over Young's attention. He had numerous conversations with Robin Coombes in London about Minimalism. Travelling in Europe and America he saw contemporary exhibitions that had a strong impact on him. Notable among these was an exhibition of the work of Neil Jenney at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam that Young recognised as an early example of a post-conceptual painting practice. In mid 1982, he visited New York where he was deeply impressed by Walter de Maria's *Broken Kilometer* and *New York Earth Room*, a David Salle exhibition at Mary Boone/Leo Castelli and a Julian Schnabel exhibition at Pace Gallery. In New York Young also attended his first Philip Glass concert, held at the Danceteria. The experience only reinforced his interest in the syntactical dimension of Minimalist practice. Yet, Young's use of Minimalism was somewhat inverted, serving as a conduit for phenomenological questioning not as a phenomenological approach to the analysis of art. His face-to-face encounter with the poetics of the painterly surface initiated a further, though not complete, split from Minimalism. He retained its interest in process as an expression of the actual in art, a fundamental understanding that continues into his present work.

During his time in Europe Young travelled to some of the places where Ludwig Wittgenstein had worked, reflecting Wittgenstein's intellectual presence in his thoughts. Wittgenstein was an inspiring but paradoxical figure to Young. He had many dimensions to his intellectual life, having at one time emersed himself in mathematics, mechanical engineering, philosophy, art and architecture while having a great love of music. Yet, Wittgenstein's achievements were also interspersed with periods of great doubt and inactivity plus a seeming forgetting of ideas that had once consumed him. Young saw counterpoints to his own situation here. He had trained as a philosopher but then switched his attention to art. He had grown up with Chinese culture but then become emersed in Western art. The pilgrimage took Young to the fishing village of Rosroe in Connemara, Ireland. Rosroe is a bleak, isolated place with bare, windswept hills. There, Wittgenstein finished *Philosophical Investigations*, a text marked by the ground-breaking idea that 'language constructs social reality'. Young later commented that his journey after Wittgenstein atoned for his 'lack of a spiritual life and the vanities of conceptual deed and art.'³ Wittgenstein's work is sometimes seen as having spiritual implications. Throughout his life, Wittgenstein had

great respect for religion and even worked as a gardener in a monastery for a time, though he was not known to be actively religious.⁴ In the *Tractatus* Wittgenstein describes things that escape any system of knowing and deciding as mystical but this is not an inducement to spiritual contemplation, rather a statement on the limitations of philosophy.⁵ Young certainly felt cut off from Chinese values and culture in Europe, especially those based on moral self-cultivation and self-transcendence. Tracking Wittgenstein was a romantic attempt to confirm some inter-subjective agreement about intellectual direction. If it couldn't actually achieve this, it did have one productive outcome.

In Rosroe, on 6 April 1982, Young held his first solo exhibition, a one-minute exhibition of a single work on the door of a stone hut. *The Second Mirage* (1982) was one of Young's 'chance' photographs, which he had continued to make while overseas, along with the 'weaving drawings'. Since 1980, Young had used the timer on a small Olympus camera to make incidental photographs. These works explored the camera's radical technological reconstruction of vision in the light of the archaic Chinese idea that nothing could disrupt or intervene in the natural order. Young produced *The Second Mirage* by setting his camera on a railing in the Malevich room of the Stedilijk Museum. The developed photograph included an inverted reflection of a Malevich cross painting. Like *Manchurian Snow Walk*, the exhibition at Rosroe addressed the contextual definition of artworks and the bounded nature of the artworld. The content of the photograph pointed to another important frame of reference for the exhibition, the work of John Nixon. In developing the project of radical modernism, Nixon used the work of Malevich as a stepping off point for wide-ranging formal and conceptual experiment. Nixon, along with Imants Tillers, was an important sounding board for Young.⁶ He was also a pioneer of artist-initiated action in post-1960s Australian art. In 1979, Nixon had set up his own gallery, Art Projects, in the Melbourne CBD, not waiting for the artworld to validate his practice. He had experimented with the exhibition of art in varied non-art locations, using the practice of installation to contest entrenched divisions between the work of art and its exhibition. In connecting Wittgenstein's ideas about linguistic frames of reference and Nixon's emphasis on the agency of the artist, the Rosroe exhibition approached issues of context from a dialectic of here and there. Young sent invitations to friends, colleagues and supporters in Australia through Imants Tiller's artist-run initiative *n-space*. So, as Young later commented, while 'nobody came ... people knew it was happening.'⁷

At the end of Young's stay in Paris, he went to Kassel to see *Documenta 7*, meeting up with Jennifer McGregor, John Nixon, Jennifer Slatyer, Imants Tillers and Jenny Watson, Nixon and Tillers being part of the exhibition.⁸ *Documenta* crystallised Young's sense of the marginality of Australian art, verifying his response to a 1981 exhibition of the work of Peter Booth, Rosalie Gasgoine, Peter Kennedy and Imants Tillers at London's Serpentine Gallery. It wasn't that Australian art was irrelevant in an overseas context. It was more the fleeting nature of its exhibition that made it largely meaningless. One exhibition every now and then meant nothing. As a survey of advanced international art, *Documenta 7* gave Young a perspective on the conceptual development and international position of Australian art, though not in relation to the work of Nixon and Tillers, more in a general sense. Ideas of centre and periphery were, of course, primary tropes in Australian art history and criticism.⁹ Young now understood that distance and marginality had produced a pathology in Australian art, mirroring his own situation as an Asian Australian artist. However, he wondered if such things couldn't become a virtue, renegotiating cultural relations in terms of contextual specificity to create a specifically Australian-based avant-garde that transcended the domination of Euro-American art. It was at this time that

Young first began to consider that art emerging from different geo-cultural contexts added the perspectivism of positionality, reconfiguring and reterritorialising dominant cultural practices.

Young returned to Sydney in 1983 via Hong Kong. From his time in Europe and America, he could see the coming convergence of postmodern theory and new image painting, feeling like a medium channelling the future as developments in Australian art unfolded around him over the next few years. Before going overseas Young had already entered the 'theory' debate through an article co-written with Terry Blake for Paul Taylor's new magazine *Art & Text*.¹⁰ Published in the winter of 1981, 'On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City-dweller' clarified postmodern concepts like the death of authorship, subjectivity, truth and meaning to a non-specialist art audience, mainly by discussing Baudrillard's ideas about surface effects, simulation and the code in an age of mass consumerism and digital media.¹¹ Written in a challenging narrative style, it was a cautionary tale about the confusion of ideas and perspectives in postmodernism.¹²

Publishing in *Art & Text* was an act full of meaning. Though the magazine had its supporters, including in the funding bureaucracy, its style of writing was widely received as deliberate obscuritism. Paul Taylor had a vision of the magazine creating a new kind intellectual space around culture in Australia, breaking through the reductivist horizons of nationalism and aestheticism. Taylor's own writing used a Barthesian extrapolation of linguistics to address diverse aspects of culture. Most articles in the magazine advanced theoretically informed analyses of vanguard art, mass culture and media works. *Art & Text*'s representation of mass culture was particularly important. In the 1960s and 1970s, Leftist artists and commentators approached mass culture as an abstract ideological vehicle.¹³ Writers in *Art & Text* saw cultural politics differently, claiming a symbolic richness for mass culture while suggesting the capacity of individuals and groups to challenge the power invested in signifying systems through critical art practices, theoretical contestation and subcultural style.¹⁴

Blake and Youngs' essay in *Art and Text* represented postmodern artists' retreat into outmoded models of art and artishood as a complete capitulation to the 'marketisation' of culture and the tastes of economic elites. A closing paragraph focussed in on postmodern artist's bad faith, declaring:

The hermit responds to the death of the code with a gesture of mourning and isolation. Carefully he goes over the images of death and decay rendering them with perfectionist delight in craftsmanship. But the work of cultural mourning, this progressive detachment of the hermit from all the cultural contents is accompanied by the discovery of the craft itself as value. By an impersonal immersion in the craft, the hermit comes to *mourn the myth of his own subjectivity*, the death of the artist.¹⁵

Yet, not all artists had capitulated to the forces of the market and aesthetic populism. Two years later, in 1983, Hal Foster distinguished between the 'postmodernism of reaction' and the 'postmodernism of resistance'.¹⁶ Reactionary postmodernism, he argued, repudiated the critique of modernism to reinstate cultural tradition through an 'instrumental pastiche of pop- or pseudo-historical forms'. Resistant postmodernism sought to 'deconstruct modernism and resist the status quo', enacting a 'critique of origins, not a return to them'.¹⁷

For Young, Foster's distinction between reactionary and resistant postmodernism was a prescient evaluation of the state of things. However, it was hard for artists to see a critical potential in art

from the perspective of postmodernism, given theory's bleak assessment of the scope to establish any form of distance under present historical conditions. The work of one writer after another denied the productive use of culture due to the collapse of the subject into subjection, essence into appearance, inside into outside, authenticity into inauthenticity, rationality into irrationality and signified into signifier. Michel Foucault's dark archaeology of domination represented the individual as constituted wholly through knowledge and power. Jacques Derrida's account of language as an arbitrary signifying system without positive values gave words exclusive precedence over being and acting. Frederic Jameson represented postmodernism as an all-pervasive 'depthlessness' and detachment from lived experience. Jean Baudrillard portrayed a thoroughly 'mediated' society of passive spectators set adrift at the end of history in an age of unrelenting, digital simulation. In the landscape of early Australian postmodernism, the pessimists made the best use of shifting cultural ground. Much of the art and art writing of the early 1980s celebrated cultural failure and a kind of libidinal decadence struck in direct opposition to modernism's belief in cultural progress and social change. Even theoretically informed artists stressed the hopelessness of art and the fragmentation of postmodern subjectivity. As Steven Best and Douglas Kellner argue, 'ludic postmodernism', which mostly drew on the work of Roland Barthes, 'indulged in aesthetic play for its own sake while distancing itself from a troubled world or even lending tacit or explicit support of the status quo ...'.¹⁸

While Young understood the traps of nihilism and rear vision, his work of the next decade dealt largely with the problems of art under the conditions of the culture industry and the mediated society. On his return to Sydney, he began the series *The Decline of Creative Power* (1983). The title alone suggests the shift in emphasis from vanguardism to postmodernism. Where for avant-garde artists the big issue was the social marginality of art, for Young the main issue now was the socio-economic limits on creativity. In the quest for new materials of expression, Young had long talks with Imants Tillers about Paul Feyerabend's idea of epistemological anarchy or 'anything goes'.¹⁹ Feyerabend argued that to restore creativity to science anarchism must replace rationalism as the basis of scientific method. Both artists read this as a call to drag diverse cultural sources into the space of painting, if for different reasons. It allowed Tillers to examine the degradation of art at the hands of reproductive techniques. It let Young incorporate new fields of reference into his work as the beginning of a reordering of the artist self. Yet, the strategies he developed to do this reveal a determination not to forget the lessons of minimalist art making. All his works of the 1980s assert the physical materiality of the paint, the plane of the canvas, the foregrounding of process, the breakdown of the act of painting into a set of simple, manual actions.

In *The Decline of Creative Power* Young painted one picture on canvas board a day, exploring the idea that the content of art could be anything—a painting by Derain, pictures from the McLuhanesque cult magazine *Xerox Dream flesh*, a photograph of the house Ludwig Wittgenstein designed for his sister. Young painted these images in a washed out grey but placed a monochrome board of intense gouache colour directly beneath each one as an expression of his mood states when painting. One canvas board featured an iconic image of a small female bust sculpted by Wittgenstein. Young repainted this picture as the large painting, *Thirst (or the Desire for Declarative Painting)* (1983). The use of a sombre monochromy and a very flat painting style—the bust was a grey figure on a dark green ground—declared his interest in modernist-type aesthetic analysis and process in opposition to its contemporary disavowal. Young was very deliberate in his use of grey, which he saw as the colour of minimalism and anti-illusion. He pointedly avoided black, conscious of postmodernism's obsession with the colour.

Young has argued, in retrospect, that all paintings like *Thirst* had to offer was ‘the conservation of historical art processes in the act of painting.’²⁰ The ghostly quality of the image in *Thirst* suggests even the commitment to painting was not very deep held. The use of Wittgenstein’s sculpture infers a search for some primary foundation for Young’s practice, some connection with something.²¹ Yet, Young retained his interest in the syntax of aesthetics and process throughout his shift from Minimalism-Conceptualism to representational painting, attesting to the fact that modernism might be over but it had permanently changed artist’s relationship to art practice. The ‘Notes on Thirst’ include a set of *a priori* propositions for investigating representation in terms of flatness and process:

Before painting, think of these things.

Not descriptive.

Not experiential.

1. Concept collides with materiality.
2. Concept holds the flirtatious nature of painterliness by dumb representation.
3. Dullness and the aspiration to spirituality.
4. Equal balance of negative-positive space.
5. The switch-over. When highlights get too high, or shadows too deep, it switches over to the colour ground.
6. Much is reminding myself of what I already know, **remembering** simple tasks, adjustments.²²

Elsewhere in the text, Young describes painting as a ‘complex linguistic pursuit’. While he saw formal characteristics and process as the indisputable, empirical facts of art, the ‘linguistic’ dimension came from their ‘utterance’ in the context of a work, that is, from how artists used them. This view of the syntax of form and process parallels Wittgenstein’s argument that there is no definition of meaning in language outside the *use* of words and concepts. Wittgenstein argues that we never speak words. We utter words or phrases in a context, for a purpose, while also giving meaning to them through the way we deliver them. For Young, the use of form and process was what made paintings readable, over and above their thematic and representational content. This position became a primary conceptual plank in his first major painting cycle, the *Silhouette Paintings* (1986-1989), which questioned whether after modernism contemporary art could ever return to the certitudes of tradition.

The *Silhouette Paintings* reflect on the nature and preconditions of representation through the act of appropriation, advancing a complex commentary on modern, anti-modern, pre-modern and postmodern tendencies in contemporary art. They also explore the effects of reproduction technology on artistic meaning. In Sydney in the mid-1980s appropriation was a primary discursive technique, especially in the high profile work of Juan Davila and Imants Tillers. Tillers assembled the works of many different artists in commenting on the relativism of history and locality, as did Davila in his renderings of current social, cultural and political issues. Young’s approach was never a barometer of the times, and he built the *Silhouette Paintings* around the work of only one artist—in fact just the late works of André Derain. Young accessed Derain’s work through reproductions he found at the Pompidou Research Library in Paris and the few books on the artist. He photocopied these reproductions, sometimes deforming the image in the process before using a grid to repaint them in monochrome on canvas.²³ For Young, the work of Derain challenged postmodernism’s exploitation of outmoded cultural codes. Although Derain was a great master in his day, to Young his work spoke of compromise, a case of an artist not going for

greatness but rather for a bourgeois art of pastiche and retrospectivity. The degree of 'otherness' in Derain's work was all the more significant because of his central part in modernism's shift from representation to abstraction, firstly through his Fauvist work and then through his interest in African tribal art and analytical tendencies in Cézanne, creating a proto-Cubist style. By the early teens, however, Derain had shifted his attention to historical European art, becoming a central figure in the 'return to order' movement that began during the First World War and continued through the 1920s.²⁴

The 'return to order' advanced a notion of innovation through revival, representing a significant fissure in the orientation of modernist visual culture. Young has written that what interested him about Derain was 'his about face at the avant-garde, opting for an 'eternal' style was really a remark against the linear, progressivist conception of time of Modernism'.²⁵ This intersected with his interest in Chinese concepts of retrogressive time. The intrinsically conservative character of Confucianism did not have a concept of historical progress in which humans could change nature or the social order.²⁶ Confucianism also privileged ancestral culture and ideas. In 1916, Guillaume Apollinaire cast Derain's change of tack as a daring quest for the truth of art, transcending modernism's investigation of formal essence.²⁷ For Apollinaire, the turn 'toward sobriety and measure' gave Derain's work, 'that expressive grandeur that stamps the art of antiquity'.²⁸ Young saw no such thing in the contemporary pastiche of neo-styles, only an attempt to restore the commercial and art historical legitimacy of easel painting after its erasure by minimalism and conceptualism. The contemporary celebration of cultural tradition and the cult of the master artist reversed modernism's insistence on an art for the contemporary moment and its rejection of hierarchical values and mythical forms of perception. Young's use of the late work of Derain in the *Silhouette Paintings* was neither a clean break with modernism nor avant-gardism. The works continue modernism's investigation of the nature and rules of painting, though more as a set of signifying practices than a formal system. In combining the extreme emphasis on medium and process in the work of Robert Rauschenberg with the colours of Bridget Riley, the *Silhouette Paintings* rebuff the great tradition of Western painting, their thin paint stressing the literalness of the two-dimensional surface. Likewise, most of the *Silhouette Paintings* retain evidence of the grid used to enlarge them, emphasising process over illusionism.

In all *Silhouette Paintings*, the photographic nature of their sources is obvious, denying the pleasure in straightforward representational skills. This relationship of painting and drawing to photography invokes Walter Benjamin's canonical argument, restored to cultural prominence in the early 1980s, that technological reproduction destroyed the presence, status and meaning of traditional artworks. In works like *Still Lifes with Derain (Retrograde) I* (1987), the use of grey and the distortion of the picture make it obvious the source is a photocopy. While Young may not have gone as far as other artists in declaring human perception and subjectivity as permanently changed by technology, the *Silhouette Paintings* make it clear that photography had changed art, eroding painting's primacy in fixing people, objects, events, landscapes, narratives and ideas as images. Works like *The Flirtatiousness of Time* (1985) look like photographic negatives. Drawn in reverse in charcoal on large pieces of paper by the use of a grid, the blackness of the charcoal defines the negative space around the white 'marks' that become the image. These gestural 'marks' are, in fact, nothing but the white paper. Yet, the effect is that they somehow appear spontaneously drawn, contrasting the status of the mark as a direct modernist gesture to its anti-thesis as postmodern effect.

The most apparent element of modernism in the *Silhouette Paintings* is the monochrome. Monochromes appear as panels next to, under, or between sections of figurative painting. In

alternating between representation and abstraction, works like *Monochrome Harlequin* (1987) restage modernism's debate over flatness in painting. Rosalind Krauss argues that even Clement Greenberg saw illusionism as 'residual' to painting, the integrity of the picture plane 'constantly breached' by the act of painting and thus in need of continual reaffirmation.²⁹ Her discussion of the 'transcendental two-step' of flatness and illusion in Western painting arises in an essay on Robert Rauschenberg. Krauss argues Rauschenberg worked from the understanding that no matter how he defiled traditional painting it remained a 'ground of meaning' in his work, hence his quotation of the contents of the museum as companions to 'every piece of urban detritus, every homey object, every outré image'.³⁰ Young's *Silhouette Paintings* equally explore painting as a system of cultural knowing, though from the position of its restoration not as an agent of its original deconstruction. In the hands of artists like Rauschenberg, the critique of painting caused its temporary demise while disrupting modernism's separation of the arts into discrete disciplines, destroying the argument that 'aesthetic experience constituted its own kind of reason.'³¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, a diversity of hybrid practices, including many grounded in photography, displaced painting. The *Silhouette Paintings* approach the proposition of painting in postmodernism as an outgrowth of its history in modernism, highlighting the tension between traditionalism and modernism as opposed to the excess of uncritical, non-conceptual modes of painting in 1980s art.

It is not surprising that Young's work should include this analytical, art historical dimension. At university, Young read the work of the aestheticians Ernst Gombrich, Richard Wollheim and Nelson Goodman. All three looked at art historical change as a series of syntactical shifts in the aesthetic. Jean-François Lyotard's writing on language games also helped Young to think beyond the degradation of radical values in reactionary postmodernism. Lyotard saw experimental art as having the capacity to disrupt patterns of instrumental thought. In fact, as Simon Malpas argues, "Without an acknowledgement of Lyotard's work on art ... what is at stake in his political philosophy is difficult to grasp."³² Clearly, the idea of the power of radical art to subvert established thought was not original to Lyotard. What was notable about his position for Young was that he articulated it in the face of the negativity inherent in ideas of postmodernism, some of which he had set in place himself.

For Lyotard, postmodernism reflected the decline of modernity's grand narratives, which had invested Western economic, political, social, scientific and cultural practices with deeper metaphysical value. These narratives of reason and freedom portrayed modernity as delivering ongoing progress to individuals and societies. Lyotard saw modernity collapsing during the 1960s and 1970s due to the West's transition to postindustrialism, which saw science and the social sciences inducted into the service of capitalism without fulfilling any of its promises of emancipation.³³ In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, first published in English in 1984, Lyotard argued postmodern science, as exemplified by quantum mechanics, chaos and complexity theory, rejected the performativity of contemporary applied science. In giving up the search for verifiable truths and universal models in favour of indeterminacy, language games and 'paralogy', it pioneered the postmodern quest for instability and dissent.³⁴ Lyotard saw the idea that established social values and institutions had no transcendent foundation as full of radical potential. The evaporation of all basic guarantees to truth and meaning meant existing cultural values and relations simply became one possible order among many, leaving postmodern artists and thinkers free to consider the positive value of uncertainty. Lyotard equated this potential with vanguard artist's previous success in re-conceiving artistic forms and mediums to create new kinds of experiences and alternate ways of representing and understanding.³⁵

Young argues it took him ten years to process the implications of Lyotard's ideas through his work—theory being no road map to art practice. However, Lyotard's emphasis on the positive value of the creative act gave fresh impetus to Young's work when he first read about it. Each new work became a mini language-game with its own rules of play. From 1989, Young replaced monochromy with polychromy. The grid, which had been a recurrent feature of his work since *Drawing in Ten Parts* in 1981, stayed in this new series of work, the *Polychrome Paintings*. Initially at least, abstraction also replaced figuration. Abstraction epitomised modern art's belief in cultural and social progress but in the *Polychrome Paintings* Young used it in a spirit of pure gamesmanship. The presence of full throttle colour set up a conscious dialogue with the work of other artists of the day, including his friend Steig Persson's *Black Paintings*. Young and Persson often discussed the pervasive use of 'black' in contemporary art, which was strongly implicated in varied artistic positions. Melancholic postmodernists used black to signify their mourning for meaning and history. Neo-expressionists used oceans of black in their apocalyptic visions of a devastated future. Particular Sydney art critics rejoiced in black to emblematised the endgame position of art after modernism, neglecting the analytical value of reductionism. To Young, these writers made it seem that art and artists were finished, other than to conveniently illustrate critic's articulation of this implosive situation. He saw Persson's work as a more complex exploration of the rhetoric of painting. Its vestigial imagery and glazed black fields highlighted an insoluble, art historical, 'duck rabbit' problem, simultaneously evoking the Renaissance tradition of illusionism and modernism's flatland of pure formal relations. John Nixon's use of the black monochrome also represented a different modality to the work of the 'end of everything' postmodernists, establishing the basic nature of painting as a starting point for new creation.

The *Polychrome Paintings* were too unconstrained to stand for the deep negativity of reactionary postmodernism. They were also too near to patterns to be confused with modernist abstraction. Their fractalised surfaces represented the contemporary screen-based, accelerated society that privileged the virtuality of 'watching' over modernism's 'seeing' and 'reading'. The *Polychrome Paintings* identified the society of spectacle as a major source of cultural anaesthesia. Like the *Silhouette Paintings*, they came with a set of framing propositions that declared Young's unfolding perspective on art.³⁶ Some suggest Lyotard's depiction of experimentalism and textual play as the release human creative energies. For instance, the series actively embraced 'irregularities, anomalies, and mistakes' as an expression of what Young referred to as 'unconscious unique gestures'.³⁷ Compared to the anguished outlook of much postmodern painting, the *Polychrome Paintings* engaged the contemporary social phenomenon at an analytical level. Yet, Young's parodic mode of address in writing about the paintings reveals an inherent problem for artists wanting to contest the trivialising effects of the mediated society—the quandary of reinforcing that which you oppose. Another difficulty arose from the fact that, Young, like many artists, was dealing with two levels of effect at once. The problem of the mediated society and passive spectatorship was one. The demise of the integrity of art through its absorption into the culture industry was the other. While it is true that both issues reflect the objective and subjective constraints capitalism and the totally administrated society placed on cultural expression and reception, the specific mechanisms of this development in High Art and mass culture were different. Nonetheless, for artists seeing the conditioning of mass culture by economic imperatives while experiencing the institutional and market-driven restrictions on creative freedom and cultural meaning at the local level of the artworld, the effect of one became a symbol for the other.

By the late 1980s, Young saw curators and institutions as taking an increasingly strategic, goal-oriented approach to the public presentation of art. In the relatively short time-span of his career,

he found the culture of curating had changed noticeably. Studio visits dwindled, suggesting curators had little interest in artist's work beyond the trajectory of their own careers. Increasingly, Young saw relations between artists as the only plane that preserved the meaningfulness of art, the start of the *Polychrome Paintings* marking his symbolic retreat into the studio. He depicted the studio as the 'ghetto' of the marginalised artist; hence 'Proposition Five' for the *Polychrome Paintings* which states, 'In general, more than one person executes these works. They are based on love, and the spirit for art and between artists. In that sense these works manifest a passion.'³⁸ This was the passion for art, which Young saw as evaporating on the entry of the artwork into the public cultural sphere. He worked with a group of younger artists, Helga Groves, Andrew Jackson, Chris Jansen, Elizabeth Pulie and David Thomas. Each artist decided what the individual colours would be for the myriad of small rectangles of paint that made up the first group of *Polychrome Paintings*, disrupting the value of the authorial function. In making collaboration a self-conscious aspect of the mode of production, the *Polychrome Paintings* were primarily about process. Young saw this as a 'defence against the commodification, both marketwise and curatorially, of art outside of the studio.'³⁹ However, while he sought to work within an atmosphere of creative community and friendship, authorship and individualism remained fundamental to the symbolic economy of the artworld. Young never fully surrendered his intentions and identity to the group.⁴⁰ The conceptual schema of the *Polychrome Paintings* remained his and he sold the paintings in his name. Yet, reflecting artist's general feeling of alienation from the products of their mental and manual efforts, he argued the paintings had no meaning for him once complete. They were just pigment and surface.

The titles Young gave to individual paintings in the series, as for example *Sanctuary*, *The Sacred Season*, and *Fruit (Happiness)*, suggest enduring expectations of metaphysical depth in art. Yet, in the written propositions for the *Polychrome Paintings*, Young described the works as 'emotionally exclusive and rejective of the viewers'. His basic argument was that what was created between artists and what was expected by the market, institutions and audiences—truth, meaning, feeling, beauty, spirituality, transcendence—was destroyed in the process of their exhibition and sale, leaving nothing but 'banal kitsch'.⁴¹ In conceptualising the *Polychrome Paintings* in this way, Young clearly recognised the art system as involving 'a relay of several interrelated but different spaces and economies, including the studio, gallery, museum, art criticism, art history, the art market, that together constitute a system of practices that is not separate from but open to social, economic, and political pressures.'⁴² Young highlighted this slippage at every turn. *Bad Faith Realism*, the title of a 1991 exhibition of the *Polychrome Paintings* at Yuill/Crowley Gallery, was an overt reference to the blunt reality of commodified art in the market place. This was equally evident in the paintings themselves. Like a set of 'colour ways' for any consumer product, the compositional uniformity and chromatic diversity of the paintings mirrored capitalism's promotion of more individualised consumption and more segmented markets through the creation of artificial difference and the illusion of choice.

To enhance these effects, Young created a variant of the *Polychrome Paintings* by adding a band of images above the coloured rectangles. He and his assistants painted these images in hackneyed colours and a flat, formulaic style. As in the work of Sherrie Levine, these pictures mostly represented fixed categories of art—the nude, the still life, the landscape, the interior, scenes from everyday life. Young had an ambivalent relationship to these pictures. As images, they were clichéd and in being sourced from photographs, second-hand. They were, however, hand painted to allow the artists to put 'affection' into them while contrasting the instant generation of images in the digital age to the time-intensive methods of traditional art. In reflecting on this dichotomy, Young thought of the conceptual artist On Kawara. Each day Kawara painstakingly painted the

day's date as an exploration of quantification and conventions of the pictorial and original. Since he could have written or typed these dates or had them commercially printed to make a similar point, Kawara's insistence on painting underscored something Young implicitly knew—that what painters love is the basic activity of painting.

For the *Polychrome Paintings* Young chose collaborators who loved to paint, only to have them devote time, effort and feeling to reproduce pictures he regarded as contemptible, and which in standing for a class of images rather than themselves had no transcendental qualities. Their deficiency related to the fact that they exemplified a particular sort of trite, mass cultural representation achieved through photography. Photography is often characterised as a superficial medium, only capable of pointing to some pre-existing reality. Conversely, it is depicted as a duplicitous medium, denying intentionality through its false objectivity. Roland Barthes most famously articulated these ideas in his 1961 essay 'The Photographic Message'.⁴³ Yet, the photographic sources of the *Polychrome Paintings* escape Barthes's idea of photography as pure denotation. There are no examples of Barthes's 'message without a code' among them, not one single picture that might reflect his 'unbroken façade' of objectivity, neutrality and naturalness. Young's sources were popular images of a kind that aspired to the status of art through self-consciously 'staged' artistic conventions of composition, pose, lighting and framing. Their meanings, intentions, and signifying structures were all too obvious in their attempts to depict sublime beauty, shining innocence, pure spirituality, faultless taste or true art, demonstrating from this standpoint alone how photography had debased the values and characteristics of traditional art.

The female nudes are a salient example of how the advent of mass culture trivialised High Art. Young found many of them in the picture albums produced by the British photographer John Everard in the 1940s and 1950s.⁴⁴ Masquerading as aids to artists, the photographs are soft-core pornography for a time when the desire to look at naked bodies was masked by activities as varied as ethnography, science, sport and art. The *Polychrome Paintings* reveal stock images of women, and the occasional man, as objectified by photography. These include the youthful innocent unaware of the viewer's gaze, the outlandishly posed nude whose body twists to align with the picture plane, the temptress, fully aware of her own sexuality who looks out provocatively at the viewer, the demure Asian beauty, and the young male engaged in some act of physical prowess. In the *Polychrome Paintings*, these nudes appear with pictures of cute animals, flowers, ornaments, interior décor, and the kind of landscapes found on postcards and calendars, some representing the 'gum tree' school of Australian art.⁴⁵ This imagery allowed Young to embrace 'the psychologically salvatory role of kitsch'.⁴⁶ He reached this position after much discussion with his younger artist friends. Clint Doyle, Chris Jensen and Elizabeth Pulie, who saw banality as a new ground zero for art somewhat like the historical avant-garde saw utopian promise in geometric abstraction and the monochrome. Jeff Koons's interest in an irrepressible, self-gratifying consumerism was also an important influence on Young's perspective on aesthetic degradation.

Yet, the *Polychrome Paintings* reflect the impasse artists faced in the pursuit of banality. While concern for the fate of culture in late capitalism drove this endeavour, invoking triviality affirmed the values and characteristics of commodity culture. The dynamics of this dilemma found their theoretical expression in the writings of Jean Baudrillard. In Sydney in the 1980s Baudrillard was a cult hero, appearing as keynote speaker at the 1984 Sydney University conference *Futur*Fall Excursions into Post-Modernity*. Young was the only artist to be given a voice at *Futur*Fall*, presenting a talk related to his 'hyperreality' article in *Art & Text*. Arguing that genuine meaning was no longer achievable, Baudrillard depicted the whole of life as operating at the level of

seduction.⁴⁷ The only role left to culture was disguising the contradictions of capitalism by commodifying every human experience. Baudrillard openly celebrated the ecstasy of cultural implosion. If his writings identified the inherent problems for contemporary art, they inferred that resistance to the reification of culture was pointless. Artists should understand art's historical limitations and embrace the inescapable inauthenticity of culture.

Young was well aware of the danger of theory taking over contemporary art and being used to add legitimacy to any frivolous artistic enterprise, especially something as arresting as Baudrillard's sweeping antipolitics. In a notebook from 1982 he prophetically wrote, 'The problem with theory (and especially philosophy) is that it can be applied indiscriminately to any art at any stage of its development. e.g. using a Baudrillardian description of the most inane silly forms of art.'⁴⁸ However, while the *Polychrome Paintings* targetted the historical restrictions on cultural expression, in suggesting that every aesthetic, emotional and intellectual impulse was already materialised as kitsch they paralleled Baudrillard's position of conforming to the cultural status quo. By randomly selecting details from existing paintings Young also found he could generate new paintings at will. The *Babysitters Series (Unique Chance Paintings)* were greatly enlarged versions of eight rectangle sections from existing *Polychrome Paintings*. It surprised Young that so little content could have so much impact, exemplifying the general flattening of meaning and experience in contemporary life. Young also produced elongated versions of the works in the *Babysitters Series*. This act of reiteration underscored the artist's inability to produce anything but diverting distractions, demonstrating the superficiality of art by circumventing all expectations of uniqueness, originality and depth. Yet, arriving at a schema open to endless serialisation was only a partial solution to the problem of art. It allowed Young to experience the pleasure of art making and be productive but it did not explore alternatives to the issues of an institutionalised artworld and its fetishization of the subjectivity and production of the artist.

The problem of praxis

Postmodernism attacked modernism's meta-discourses of aesthetic progress and independence, only to endorse its own grand narrative of the universal victory of the market and technology over art and society. If Young arrived at a similar place in the *Polychrome Paintings*, as the series ran its course in the early 1990s he began to think about trading parody for a less oblique repertoire of resistance. Feyerabend held up anarchy as a way out of the totalising universal schema. Lyotard stressed how historically, artistic experimentation had subverted entrenched values and beliefs. He saw art as a vital cognitive apparatus through which individuals and societies could develop new ways of thinking and being. For Lyotard, a cultural practice built on non-linear connections, even illogicality, countered those 'fantasies of realism', expressed through myth, culture and ideology, that sought to stabilise meaning and fix it according to the point of view of the dominant episteme.¹ Young had tested some of these ideas in the *Polychrome Paintings*. In elevating process over content, transposing low cultural materials into the context of High Art, setting up an interference system between figuration and abstraction while exploring the random manipulation of aesthetic and pictorial elements, the *Polychrome Paintings* rejected universal meaning in favour of relativism, contingency, intertextuality and ultimately the arbitrariness of signifying systems. Yet, Linda Hutcheon argues that in attacking truth as a general principle, much postmodern art and theory demonstrates a lack of a progressive political agenda.² She argues this is not the case for feminist artists, their deconstructive project growing from the direct social need to engage the ideology of gender domination inside prevailing aesthetic and social practices.³ The strategy of plunging art into meaninglessness tendered only a notional critique of culture and one that was largely silent on underlying social forces.

In 1992, two events moved Young's practice beyond general questions of cultural authenticity to more immediate, specific and socially grounded ones. While travelling to Kassel for *Documenta 9*, he met Nam June Paik in Bonn. Paik responded candidly to Young's Asian identity, suggesting that artists of his generation should be confident to work in their own country without feeling the need to move to New York or Wiesbaden.⁴ Paik could not have known the irony in addressing such a comment to a Hong Kong Australian artist. Australia's relationship to international art was habitually constructed around ideas of centre and periphery, particularly when formalist abstraction was at its height in the 1960s. Young's other point of origin, Hong Kong, was a paradox to him. It was an absolute backwater in terms of contemporary art but created cutting-edge films, including montage and scriptless films. Moreover, in feeling neither Chinese nor Australian Young was not exactly sure where his home was in a cultural sense. The primary Chinese element of his work was his enduring interest in chance, as framed by the *I-Ching* with its distinctly Chinese metaphysics of letting things take their course. Yet, this aspect remained buried in process. Young felt that those Asian artists who had become important figures in Europe and America in the 1950s and 1960s had survived by not straying from the main track of contemporary art. Yet, Paik's words heightened his growing sense that postmodernism was largely a crisis of Western mastery. Given Young's loss of his original social and cultural context, he now saw that perhaps the most important artistic objective was to use his work to explore issues of cultural identity, hybridity and difference in a .postmodern, postcolonial age.

In 1992, Young also attended John Clark's watershed conference *Modernism and Postmodernism in Asian Art* at the Australian National University.⁵ The proceedings revealed the neglect of significant developments in Asian modernism. To Young, the fact that important movements like Asian Dada and Surrealism remained largely undocumented inferred that the modernisation of cultural practices was equivalent to Westernisation, Asian modernism being regarded as a set of

'second-hand' versions of Western cultural originals and thus of little art historical interest.⁶ From Professor Ralph Crossier, Young learnt of Ni Yide, the Shanghai 'Derain' of the 1940s. Ni Yide's work demonstrated how differently the vanguard-traditionalist controversy had operated in China. In Europe and America of the 1940s, issues of cultural radicality revolved around of the independence of art and the freedom of artists, privileging abstraction over figuration. The reasons for this trace back to the philosophical underpinnings of modern Western society. In the eighteenth century, the rationalist and scientific values of the European Enlightenment challenged the substance of Christianity, leading to the separation of church and state and the increasing secularization of art and life.⁷ Now specifically created by individual artists for personal appreciation, art became an expression of bourgeois consciousness and ideological values. The idea of 'art for art's sake' unfolded across a sequence of art movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, each marked by increasing aesthetic self-referentiality.

The elevation of form over content was a radical departure from established art. It was also the process by which modern art absorbed the condition of autonomy into its nature, repressing the loss of its former links to society by aesthetically resolving social relations it could not otherwise transcend. This development motivated the outbreak of avant-garde activity in the early twentieth century. Peter Bürger argues, 'The avant-garde work turns against both the distribution apparatus on which the work of art depends, and the status of art in bourgeois society as defined by the concept of autonomy.'⁸ The dadaists and cubists challenged the independence of art by drawing their collage materials from the realm of everyday life. The same holds for the industrially manufactured, utilitarian objects that Duchamp used as readymades, a group of works that also attacked the museum's role in opposing art to life and the central place economic values and the commodity in bourgeois society.

In China, there was no equivalent process of secularisation as occurred in Europe following the Enlightenment. Before the 1948 Revolution, the philosophical basis of Chinese society was secular, Confucianism, moreover, extolling the value of cultural emersion for moral and intellectual development. There was no comparable Chinese displacement of art as an expression of core social values as in Europe, although Confucianism's emphasis on the classics of Chinese culture highlighted the regressive concept of time in pre-Revolutionary China.⁹ On the surface, Ni Yide's use of Derain as an artistic source in the 1940s appears outdated, especially by comparison to contemporary work coming out of Europe and the United States. There, gestural abstraction was very much to the fore, standing for post-Enlightenment values of individualism, expressive freedom and cultural progress. For Chinese modernists, overwhelmed by the cultural weight and rigid discipline of calligraphy, modernist figuration, even as historicist as that of Derain, appeared inherently more radical.

For Young, Ni Yide's work suggested other possible interpretations of modernism to the canonical privileging of abstraction and linear progress in Western art history. It contested the view that Chinese artist's use of modernism demonstrated the total domination of Western cultural frameworks over those of the peoples and regions it came into contact with. At the same time, European adventurism in China supports Adorno and Horkheimer's focus on the progressive/regressive duality of the West's 'dialectic of Enlightenment'. The very specific form of modernity that arose in China after 1945 was both heir to modernist processes of social progress and industrialisation and a reflection of their inherent limitations. This statist modernity, fashioned by Marxist ideology, supplanted the role of the market economy in the organisation of production and the distribution of resources.¹⁰ Yet, it also led to extremes like the Cultural Revolution, Chinese involvement in Tibet, the great famine of the early 1960s where nearly 30

million Chinese died and a thoroughly instrumentalised cultural sector that exploited artist's talents for ideological purposes. Although the authoritarianism of Chinese Communism is often seen to reflect the 5,000-year history of despotism in China, it still points to the unreason of Western-style developmentalism cast in the name of progress and freedom.

The ANU conference reinforced Young's growing sense that as a living member of the Chinese culture, he should make alternative cultural frameworks explicit in his work. He even began to hope that an engagement with Asia might become a priority in Australian art. The conference certainly revealed there was much work to do in extrapolating the concepts of modernity and cultural relations from an Asian perspective—a task Young felt could be as legitimately undertaken through art as academic research and theorising. During 1993, he began a new series of works that explored the relativity of cultural formations. He recognised that he was still operating in a social and cultural context that defined the specific terms in which artists could act. However, where the *Polychrome Paintings* parodied such constraints, Young was now more interested in art's capacity to explore new paths of cultural expression. Iain Chambers argues the experience of diaspora sweeps individuals up 'in an interminable discussion between a scattered historical inheritance and a heterogeneous present.'¹¹ From 1993, cultural and temporal cross-referencing and dialogue with the cultural self became the basis of Young's mature practice, its montage aesthetics challenging essentialist ideas of identity and cultural specificity, especially around themes of nature, the body, beauty and metaphysics.

The first new works after the *Polychrome Paintings* were a group of three paintings titled *On Liberty* (1993). They arose out of Young's discovery of the activities of Guiseppe Castiglione and the Jesuit fathers in China. For Young, the Jesuit was an evocation of the positive and negative aspects of cross-cultural exchange. The three paintings share the same background image, taken from one of a cycle of eighteenth century Italian tapestries known as the *Beauvais Tapestries*, now housed at the Ghetti Museum. The image shows the Jesuit Matteo Ricci introducing Copernican Cosmology to the Chinese Emperor, making a link between real power relations and the symbolic power implied in the scientific conquest of space. In Young's attempt to understand the cultural dynamics of the Chinese diaspora, the picture on the tapestry represented a moment in history that determined the Chinese future. Yet, *On Liberty* also grew from an understanding of China as deeply implicated in European thought and culture. The transmission of European experiences in China gave Europe a deep experience of 'otherness' and of itself as one among Others, changing the way it saw itself. China also clearly contributed to technical and economic modernisation in Europe, giving the West printing, paper, gunpowder, goods and raw materials for trade, and labour.

On Liberty became the first of a series of works that continues into the present. On recognition of their common layered compositions, Young later titled the series the *Double Ground Paintings*. To create the layered effect, he painted three smaller pictures over the background image, some found, others copied from photographs he took himself. As in the *Polychrome Paintings*, all stood for fixed pictorial typologies—the landscape, the nude, the interior and close-ups of flowers. The alternation between figure and field revealed the conceptual structure of the works, the idea of the 'double ground' reflecting Young's interest in addressing at least two audiences at once. These imagined audiences were not conceived as binary pairs but included Western and Chinese viewers plus those able to deconstruct the work on its terms and those who would only respond to the recognisable images and the skill factor. Young used a commercial printing process developed for billboards to produce the background images onto the canvas. Once the printing was complete, he painted the backgrounds with twenty layers of milky glaze. This emphasised the age of the

sources and masked the graphic quality of the printing. It also made the representational content of the backgrounds less obvious so they appeared like patterned fields. The smaller images appear to either float above the background or punch a space through it, highlighting the work's stratified conceptual structure and intercultural mixing of modes of representation. That Young still included hand painted elements in *On Liberty* was no attempt to restore the lost aura of the original, though it did reflect his sentimental attachment to a historically vulnerable mode of cultural production. The act of painting on top of a digital surface underlined the historical shift in modes of representation, recognising that image making had a history while also playing on the elevation of intellectual over manual skills in contemporary art post-Duchamp.

Despite their heterogeneous sources, the *Double Ground Paintings* are not empty arrangements of things. Their complex constellations of cultural materials challenge the viewer to recognise different narratives of culture and history and to participate in their unravelling, attributing agency to contemporary audiences rather than the inertia of postmodernism's totally mediated subjects. As in the work of the minimalist composers John Adams and Phillip Glass, Young takes a fixed set of elements then composes a number of conceptual variations with them. Beginning with *On Liberty*, the background scans refer to the contemporary context and the clash of cultures through a range of historical or manipulated images. The painted images continue Young's interest in banality, though no longer in the rudimentary terms of the *Polychrome Paintings*, which used meaninglessness as an expression of closure. The banality of some of the images in the *Double Ground Paintings* identifies representation as a primary site for the inscription of social and cultural disciplines but not one that it sealed off to recognition, reading, questioning and criticism.

From 1994, many of the background scans feature examples of historical Chinese art—landscapes of the Sung Dynasty, genre scenes, 'pillow book' images, and narrative paintings. While these are fragments of Young's cultural inheritance there is little sense that they tap into some cultural well-spring of authentic Chinese experience. Their faded appearance creates a distance from their original cultural usage while their unfamiliarity to non-Chinese audiences reflects the difficulty of reading meaning across cultures. The series echoes Wittgenstein's ideas on the social nature of language.¹² Rejecting the possibility of any meta-cultural or meta-social dimension to language, Wittgenstein argues that what registers as this or that 'language game' is conventional and specific to a particular group of speakers. He takes this position even further in *On Certainty*, arguing that languages are not conventional in a simple sense; rather the meanings they hold are fundamental to the beliefs and understandings of the groups that use them.¹³ Contrary to the recent curatorial escalation of identity art in Australia and internationally, the *Double Ground Paintings* investigate the difficulty of cultural 'centeredness' and 'connectedness'. By recontextualising cultural materials, the paintings explore the nature of cultural representations as a primary conduit for the definition, maintenance, and containment of social and cultural meaning, within and between cultures. Where the *Polychrome Paintings* focus on the coded nature of representational and sign systems, the *Double Ground Paintings* recognise the importance of distinguishing between how things really are as opposed to how they appear, exploring how images circulate and fix dominant mythological schemas that stand for meaning and identity. A primary concern of the series in this respect is the projection of meaning onto and through nature and the human body. There is, of course, an implicit connection between these two themes. Many feminist theorists see a correspondence in the Western patriarchal will to dominate nature and other human beings in a subject-object relationship in which men are the subjects while nature and women are the objects of control.

In appropriating images of the nude and nature from painting and photography, Young explores the social use of such images and how pervasive ideas of the body and nature proliferate through representation. In this, he recognises no particular ideological or metaphysical consistency to representations, seeing them as culturally grounded. Different cultures and times in history have different symbolic orders. The priority of instrumental reason in post-Enlightenment Western thought seeks dominance over nature. The historical Chinese view of relations between nature and humans is anthropocosmic, seeing the human and natural realms as part of the one life organism.¹⁴ The modern tradition of aesthetic art produced for the museum and an anonymous, self-regulating market did not exist in China until recently. There culture was about forging social cohesion, and moral and intellectual 'perfectability', creating quite different frameworks of possibility and constraint. Ideas of art and concepts of nature, of course, combine to produce very different kinds of nature imagery. The *Double Ground Paintings* explore such cross-cultural cleavages to underline the fact that the way we see the world and the way we see art are too readily naturalised and universalised. The examples of Chinese art in the *Double Ground Paintings* play on the historical and contemporary uses of cultural representations, especially when matched with stock images of people and nature.

In post-structural thought, representation and language mediate reality by creating the fundamental frameworks through which humans perceive, receive and conceive the external world. Throughout the 1980s, this position fired artist's interest in the signifying structures of text and image at the level of ideology and the code. By the 1990s, however, increasing numbers of artists and theorists rejected post-structuralism's disregard for external realities and everyday experience, redirecting their concern to issues of the body and embodied subjectivity.¹⁵ Pictures of people are a consistent feature of the *Double Ground Paintings*, reflecting the dominance of figurative painting and sculpture in Chinese art for much of Chinese history. Yet, these mostly female figures reflect a particular Western kind of artistic image—the nude. In recent paintings like *Invocation* (2004) and *Speechless Paradise* (2004) Young explicitly locates them in the artist's studio, reinforcing their status as nudes. The bodies in nude studies, whether paintings or photographs, are subsumed to the order of the aesthetic, stripping them of their subjectivity and identity. In his essay on the invisibility of bodies in East Asian art, John Hay argues that in the West, 'The nude seems to be the neutral staring point for our bodily perceptions'.¹⁶ Yet, representations are rarely neutral and there is no single universal ground against which their meaning can be verified. Despite their agreeable physical traits, the bodies in the *Double Ground Paintings* are not the idealised objects of desire in old master paintings, contemporary advertising or softcore pornography. They have a distant, self-absorbed demeanour that is hard to resolve. These figures signify something. They explore the character of the body as expressive and cultural, suggesting Young's interest in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty but also the riddle of the missing bodies in Chinese art despite a line of figurative painting that blossomed for more than two thousand years.

Young first read Merleau-Ponty's *The Phenomenology of Perception* at university. Its ideas on the bodily manifestation of subjectivity came into strong focus as he embarked on the *Double Ground Paintings*, suggesting corporeal planes of reference reminiscent of the immanence of aesthetic experience. Post-structuralism represented language and being as essentially in conflict with each other, giving precedence to the representational properties of language in the constitution of human subjectivity and experience. Veronica Vasterling argues that to see everything as constructed through language is perhaps okay for inanimate objects but very different when the thing so constructed is a human being.¹⁷ *The Phenomenology of Perception* challenges the priority of language over other meaning systems. Arguing the body is an 'intentional' entity and a source of

meaning and action, Merleau-Ponty declares 'it is the body that speaks'.¹⁸ He links this capacity to the body's expressiveness, interpreting physical gestures and emotional responses as *the* 'primary form of language'.¹⁹ Merleau-Ponty accepts the habitual aspect of gestures, arguing, 'It is no more natural, or less conventional, to shout in anger or to kiss in love than to call a table "a table"'.²⁰ In the main, however, he argues that the source of language is in the physicality of the body and its capacity to communicate meaning, the body's perceptual dimension opening us to the world.

Counterposed against this discourse of embodied subjectivity is the absence of the body in Chinese art. John Hay argues no Chinese painter ever produced a 'nude' because a concept of the body did not exist in Chinese culture.²¹ The figures in the *Double Ground Paintings* are conventionally referential as images. The poses they assume and the gestures they make presume a system of established meanings. This fixity is amplified in the flat way they are painted, aesthetic processes and effects being central to the meaning of things in all Young's work. Yet, Young tests the viewer's ability to read gestures, poses and representations of the body outside their own cultural sphere. As the series has unfolded, the cropping of images has become more extreme. Young routinely inverts images, places them sideways or repaints them as grisailles. Often it is hard to tell if a figure is falling or dancing, knowing or oblivious, without inhibitions or coerced, even dead or alive. This ambiguity introduces the issue of perspectivism. The very perception of the absence of a category of the nude within Chinese figure painting situates the whole question within Western culture—with Western constructions of the Oriental Other and the West's historical and present fixation with the body.²² In past Chinese societies, the naked bodies in the *Double Ground Paintings* that appear so conventional to cosmopolitan contemporary audiences may not have been simply shocking in a social or cultural sense. They may have been incomprehensible. Yet, there is also much that is incomprehensible to Western audiences. John Hay argues 'Chinese art was produced and seen from within a very different set of frames. Within this art, the human body was far from invisible. It was dispersed through metaphors locating it in the natural world by transformational resonance and brushwork that embodied the cosmic-human reality of *qi*, or energy.'²³ Such discontinuities challenge the basic concept of communication across cultures, though the *Double Ground Paintings* operate according to a heuristic model, testing the viewer's reflexive capacities and underlining the importance of thinking of difference between cultures.

In developing a non-universalising picture of transcultural relations from the static of cultures past and present, the *Double Ground Paintings* draw on John Cage's distinction between noise and sound. Young sees the paintings as an end-point, somewhat more distilled than what exists in the world but without falling into the trap of reducing things to a single picture. His use of nature images, mostly landscapes and flowers, likewise involves multiple cultural realities. All representations of nature in the *Double Ground Paintings* are de-naturalised by their mediation through photography. Young either selects them from stock images available on CD-Rom or produces the photographs himself. In either case, a picture must echo existing photography or painting to be included in his work, and demonstrate the strong mythological dimension in representation. In fact, when taking the landscape photographs he uses in the *Double Ground Paintings* Young finds himself incapable of being overwhelmed by what is in front of him. Representation has already been there, operating as a sort of veil that denies the immediacy of direct experience. The only criterion he has to select individual landscapes is that they conform to conventional cultural ideas of the aesthetic, moral, philosophical, poetic or sublime qualities of nature. In approaching the natural world as a sequence of photo opportunities, Young's primary challenge in photographing individual views is getting the iconographic schema and formal arrangement right so that the picture stands for one cultural form of representation or another.

These may be Western conventions or Chinese. Many of landscapes reflect the grandiose views of nature favoured by German Romantic painters, especially Caspar David Friedrich. However, Young crops these pictures to stress the vertical perspective of *shangshui* or Chinese 'mountain-water' paintings. The pictures of flowers have qualities of the transcendental through the idea of the still, golden moment, a pictorial trope highly developed in the work of Vermeer. Yet, Young has little interest in literal discourses of profundity and the ineffable around nature, being principally concerned with the tension between standards of nature set by different civilisations. In the Western philosophical tradition, nature is bound up in perceptions of beauty and the sublime, suggesting humanity's cognitive and emotional separation from nature. In Chinese culture, its philosophical dimension revolves around the inherent harmony of the human realm (*ren*) and the natural realm (*tian*). As a metaphysical ideal of human existence, it depends on quite differently constituted visual languages with the human dispersed into nature. Traditional Chinese landscape painting is not naturalistic or anthropomorphic. Neither does it concern the simple contemplation of beauty. The absence of human figures did not signify a lack of human presence. François Cheng argues man 'is eminently present in the features of nature' which are a 'projection' of the viewer's 'own deep nature, which is completely pervaded by an inner vision.'²⁴ The subtle relations between landscape elements—rocks, trees, mountains—represent moral relationships, attitudes and gestures somewhat akin to the Western reception of figures in narrative painting.

The relationship of 'man' to nature has also been a pivotal issue in Western culture. In eighteenth century Europe, the landscape or more specifically the category of the 'natural sublime', became enmeshed in major Western philosophical arguments about the universality of human experience and the failure of representation to depict what the human mind could conceive. In *The Critique of Judgement*, Emmanuel Kant argued beauty is the universalised experience of pleasure and grows out of a common capacity for understanding in humans. In the same text, he defines the sublime as something great like the scale and power of nature, that can be recognised but which in transcending representation says something profound about being human. Kant's idea of the sublime emerges out Western philosophical arguments about the conflict between the human capacities or perception, conception, and imagination. These debates were central to the break between religion and metaphysics in the Enlightenment and lead to the secularisation of judgements of truth, ethics and beauty in modern times, generating both instrumental reason and the principle of aesthetic autonomy in modernist art. For Kant, confronting the infinity, greatness or chaos of nature revealed the gap between how humans perceive, imagine, and understand things. Perceiving something as sublime was a double-edged sword, reminding the individual of the limitations of the imagination—because of the inability to *re*-present the experience—but highlighting the power of human reason in the ability to conceive of the sublime in the first place. When confronted with the sublime, Kant sees the human faculty of reason taking over, displacing the self as the measure of things to re-establish a sense of order even though the sublime remains a paradox for the senses and imagination.

The *Double Ground Paintings* reject the modernist essentialising of Kant's aesthetic theory, especially the idea that the universal is the agreement between rational *men*. Confucianism, for example, has a very different view of nature. While in Confucianism 'heavenly principles' are 'ideals that point beyond the dictates of this world', they are also understood to exist in the world, especially in nature.²⁵ In Chinese culture reflection on nature represents an 'immanent transcendence' as against Western modernity's 'absolute transcendence'; the latter attitude perhaps explaining the West's exploitative uses of nature while revering it in image and text.²⁶ At the same time, to speak

of a Chinese view of nature is an inaccurate essentialism. China's other great wisdom tradition, Daoism, saw a vision of human life in nature that was more individualistic and which placed greater emphasis on 'the development of the individual's originality and personality and on the pursuit of the freedom of the mind.'²⁷ Daoist landscape poets and painters adopted a solitary position, wandering the countryside in pursuit of their art in a way that was widely regarded as dangerous. In a predominantly Confucian society, individuality—so important to Western art since the Renaissance—was subject to repression, the role of cultural practices being to reflect 'the illustrious virtue of the great order' and develop moral consciousness and social unity.²⁸ In the main, however, Chinese culture was the antithesis of modern Western art's expression of individualistic liberalism, the idea of the production of art for private interest, aesthetic pleasure or economic exchange being almost inconceivable.

Young's use of nature images in the *Double Ground Paintings* explores worldviews beyond entrenched Western models. This idea of art as a space of representational discontinuity and disruption reflects Lyotard's idea of the postmodern sublime.²⁹ For Lyotard, the postmodern sublime arises from the inherent conflicts at modernity's core. These tensions stimulate postmodern subjects to think, not in the quest for some transcendent order but rather for the incommensurable and inconceivable. Christine Battersby asserts that this position is 'fundamentally disturbing to a civilisation that conceives of its own modernity in terms of consensual rationality and a communicative ideal.'³⁰ To Lyotard, however, postmodern art not only challenges the adequacy of existing aesthetic and representational systems. It understands representation to be inherently inadequate, encouraging audiences to see the inconsistency in things. For Young, the central representational challenge of the *Double Ground Paintings* is incorporating a multi-perspective view of contemporary reality, paralleling that operating in his own consciousness in being a Hong Kong Australian artist working under the weight of the modernist/Enlightenment tradition and Chinese worldviews. The use of nature images in the *Double Ground Paintings* is evidence of how the 'double ground' format juxtaposes diverse cultural materials so that none take over or evade the implications of the others.

The inclusion of nature images has significance far beyond the point that pictures of landscapes are cultural representations. Nature and culture are linked in the *Double Ground Paintings* through their relations to modernity. The scale and depth of the changes associated with modernity have determined the fate of the natural world. Massive social transformation and dislocation also accompanied modernisation, bringing about the mass migration of peoples with a loss of traditional cultures all over the world. In Hong Kong, industrial and economic modernisation eroded the influence of ancestral Chinese culture though without, as Young would attest, completely obliterating long established patterns of thought and cultural engagement. It is this friction between cultural obligation and contemporary reality—Young's perpetual double bind—that the *Double Ground Paintings* explore. Although Confucianism and Daoism disagree on a number of important grounds, metaphysical readings of man's relationship to nature are at the centre of both wisdom traditions. Confucians held with 'the axiological unity of nature and humanity' as a natural order nothing could disrupt.³¹ From the Daoist perspective, a person who fails to appreciate the beauty of the world loses both beauty and truth.³² For Young, leaving an Asian childhood lived in idyllic settings by the sea for a boarding school in suburban Sydney was not simply like falling into the plot of a Clara Law movie. It arrested his ability to experience nature from a Chinese perspective. The pictures of pictures of nature in the *Double Ground Paintings* speak of Young's distance from his ancestral culture and home. Yet, these representations also have important world historical dimensions. In the face of today's seriously endangered eco-systems, the artificial

character of these nature views contests modernity's status as a progressive age of reason, unfolding according to an inner and wide-ranging logic.

Despite its many problems, the rise of postmodernism in the early 1980s suggested the end of Western modernist hegemony in thought and culture for Young, reversing the singularity of aims and interests in late modernism. Postmodern theory argued there was no single universal ground on which to confirm knowledge, suggesting that Asian experience was just as valid as any other. Lyotard and Feyerabend's critique of modern science made way for non-Western modes of thought such as Daoism or Zen, where the basis of analysis was insight rather than reason.³³ Yet, even in an ideologically multicultural society like Australia, where the assertion of cultural difference is outwardly received as positive and progressive, for Young this principle is typically the end of the conversation not the beginning. Asian Australians still stand as outsiders to nationalist discourses of Australian culture and society, regardless of migration's centrality to the creation of the Australian nation. As much as individual Asian Australians might want to be 'ordinary' Australians, the skin they exist in precludes this. As Benzi Zhang argues, 'defining multicultures in minority terms, reifies a relation of dominance and subordination ... mosaic multiculturalism means a centre-periphery structure in which Asian cultural inheritances are treated as 'foreign' festoons that would bedeck but never becomes a central part' of national identity.³⁴ When he started the *Double Ground Paintings*, Young knew the cultural perspectives contained in the series would not correspond with the language, imagery and concepts of Australian identity. He also recognised that the change of cultural perspective from the *Polychrome Paintings* would end his allegiance to his artist peers in terms of their fundamental concern for the nature and purpose of art from the perspective of Western modernity. Moreover, in the context of Australia art, Young didn't want to be seen simply as an ethnic artist, representing only his social or cultural group and making art only about his identity and the migrant experience. Rather, he saw the primary value of being positioned both within and without the structures of Western thought and culture as enabling him to meet the idea of difference head on, the *Double Ground Paintings* offering a chance for anyone anywhere to reflect on the cultural perimeters that constitute self understanding and the plane of meaning.

For Young, cultural orientation is not achieved through concord or synthesis but by allowing the heterogeneous to exist and by unsettling established meanings. He sees it as axiomatic that heightened reflexivity towards cultural contexts and meaning structures is a feature of postmodern art. The *Double Ground Paintings* use conventions of the pictorial against themselves in order to foreground the complexity of representation and its implied politics. Their mixing of elements is inherently propositional. Rather than conforming to expectations of consistency of meaning, they allow scope for the 'unrepresentable' to emerge in the chemistry between things, an outcome forged in the act of reception as much as in the intentionality of production. In this sense, the *Double Ground Paintings* challenge modernism's conception of art as an autonomous, aesthetic practice. The gulf between things, between cultures, is intrinsic to the conceptual configuration of the 'double ground' format. Their mixing of cultural references acknowledges the existence of competing cultural discourses, systems of representation and cultural groupings. Young's use of Chinoiserie, as in works like *Clouds with Generic Flower Study* (1998), is a case in point. It highlights the banality that results from processes in Western society that seek to neutralise the 'other' by converting it into representations of no consequence beyond the decorative. In this Young sees a counterpoint in the work of Tony Clark, particularly Clark's *Chinoiserie landscapes* of 1986-89. In these paintings the forms of trees and pagodas become eccentric mutations in the 'Chinese manner', suggesting, as Clark has commented, how 18th century Chinoiserie was 'a western style, displaying western fantasies about the mystic Orient as fantasies.'³⁵ The *Double*

Ground Paintings reflect the insoluble conflict of difference between representational and cultural orders, suggesting there can be no straightforward resolution to the problem of cultural difference. Moreover, to resolve difference by the imposition of some transcendental system, such as abstraction as it functioned in modernism, is to deny difference. While Young has a yearning for fullness and completion in terms of his personal and artistic identity, his experience of diaspora drives the aesthetic and conceptual dimensions of the *Double Ground Paintings*, the space or spatiality between the two grounds a context for exploring the interrelation of cultures in time and space.

The problem of the real

In the *Double Ground Paintings*, the mix of visual materials explores ideas of difference but also the fact that through history different cultures have infiltrated each other's symbolic domain in ways that do not equate with the binary structure of domination and subjection. The background scans establish the main subject matter of a work. The pictures painted over them extend each work's thematic, conceptual and temporal register. In early *Double Ground Paintings*, the scans were historical representations, either European paintings of first contacts between Europeans and China, or examples of ancient Chinese art. From 1998, many paintings have patterned backgrounds from Chinese, Japanese, Tibetan and a few Western sources. These works place the aesthetic and the decorative at the forefront of cultural mixing in history. Since the ages of discovery, imperialism and colonialism, art and design have modelled a process that today, in globalisation, makes distinctions between cultures and regions look ever more hollow. Hence, the indeterminate nature of the people, places and things Young paints over them. Yet, if the historical cycling of styles, patterns and visual symbols through art and design parallels the merger of cultures into a single, heterogeneous world order, it also attests to the fact that in a cosmopolitan world reconciling difference is an unavoidable part of everyday life. Julia Kristeva, in fact, argues 'we are all in the process of becoming foreigners in a universe that is being widened more than ever, that is more than ever heterogeneous beneath its apparent scientific and media-inspired unity'.¹

From 2000, however, the *Double Ground Paintings* have not only dealt with the challenge of cultural meaning and identity in an age of postmodernism and globalisation. They are more overtly political. In dealing with issues including refugees, Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, the culture wars and the war on terror, they bear witness to the way cultural and identity politics are directly implicated in world political events. The stripped backgrounds of paintings like *Red Blue*, *Red Grid*, *Sanctuary* and *Limbo* (2003), reference the polypropylene shopping bags and zippered carry-alls that are the ubiquitous 'suit cases' of the poor and displaced. The backgrounds of the *Persian Paintings* (2004–) are details of antique Persian art. This imagery underscores how representational processes codify other cultures and societies while acknowledging a renewed partitioning of the world around ideological, religious and cultural differences. At the basis of current panics about refugees and terrorists are complex political and historical fault lines animated by lurid prophecies of nations overrun or threatened by dangerous outsiders, denying, in particular, refugees' actual lack of power, resources and alternatives. No amount of reasoned argument can overcome entrenched animosity to others from those who feel it. Conversely, those who make a case for compassion can display little will to understand those determined to rebuff refugees or denounce all members and manifestations of a particular culture. Young's recent works attest to the complexity and intractability of positions in the contemporary world. For Young, the space of painting is a prospective intermediary site where attitudes, values and ideas are experienced at an immanent level through the condition of subjectivity. The most recent *Double Ground Paintings* underline the importance of thinking of difference in inter-cultural and inter-societal relations as well as the need to accept multiple realities. This is mostly achieved at the level of aesthetic process, something as simple as montage effects or the cropping or inversion of an image showing the irreducibility of things to a single point of view.

Among Young's most overtly political works is *Hong Kong Burns* (2000). In specific terms, the painting concerns the handing back of Hong Kong to China, a theme of great personal significance to Young in focusing on the loss of his homeland and his fears about what might befall it. But Hong Kong also stands for a wider threat to all ideas of home and nation based on

geographic or cultural specificity. The butterfly-patterned textile used for the background suggests the transience and fragility of all national, regional and cultural boundaries in an age of transnational trade and monetary exchange, accelerating technology and unpredictable geopolitical alliances. The handing back of Hong Kong is moreover just one episode among many that reveal the unravelling of modernity's grand narratives of reason and freedom in the present. *Hong Kong Burns* plays on the 19th century European convention of depicting the nation as a virile youth, underscoring art's ideological role in urging people to identify with dominant conceptions of the social order. Yet, this youth is falling backwards not striding into the nation's bright future. The central female figure shields her face from what is in front of her. The upside down picture of goldfish makes the fish appear dead in the water, predicting tragic consequences for the reunification. Young found this picture in *Artist's Panorama from China*, a book produced during the Cultural Revolution. Pictures throughout the book reveal the Communist Party's appropriation of Chinese metaphysics of nature for political purposes, despite staging the Cultural Revolution in the name of ideological reconstruction and the purging of false-consciousness. At the same time, evidence of the real, in the form of a picture of burning squatter's huts from the Tai Hang district of Hong Kong in 1974, become a set of grey smudges when inverted, implying the indecipherability of present and historical events and the blurring of the real and the fictional through representation.²

The history of Hong Kong is a forceful symbol of the fate of territories at the hands of global historical forces like colonialism, capitalism and Communism. Suspended between East and West, a stopping off point for the Chinese diaspora, Hong Kong's handing back to China underscores the emergence of China as a colonial and economic power where once the West might have thought it would hold exclusive reign over history. To be a Hong Kong Chinese speaks of the vicissitudes of identity in the contemporary world, Rey Chow arguing, 'The people in Hong Kong can sacrifice everything they have to the cause of loving "China" and still, at the necessary moment, be accused of not being ... "Chinese" enough.'³ As a product of colonialism, as a global economic hub, technologically advanced, and intimately involved in the production and consumption of commodities, Hong Kong is a model of China recast in the image of globalisation, its existence allowing mainland China to maintain the illusion of an originary 'native land'.⁴ This effect is mirrored in the domain of art, both curators and mainland artists seeing artists from Hong Kong as not authentically Chinese.

For Young, modernisation, colonial rule and globalisation may have been imposed on Hong Kong externally and from within but aspects of historical values and outlooks persist there. Exposure to these forces invests individuals and communities with reflexive capacities that recognise what is taking place and form attitudes to it, even if the power to halt or reverse change is limited. Globalisation is mostly seen as a force of cultural homogenisation. People everywhere are consuming a mass-produced and commodified culture emanating from dominant capitalist countries, especially the United States. Yet, around the world 'subjects once objectified by colonial visibility are 'visualising back' in ways that attest to the cultural specificity of indigenous, diasporic and non-Western forms of embodiment and visibility'.⁵ Urgent discourses and practices of cultural nationalism, ethnic specificity and regional difference have emerged in former colonial countries and from diasporic individuals and communities to assert self-identity in the face of the new imperialism of globalisation. Young's most recent work moves beyond Lyotard's postmodern sublime of incommensurability and free experimentation to a transcultural sublime of uncontained heterogeneity, contesting modernist concepts of a unified world humanity as well as the idea that globalisation inevitably equals westernisation.

Hong Kong Burns shows it is possible to read a specific iconography into Young's paintings. However, decoding their individual parts and collating these ideas doesn't uncover the meaning of his work. Any singular reading of a *Double Ground Paintings* is as unstable as the precarious towers of images that climb up their surfaces. No single viewer possesses the range of knowledge and cultural literacies to decipher their contents. This is largely their point, highlighting the issue of one's social positioning in relation to cultural formations and historical events. Young is only in possession of all the key information because artists have the time to act as a filter, to deal with symbolic economies and to be pluralistic in their knowledge. It is perhaps also the 'in-betweenness' of diasporic experience that makes Young more receptive to the experience of dislocation, separation and difference in the present. The scattered thematics and formal and perceptual volatility of the *Double Ground Paintings* reject the idea of a stable referent, a single audience, subjective expressiveness, communicational consensus and a plausible transcendence.⁶ They refute any totalising vision of history as a process of progress and liberation, embracing relativism over singularity and truth. Moreover, while the *Double Ground Paintings* are by Young they aren't strictly about him. They are about all of us under the conditions of late modernity with its globalising media, open yet integrated financial and production systems and 'eco-catastrophic' growth economy.

As the *Double Ground Paintings* deal with issues of globalisation, they also deal with the role of technology and production within globalisation. From the beginning of the series, the digital has stood in opposition to painting as an epistemologically distinct form of image production. While claiming photomechanical reproduction for the purposes of art, Young has also doggedly held onto the craft of painting in opposition to the rise of new media art. The sub-group of paintings called *The Numeral Paintings* and some works in the series *Edge of the World* have digitally generated decontextualised patterns as backgrounds. Their theatrical aesthetic effects suggest the warping of spatial and cultural relations by present-day information and communications technology. Where images of change in modernism drew on symbols of time, those commenting on the impact of globalisation use spatial metaphors to explain what is happening in culture and society. The idea that globalisation deforms space/time traces back to early postmodernism, Frederic Jameson describing postmodernism as the upshot of a 'new social system beyond classic capitalism' spreading across the world space of multinational capitalism.⁷ The canonical aspect of Jameson's work is his mapping of the growing internationalisation and integration in the market economy onto cultural processes. Where early oppositional postmodernism attacked modernism's utopian reading of abstraction and universality, Jameson recognised a new and more sinister version of universality rising in the form of globalisation. In digitally generated pattern paintings like *Wild Root Painting* (2000), *Pine's Edge* (2000), *Vacuum #2* (2001) and *Times Collapse #1* and *#2* (2002), and *Love Song #1* and *#2* (2002), digital processes allow Young to manipulate line, colour, form and space to reflect on the infinity or power of global information and communications systems that are too diffuse and complex for comprehension. The impact of these works is generated through dissonance, the alternation between the captivating qualities of digitally produced abstractions and the sentimental, over-burdened or kitsch images painted over them suggesting ways of thinking about spatial and cultural relations in globalisation beyond the nostalgia for certainty.

Where Young has explored the disposition of global technology flows, he has also tackled the relationship between cultural production and consumption in a globalised economy. In the mid 1990s, Young made a small group of works that compared the symbolic capital invested in art to the expropriation of labour elsewhere in the world economy. At the representational level, the *Square Paintings*, an uncharacteristic set of single images, consider the status of ethnicity and

tourism as commodities. While they appear like large, square versions of the painted sections of the *Double Ground Paintings*, the way they are made explore divisions of labour and production in transnational capitalism. The paintings, principally a set of indeterminate landscapes from Chinese travel books, were firstly painted in China in studios that specialise in the batch reproduction of paintings for a price. On arrival in Australia, Young and his assistants put another 100 hours work into each painting to heighten the colour and add layers of detail. So, although the *Square Paintings* appear like single images they are in fact layered like all the other *Double Ground Paintings*. *Untitled #1* (1995-1996) appeared in the 1996 exhibition *Paradigm Fountain* at Sherman Galleries in Sydney as the central feature of a curved wall installation that Young had built in the gallery. The wall described a completely round white space, punctuated by this one fantastic landscape painting, contrasting the generic architecture of the transit lounge to the alluring promotional images of nature that feed the symbolic economy of tourism and its production of desires and imaginaries. Yet, hidden within the painting's process was a conceptual model of alienated labour and the distant worker in global production, which mirrored the art system's erosion of the freedoms inherent in art and showed how the inequalities between artists in Western art were now also endemic to art in China.

As if commenting on this suppressed plane of meaning in the *Square Paintings*, Arjun Appadurai argues that the globalised management of production has made 'production itself become a fetish, obscuring not social relations [as with commodity fetishism] but the relations of production'.⁸ For Appadurai, what is also fetishised in this process is locality, which becomes a fixation that disguises the dispersed nature of global forces. The accent on the signs, artefacts, aesthetics, experiences and customs of locality are a paradoxical but predictable feature of global culture, setting up what Appadurai calls 'the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference.'⁹ Where the *Square Paintings* explore these effects in tourism, recent *Double Ground Paintings* address the manipulation of difference in the political economy. For Young, the experience of difference should make it possible for subjects to recognise the partiality of their history, language, culture and consciousness. The *Double Ground Paintings* seek an escalation of this awareness by bringing different frames of cultural reference into contact. However, recently they have focussed on the negative uses of difference. Despite the historical entanglement of Judeo-Christian and Islamic thought, a primary repercussion of September 11th 2001 is that ideological forces have reinforced cultural and political divisions. The backgrounds of *The Persian Paintings* are beautiful examples of Persian art, suggesting how the basis of many Islamic societies is cultural despite entrenched American views that it is religious and ideological. In a post-9-11 world respect for cultural diversity has become a moralising abstraction to many people, the current political situation demeaning Islam to such an extent that even the magnificence of its art may not be recognisable. Benzi Zhang argues that, 'In history, different nations and cultures [have] often regarded one another as 'savage' or 'barbarians' ... this mutual demonization (or idealization) [constituting] an unconscious psychological projection of the self upon others.'¹⁰ For Christine Battersby, in the present 'there is one and only one description of any act that is valid.'¹¹ From the American and Western perspective certain acts are 'murderous terrorism' perhaps even 'absolute evil'. Yet, for Battersby this 'does not overwrite the competing language of religious martyrdom and heroic self-sacrifice (as viewed from the perspective of fundamentalist extremists).'¹²

In titling these works *The Persian Paintings*, Young recognises the West's historical attraction to the exoticism of the Middle East, contrasting the romantic connotations of 'Persia' to the inclusion of modern-day Iran in Bush's axis of evil. For Young, shifting attitudes to Islamic nations and cultures echo the conflicting ways in which the West has thought about China and 'oriental' people. In *The Persian Paintings*, difference is not the only point, rather the works use the

representation of difference to challenge established views and totalising schemas because they are closed to what it is possible to conceive. By connecting different cultural elements—historical paintings that reveal Iran’s rich mythic traditions, pictures of introspective young women in the artist’s studio, the kind of mollifying landscape pictures that want you to think of freedom, peace, the infinite, spirit, God—*The Persian Paintings* create a virtual space that opens consciousness to doubt. The problem of representation in the current world political climate is not just what is said but what isn’t said. For all our access to immediate information, things, values and ideas are repudiated by what is omitted. *The Persian Paintings* testify to these processes of silent exclusion to challenge us to really see. To underscore this point, Young included a short section of dialogue from Jean-Luc Godard’s 1963 film *Le Mépris* (*Contempt*) in the catalogue of an recent exhibition of *The Persian Paintings* in Sydney in 2004:

Camille: Look (putting on a black wig). Doesn’t it suit me?

Paul: I prefer you blonde.

Camille: And I prefer you without the hat and cigar.

Paul: I’m being Dean Martin in *Some Came Running*.

Camille: Very funny. You don’t remind me of Dean Martin, but of Martin and the ass. Don’t you know about Martin and the ass? One day Martin went to Baghdad to buy a flying carpet. And a carpet seller sold him a particularly nice one. So he sat on it and it didn’t take off. ‘Hardly surprising’ said the carpet seller, ‘the carpet won’t take off if you think about an ass.’ ‘All right,’ said Martin, ‘I won’t think about asses’, but automatically he did, and the carpet wouldn’t take off.

Paul: I don’t see the connection with me?

Camille: That’s exactly what I was saying.

Paul: I really don’t get it.

Camille: Never mind.

Paul playing at being a movie idol and Camille trying a different look signify the diffusion of meaning and identities in contemporary life. However, where Camille recognises the charade, Paul can’t think outside the presumptions provided to him. No matter what he sees he can only think of asses or terrorists or cue jumpers or people throwing their children overboard.

For Young, among the varied causes of this relativisation of meaning and effect is the mounting influence of the media over contemporary experience, whereby manifold messages and symbols with contradictory meanings continually reconfigure the topography of contemporary life, recent events in the Middle East being a primary example. The media exerts a worldwide cultural influence, the rise of Arabic media outlets revealing another phase in the battle to stave off the role of global media in the universalisation of eurocentric, and perhaps more specifically, American values. However, while many people in many societies around the world exchange traditional beliefs, values and ways of life for Western ones in the name of modernisation, the flow of cross-cultural appropriations can run both ways; what is given up in one context is

adopted in another though never in the same way. Consider, for example, the enthusiasm for Chinese religions, wisdom traditions and customary forms of knowledge in the West: Zen Buddhism, the Book of Changes and Daoist-based practices like Fengshui, Qigong and Taijquan.¹³ The compatibility of these practices to the needs, desires and values of cosmopolitan yuppies explains their adoption in the West. The cross-cultural appropriation of belief systems demonstrates the commodification of spirituality, paralleling what has happened with identity generally.¹⁴ Homi K Bhabha argues that 'Cultural differences mark the establishment of new forms of meaning and strategies of identification through processes of regulation where no discursive authority can be established without revealing the difference of itself.'¹⁵ *The Persian Paintings* suggest that the intense politicisation of difference concerns everyone involved through the strain and enmity it creates. The *Double Ground Paintings* are Young's sustained effort to develop an aesthetics of disruption and a historical consciousness that allows more ground in between.

The problem of the art system

While painting sits at the centre of John Young's work as an artist, he has involved himself in other art related activities during his career, including the roles of writer, publisher, and exhibition and venue organiser. Although these two streams of activity remain distinct, they both reflect on the configuration of cultural forms in the realm of the social. Young's paintings consider how representation is constitutive of social reality while simultaneously modelling alternative ways of seeing, knowing and experiencing. His wider activities intervene in the way art is presented and received, highlighting how the centralised distribution system of the artworld is predisposed to respond to art on its terms rather than that of artists. Like a number of other artists since the late 1960s, Young has not been prepared to leave active agency in the art system to the curators, administrators, critics, and editors who serve as gatekeepers to the public cultural sphere. In taking on other roles he has gone outside the usual stratification of tasks and responsibilities in art that limit the artist's scope to have a voice and a stake in what transpires in art. Artists clearly benefit from contemporary art being professionally and publicly managed. However, negotiating this system is a complex task for artists who see the practice of art as a reflexive enterprise enacted in defence of values of freedom and authenticity. Yet, as the British artist Matthew Cornford argues, 'the 'David and Goliath' model of the independent artist working outside and against the established institution is far too simplistic a model to have currency now.'¹ To work beyond the art system means invisibility for artists whose practice is object-based and who do not want to relinquish art making for more purely social forms of activity. Alternatively, since the 1960s vanguard art has become the official art of institutions. The tastes and interests of progressive curators and gallerists routinely draw critical and even activist art into museums and the market to contribute to public discourse about issues and ideas, or, more cynically, to create value through the 'spectacle of opposition'.²

While Young's activities beyond the studio test boundaries and designations in art, he accepts that he makes and exhibits his work within the logic of the art system. He has a successful commercial practice and harnesses institutional support and artworld structures to do many of the things he wants to do as an artist. If he has a sentimental attachment to the artisanship of painting, the conceptual basis of his work emphasises art's intellectual dimensions. In addition, his use of studio assistants and other forms of technical, production and administrative support gives his practice a managerial dimension. In reflecting the status of the contemporary artist (post-Duchamp and Warhol) as a director of ideas³, Young fits the description of Robert Reich's 'symbolic analysts'—those contemporary knowledge workers whose ability to manipulate codes, signs, styles and information makes them highly valued in a society where cultural production is central to economic exchange.⁴ This social group also includes curators, gallery directors and arts bureaucrats who gain their place in the artworld from their human capital, that stock of 'specialized [productive] knowledge, based on education, competitive merit, and experience on the job'.⁵ Such individuals should be proactive and expert in their decision-making, their contemporary 'neo-management' style bound up in creativity.⁶ To an extent, demarcation disputes in contemporary art arise out of the similarities between the reflexive and imaginative outcomes in advanced art and the attainment of valued social and cultural goals in arts administration.

Certainly, the endowment of the Australian artworld since the mid 1970s with growing numbers of contemporary art venues, arts bureaucrats and curators has created some basic contradictions for artists, even while it has increased exhibition opportunities and the public advocacy of contemporary art. At the most basic level the makeup of the sphere has changed from small, overlapping networks of critics, dealers, collectors and artists to a highly structured system of

institutions and public funding bureaucracies whose missions can compete with artists' role in the specification of cultural issues and priorities. In fact, Jean-François Lyotard attributes the failure of contemporary institutions to the fact that they are driven by a 'language game, in which the goal is no longer truth but performativity—that is, the best possible input/output equation.'⁷ Performativity and the nexus between knowledge and power define the Australian public contemporary art sphere and the ranks of professional curators and arts administrators it has created.⁸ For Young, the actions of institutions in framing the public manifestation of contemporary art constrain both the autonomy of artists and the immediacy of art practice. Like a number of other artists, his adoption of other roles has sought to undo some of the control vested in institutions and institutional processes while reconstituting aspects of art in forms that are less hierarchical, less centralised, and more grounded in participation than results.

The range of these activities is diverse and it is not possible to claim that Young has acted from a transcendent philosophy in everything he has done. His wider art activities have also undergone a process of evolution in response to the changing nature of the artworld. Nonetheless, the form of an activity plainly symbolises Young's intentions, not just in terms of end results but as a statement of values. For instance, some of the early exhibitions and publications Young organised were deliberately amateurish and never sought to engage a wide audience. In this they reflect Young's interest—and that of other artists' because he rarely undertook any of these activities alone—in generating things from the realm of the artist, a domain largely eclipsed by the spheres of the art market and public galleries. One clear aim of Young's wider art activities is forging alliances between the work of artist friends and peers. The point was not to be definitive, like exhibitions in public institutions, or to defer to the singular authorial vision, like offerings in dealer's galleries. Rather, artist-initiated exhibitions and publications stressed that although the art system perceived the role of the artist as a service based activity, art, in fact, emanated from a creative and intellectual community. Many of Young's activities outside the studio have the distinctive provisional quality of much artist-initiated activity. However, it is because they consistently escape the corpus of legitimated art activity as canonised by the museum, gallery, art history and criticism that they are significant. In the context of Young's practice, this thread of activity reveals his critical perspective on prevailing social, cultural and artistic models in the concrete, contributing in tangible ways to the development of his practice.

In this regard, Young's wider art activities have developed from a strong consciousness of what has gone before, and as such, what is possible. The institutionalisation of Western art originated in the structures of society and was then framed by artists of the historical avant-garde who challenged the authority of those structures over art. This reflected a concern for the social alienation of art while incorporating a critical view of social relations in general. From the mid 1950s, neo-avant-garde artists developed forceful anti-systemic practices and rhetoric to defend art and society from institutionalisation and commodification processes. An important aspect of this effort was organising the circumstances of art's dissemination and reception through independent exhibition and publishing ventures, reflecting artist's interest in democracy, freedom of expression and self-determination. As a movement, Conceptualism was especially concerned with the influence of system imperatives over art. Its exploration of alternative contexts aimed to develop public outlets for art that did not perpetuate the hierarchical social and cultural values driving mainstream institutions.

In Australia, this new, reflexive version of artist-initiated activity emerged in the late 1960s, born of a mix of necessity and ideology. While the institutional infrastructure supporting contemporary Australian art developed considerably between the 1960s and 1980s, the scale of the Australian

artworld and the embryonic relationship between art institutions and contemporary practice drove many artists to act as a catalyst in support of their work. John Nixon, for example, argues that, 'What occurred in the late Seventies and early Eighties was that a number of people took control of their lives. They no longer waited for the art bureaucrats.'⁹ In organising their own contexts, a group of Australian artists challenged the systemic control over art. Developments like site-specific art, the women's art movement, self-publishing ventures, and the artist-run galleries Inhibodress (1970-1972), Art Projects (1979-1984), Q Space and Q Space Annex (1980-1981) worked around the authority embedded in public galleries, the art market, and art criticism as primary sites for the ratification of art status, artisthood and artistic identity at the local level. While accepting the reality of the art system, some artists developed stratified practices to protect the core of their creativity. For example, although Peter Tyndall, Robert MacPherson and Gunter Christmann had established reputations as painters during the 1970s, Peter Cripps argues 'their activities extended far beyond the limits imposed by painting. Parallel to their mainstream gallery careers these three artists developed a more ephemeral, experimental and playful art practice.'¹⁰ Similarly, during 1980 and 1981, John Nixon and Robert MacPherson conducted a significant collaboration through one-day exhibitions held at Q Space, a derelict woolstore in Brisbane, both artists well aware that few people would see their work.

Collectivism and self-initiated activity gave expression to the artist's perspective in an artworld in which the increasing activity of professional art managers confused the sense of where ideas came from and what things meant. A number of artists in the 1970s and 1980s escaped the specificity of the gallery space by using publications to present their art and ideas. Peter Tyndall used printed pages bearing the Hand Space Manifesto as an immediate vehicle for a range of comic and polemical ideas about art. Peter Cripp's *Blunt Report*, issued irregularly from 1975, reflected his own critical perspective on the art system and cultural politics while presenting material from Tony Clark, Bronwyn Clark-Coolee, Robert MacPherson, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall, and John Young.¹¹ There was also *Pneumatic Drill*, the newsletter of the Anti-Music collective an anonymous group experiment in recorded sound initiated by John Nixon in 1979.¹² Between 1981 and 1983, Nixon's gallery, Art Projects, published sixty issues of the newsletter to provide information about its activities to an actual and imagined community of interest.

The challenges artists levelled at the art system changed aspects of Australian art, projecting a model of the artworld as produced by conflicts over the control of cultural space and meaning. Evidence of change is apparent in the advent of public alternative galleries, notably the Experimental Art Foundation (1975) in Adelaide, and the museums' assimilation of site-specificity and institutional critique in exhibitions like *Recent Australian Art*, (1973), *Object and Idea* (1973), *Some Recent American Art* (1974), *Sculpturscape* (1973, 1975, 1978) at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial, and the 1976 Biennale of Sydney.¹³ Working against entrenched art values and structures also gave artists skills that enabled them to change institutions from the inside. Examples are Noel Sheridan's position as first director of the EAF from 1975 to 1980, and John Nixon and Peter Cripps' directorships of Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art for the periods 1980-1981 and 1984-1986 respectively. All three artists showed how to base institutional programming around strong curatorial premises while revealing the practice of contemporary art as it was happening.¹⁴ Cripps also did ground-breaking work in establishing the recent history of vanguard art in Australia, supporting exhibitions with properly researched and documented catalogues.¹⁵

Whether it was a case of institutions learning from complaints against established art or converting opposition into controllable reforms, from the 1970s polarities such as vanguard and established, commercial and non-commercial, public and private no longer represented the fixed cultural

meanings they previously did in Australian art circles. Nor did such terms accurately indicate the orientation and location of contemporary cultural conflicts given the degree of convergence between the preferences of the market, funding agencies and the public galleries. The artworld used artist's engagement in hybrid art practices and art critique to modernise a sector now in open competition with sophisticated mass cultural products, notably books, fashion, films, magazines and music. Facilitating institutional critique within the institution also meant that critical practices had less impetus than before. Then, in the early 1980s the emergent alliance between contemporary art and the institution was further neutralised by postmodernism's revival of artefactual and commodified forms of art such as historical pastiche and neo-expressionism. The arrival of postmodernism saw the idea of the alternative gallery reformulated as the more generic contemporary art space. Most venues still required currency in the art they exhibited because it enabled the cycling of new cultural products regardless of their nature, but many dropped the emphasis on radical cultural outcomes, which now contradicted the traditional turn in contemporary art and the increasingly affirmative role of public cultural institutions.

Artworld change produced variegated patterns of resistance as new groups of artists negotiated the shifting structures of the art system. For Young, the activities of a group of artists immediately before him, which included Peter Cripps, Tim Johnson, Peter Kennedy, John Nixon, Mike Parr, Imants Tillers, and Peter Tyndall, showed how refusing to accept a fixed artistic role while integrating practical resistance with a critical approach to art gave artists some control over their destiny. Throughout his career, Young has worked both in and around the art system. His has been a situational artistic identity involving a range of activities. Some are wholly consistent with a normative art career, others, however, are marginal to the model of artisthood built on work in the studio and the creation of sophisticated 'art products' for the market and museum. For Young, shifting between different kinds of activity, some opposed to each other in basic ways, reflects the dialectical nature of recent art, which is simultaneously a creative, social process and a market-driven system of symbolic production with museums and art criticism corroborating exchange values. Both alternatives present attractions for artists.

Before leaving art school, Young had already embarked on the necessary process of career building, participating in a group exhibition of conceptual photography in 1979 with Peter Crocker and Neil Stevenson at *One Central Street*.¹⁶ When he left art school in 1980, Noel Sheridan invited him to travel to Adelaide to restage this exhibition at the EAF. On his return from Europe in 1983, Young soon established a place in the artworld, teaching part-time at Sydney College of the Arts and exhibiting at Kerry Crowley and Nola Yuill's gallery in Pymont. Since then he has exhibited consistently in private and public galleries in Australia and overseas. However, like many other artists the course of his career also reveals how important cultural developments unfold within informally networked communities of artists. This began with Young's membership of the editorial 'collective' of *ZX* (1978–1980), a magazine produced at Sydney College.¹⁷ There is, of course, a history of Australian artists writing on art and starting small magazines to stake out territory in the artworld. *ZX* continued this legacy, if on somewhat altered terms. The late 1970s and early 1980s were a watershed period for the relationship between art and writing, or more specifically art and theory, post-structural theory being influential in the rejection of modernist values of universality, social and cultural progress, and centred subjectivity. *ZX* began as a student publication but soon became a forceful expression of this new perspective on culture.¹⁸

Young's engagement with writing demonstrates the diversified circumstances in which emerging artists felt compelled and able to act in the early 1980s. He often believed the response of

contemporary art writers fell short of what was needed, motivating him to publish his point of view. As an artist, he also recognised an otherness in the activity of writing. No matter how theoretically invested his work was, writing exercised an important aspect of his intellectual makeup. The kind of theoretically informed writing he engaged in was also a generational marker. Conceptualism, with its basis in linguistic philosophy and epistemology, drew the line between manual and intellectual skills in Australian art. Following Conceptualism, 'theory' defined an emerging group of Sydney artists from studio artists and neo-Marxist artists. However, where Conceptualism stressed ideas over visuality and the object form in the critique of art, the trajectory of ideas in *ZX* addressed more general ideas of power and knowledge. For example, in the second issue of the magazine Young adapted and transcribed Bernard-Henri Levy and Michel Foucaults' interview 'Power and Sex'.¹⁹ A later edition edited by Janet Burchill and Jennifer McCamley included Meaghan Morris and Ross Gibson's translation of Lyotard's essay 'Reply to the question What is the Post-Modern?'.²⁰

It is hard to describe the excitement or consternation that accompanied the first encounters with the new theory in Australian art circles in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Before theory fatigue hit in the mid-1990s, theory had the status as 'a self-contained "event" with its own political integrity', challenging the value of praxis.²¹ For Young the relationship to post-structuralism also had a personal dimension. He was in contact with two groups of Australians who had gone to Paris to study philosophy, learning at first hand about the conflicts over discursive space in French poststructuralism, particularly in relation to Baudrillard's nihilism. His occasional forays into the theory debates of the early 1980s responded to general confusion in art circles about postmodernism. Young wrote to explore differences between postmodernism in art, as defined by historicism and appropriation, and postmodernism in philosophy, as reflected in the refutation of the paradigm of modern reason. Looking back at the period, it is clear that much of the confusion arose from the fact that discussions about postmodern art often started by scavenging ideas from post-structural theory. The upshot was that it was never exactly clear what was driving postmodernism, its rise variously attributed to changes in economic, cultural, political, social, scientific or technological conditions or a mix of any or all of these.

This is not to suggest that Young's writing was didactic. The polemical articles he co-wrote with Terry Blake for *ZX* took the form of plays, fake interviews, and text fragments.²² Such stylisms reflect three important influences on contemporary art; the legacy of vanguard posturing, postmodern ideas of the indeterminacy of meaning and the influence of new social movements and subcultures, whose struggles waged at the level of culture and lifestyle demonstrated the growing importance of symbolic challenges, cultural politics, and identity. The idea of self-publishing was also an influence from the world of music. Punk was a definitive movement in this respect, challenging the power and values of the music industry through the principles of DIY and amateurism. Through his intermittent involvement with the schizo-punk group *Slugfuckers* (1977-1980), Young explored the nexus of music, fashion and graphic design as a site for culturally and expressively oriented forms of resistance.²³ The cross-fertilisation between art, fashion, film, music and theory is a distinguishing feature of Australian art in the late 1970s and early 1980s.²⁴ Early issues of *ZX* combine elements of Dada and Surrealist publications, Conceptualist text works and punk fanzines. Later, when the radical philosophical perspectives of the new theory found their full expression in *ZX* its design became much more sober.

While subcultures underscored the expansion of cultural politics beyond vanguard art, the influence of critical theory changed historical debates around what was art and who was an artist. Arguments became less rooted in issues of aesthetics and subject matter—the

traditional/modernist debate—shifting to other statuses of the artist, notably gender, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. In the 1970s, women artists used feminist principles to oppose their lack of cultural opportunity. The next wave of women artists took a less instrumental approach to claiming their position in the artworld. Using deconstruction and seduction, they reframed questions of art and gender as a set of symbolic challenges in a cultural struggle. In the early 1980s, Young maintained friendships with the artists Janet Burchill, Kate Farrell, Jennifer McCamley and Carole Roberts. These women took an aggressive stance to the bureaucratisation of the Sydney artworld, challenging Young's thinking about the role of identity and social positioning in artishood and cultural reception.

The Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci argues that in contemporary societies, where 'material production is increasingly replaced by the production of signs and social relations', it is understandable that 'conflicts centre on the ability of groups and individuals to control the conditions of their own action.'²⁵ However, contesting social processes raises evident challenges. Where Conceptualist practices of institutional and art critique confronted cultural meanings centred in the art object and gallery, social politics contest the dispersed, immaterial effects that permeate social structure.²⁶ Self-generated activity was one simple way for artists to address issues of autonomy and identity, allowing them to control the terms, level and meaning of their actions within limited circumstances. In 1985, Young co-founded the artist's collective *Various Artists Ltd.* with Janet Burchill and Carole Roberts, its name implying the friction between art and commerce while resisting the cult of artistic personality. A concurrence between practices and interests was the glue that brought the collective together between March and October 1985. The enterprise attracted a significant group of members in addition to the three founding artists, including Rex Butler, Bronwyn Clark-Coolee, Peter Cripps, A.D.S. Donaldson, Kate Farrell, Lindy Lee, Catherine Mills, Bette Mifsud, Katherine Moline, Reto Oechslin, Kevin Sheehan, Richard Thomas, Brian Thompson and Ellen Thompson. Some participants already had an art profile. Others were emerging artists. However, all felt the need to challenge the mechanistic rationale of the Sydney artworld through a greater focus on making and looking at art.

Burchill, Roberts and Young consciously located the project in the sphere of the artist, its organisational form a message that exemplified the group's ideals and objectives. In the main, involvement reflected values of self-determination and community, contrasting with exhibition programs shaped by the values, needs and interests of commercial and public galleries. In this the collective had affinities with Q Space and Q Space Annex, the two exhibition spaces John Nixon operated in Brisbane during 1980 and 1981.²⁷ Like these projects, *Various Artists Ltd.* did not hold exhibitions for the general art public but rather for the participating artists and a few other interested people, like the critics Keith Broadfoot and Rex Butler. Based on the idea that exhibitions could take place anywhere—as in Imants Tillers's project *n-space*²⁸—artists commandeered disused warehouses and wharves for their purposes, the location of exhibitions shifting from week to week. All exhibitions were less than one-day's duration, being held for several hours in the afternoon or evening. Invitations let people know an exhibition was happening. Since the collective's activities did not require official backing or significant financial resources, there was no need to attract a large audience to justify or provide such support. Rather, the project supported those involved in sustaining the purpose and validity of their practice. A majority of members came to each exhibition, allowing the ideas and approaches presented to be widely discussed.

In retreating into a semi-private sphere to the side of the artworld—as Young was later to do in his own studio surrounded by his collaborator/assistants—it might seem that *Various Artists Ltd.* had

little scope for impact. The project certainly illustrated the artists' disenchantment with the partisan and conservative Sydney artworld of the mid 1980s. Although it was not a direct inspiration, the organisation of the collective reflects Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's metaphor of the 'rhizome'.²⁹ The concept embellishes an argument against linear logic in literature. However, it has been widely interpreted as an alternative model of sociality; one that is horizontal, non-hierarchical and open, or as Deleuze and Guattari put it, an 'assemblage' that 'establishes connections between certain multiplicities' by embracing 'the state of intermediacy' and 'the logic of the conjunction'.³⁰ *Various Artists Ltd.* defined the immediate intellectual and social context of a group of artist peers with a shared awareness of critical culture. Moreover, the diversity of artist's backgrounds and interests demonstrated the importance of individual artistic projects, much in the sense of Jean-François Lyotard's endorsement of micro over meta-narratives. The ongoing nature of the collective's activities paralleled the participant's regular involvement in art making, evoking forms of everyday resistance bound up in the practice of alternative lifestyles. In this *Various Artists Ltd.* echoed not so much bohemianism but changing ideas of the political advanced by movements like feminism, that identified the effects of power in all social circumstances.

At the same time, the idea of independent art activity did not emerge from the 1970s with its original value intact. Underground activity had proved very beneficial to some artists in delivering them into the mainstream with their stocks of notoriety and integrity high. *Various Artists Ltd.* consciously played on the semiotics of positioning. In arising in the middle of postmodernism Burchill, Roberts and Young were alert to the significance of effect. The physical exhibition was one thing but they were also interested in occupying the virtual space of rumor and the media. Since individuals and groups are always connected to wider social networks, the activity did not take place in isolation, growing in scale through what was said about it.³¹ Burchill, Roberts and Young also recognized that anything reported in the Sydney art press gained in profile and credibility. The mention of their makeshift activity had as big an impact as events at major public venues like Artspace that many people had attended, demonstrating the value of bluff and the allure of obscurity. In fact, they deliberately stopped the exhibition phase of the project before too many people wanted to come along. They concluded things with a publication documenting the collective's sixteen exhibitions, to further its fictional life in the future. After 1985, activities of the collective focused on the sphere of publication, though Young was later involved in the artist-initiated galleries *First Draft* and *CBD* to support yet younger generations of artists to find a measure of creative freedom and intellectual autonomy in the art world, especially Vicente Butron, Helga Groves, Kate McKay, Janet Shanks and David Thomas.

Under the aegis of *Various Artists Ltd.*, Young edited the May 1986 edition of *Tension* magazine, a section of the magazine comprising visual projects by artists under the title 'Murmur of the Soul'. The project reflected Young's specific interest in publication as well as demonstrating artists' growing adeptness at mobilising artworld resources. In 1981, Young co-produced the book *Photodiscourse*, co-writing the catalogue essay 'The Photographer as a Hit and Run Driver (In Praise of Futurist Photodynamism)' with Terry Blake. In 1983, he co-founded the publication *Kerb Your Dog* with Brendon Stewart. In taking its name from the civic ordinance warnings painted on Sydney footpaths, Stewart and Young saw an inbuilt advertising strategy for the publication while making a statement on the promotional logic then seeping into the Sydney art world. Based on André Malraux's idea of the 'museum without walls', *Kerb Your Dog* was an anthology of artist pages and writings. Commercial and public galleries had long lead times, short exhibition periods, continuous programs and predetermined objectives. By contrast, *Kerb Your Dog* was fluid, intermittent and provisional, presenting current art as the need arose in a form that remained

available, reappearing in different times and places. Its aim was to allow artists to articulate their position and curate their own practice, establishing discursive space around art while suggesting polyvalent relationships between artistic projects through the different sets of work collected in each issue. By 1984, however, Young found the publication was taking up too much time and even more thought in considering how to position and develop the enterprise. It ceased publication until 1988 when Young revived it in association with John Nixon, recognising its value as an alternative way of disseminating and documenting information about contemporary art. For example, *Kerb Your Dog No 7* (1990) was a special number entitled *Notes on Art Practice III*. Published as a section in *Art & Text* No. 35, it gave the artists involved access to much better quality reproductions of their work and a far wider circulation.³²

Over its lifetime, *Kerb Your Dog* featured the work of over 80 artists from Australia and overseas. To the artists involved its value was in contesting dominant accounts of contemporary art by providing evidence to the contrary. For instance, *Kerb Your Dog Textbook* (1992) demonstrated the intergenerational legacy of critical art in Australia since the 1970s. The issue contained material from a wide network of artists. This included John Barbour, Eugene Carchesio, Tony Clark, Peter Cripps, Aleks Danko, John Dunkley-Smith, Clinton Garafano, Ross Harley, Tim Johnson, Lyndal Jones, Maria Kozic, Rosemary Laing, Shelly Lassica, Lindy Lee, Geoff Lowe, Robert MacPherson, John Nixon, Rose Nolan, Susan Norrie, David O'Halloran, Robert Owen, Mike Parr, Jacky Redgate, Carole Roberts, Vivienne Shark-LeWitt, Peter Tyndall, Ken Unsworth, Geoffrey Weary, Wood/Marsh Architecture Pty Ltd., and John Young.³³ Through this grouping Nixon and Young challenged pervasive stereotypes of Australian art, writing 'since the 1970s, Australian art has severed ties with the Antipodean, with the domination of the local landscape and instead looked outward to much more than the 'seen' and the 'drawn'. Nationalism as a subject has now gone.' In place of a singular, nationalist culture and its tendency to direct the outlook and subjectivity of populations, *Kerb Your Dog* offered thirty highly individualized artistic projects, challenging the cultural authority behind this imposed identity. Nixon and Young saw the publication as a resource for historians, curators and students, providing proof of artist's 'differing philosophical outlooks'. Young used the publication to re-issue his 1989 text 'Propositions for the *Polychrome Paintings*' and add a new text 'sentences on the *Polychrome Paintings*'. The texts made it plain what Young's work was about, dispensing with the mediating role of critics, curators and theorists.

Young's interest in self-generated activity was never a response to a lack of personal opportunity. By the mid 1980s, there was almost an excess of activity around contemporary art. An economically buoyant Sydney was fast establishing its status as an international city. Although Young's work of that period dealt with the constraints on authenticity in art and life, Sydney's contemporary art sphere had developed a real buzz, creating many possibilities for artists. A new generation of post-Conceptual artists and filmmakers including Tony Clark, Dale Frank, Janet Burchill, Mattys Gerber, Jeff Gibson, Michael Hutak, Narelle Jubelin, Lindy Lee, Jennifer McCamley, Hilarie Mais, Tracey Moffat, Jacky Redgate, Scott Reford, Luke Roberts, Carole Roberts, Steig Persson, Mark Titmarsh, Gary Warner and Young were actively exhibiting their work. Sydney also had an unprecedented sense of cultural focus and substance through the network of sophisticated private galleries that now operated in the city, as well as major public cultural events and institutions like the Sydney Biennale, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Museum of Contemporary Art, and smaller contemporary art spaces. To add weight to the burgeoning cultural life of the city, the operations of the Australia Council were also centred there. Art writers and journalists like George Alexander, Rex Butler, Keith Broadfoot, Catharine Lumby and Anne Howell gave much support to the scene that had developed, which was also drawing in artists from other cities in Australia. Conversely, the public context for contemporary

art had changed appreciably during the 1980s, the state-directed policy and funding environment leading to significant intervention in the sector. The changing policy framework repositioned the arts as an arm of the culture industry, from where it was required to operate on a business model.³⁴ For an artist like Young, with a consolidating career in the mainstream arena, self-initiated activity enabled him to work outside its commodifying processes and corporatist objectives, expanding the boundaries of his cultural participation.

Like his writing, Young's involvement in organising group exhibitions grew out of his and his fellow artists' interest in presenting things from the artist's perspective. This dates back to 1983 when Young organised the exhibition *The Life of Energies* at Artspace, assembling a range of artist's ideas on the distortion of space, time and culture in postmodernism.³⁵ From the mid-1980s, a significant number of Australian artists were organising exhibitions of each other's work, developing a dialogue around contemporary ideas in opposition to curator's more schematic approach.³⁶ With the systematisation of Australian art, the primary plane of conflict became cultural meaning and the central issue for artists the management of their practice. Young's 1989 exhibition *Victory over the Sun: White Square on White*, organised with Clinton Garafano, meant to demonstrate the richness of contemporary artist's interest in the work of the historical avant-garde in contrast to the contemporary hijacking of art history to validate various fashionable 'neo' positions. An important by-product of such exhibitions was revealing artist's networks, which in Young's case extended beyond Sydney to Brisbane and Melbourne, bringing a wider range of work together than was usual. Artist-initiated activity confirmed the social as well as personal nature of art for artists, creating an extended forum for their practice.

In other exhibitions, Young sought to show a range of artist's responses to things. In 1989, for example, he curated *The New Naturalism* at the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane at the invitation of Sue Cramer. The exhibition included the work of Janet Burchill, Clint Doyle, Helga Groves, Jennifer McCamley, Elizabeth Pulie, Carole Roberts and Young. The basic theme for the exhibition was the growing displacement of nature from the human world. Young's underlying motivation, however, was revealing contemporary artists' thoughtful and imaginative responses to this situation, counter to curator's often uncritical celebration of the 'techno-mediated, post-modern condition'.³⁷ Equally central to Young's approach was presenting these exhibitions in public art spaces, showing that artists' stake in art did not end at the production phase. Like a number of his contemporaries, Young rejected the idea of artworks as the only means for artists to have an impact in the world, opposing the image of the artist as a primary producer. When he saw the need, he directly intervened in the ways things were seen in Australian art. One such example is his 1988 essay in *Art and Australia* on the work of David Strachan.³⁸ Young saw Strachan as an artist who had suffered serious neglect. He first became interested in Strachan through a shared link to the work of André Derain. On looking further into the artist's work, Young learnt that Strachan had studied in Europe, was interested in the writings of Jung and, like him, had undergone Jungian psychotherapy.

The text was written as an appreciation of Strachan's *Two Women in a landscape* (1968) to fit the format of the magazine's on-going series of essays by contemporary artists on artworks they admired. However, Young used the opportunity for a polemical purpose. He meant it to challenge Bernard Smith's dismissal of Strachan's work as 'neo-romantic'³⁹, as well as the general repression of interiority and metaphysical speculation in Australian art. Setting the record straight was also the point of his essay 'Locality Flux' in *Like Magazine* in 2000.⁴⁰ Around this time there was a surge of interest in Fluxus. Young's essay questioned the pedagogical basis of these exhibitions, which took the tone of teaching Australians about the movement without acknowledging

Australian artists, musicians and writers' practice in 'the spirit of Fluxus' for over three decades. Young was equally concerned to stress that that spirit 'cut across ... the claims by the cartel of international curators that art of the present day is 'global'.' Fluxus, he argued, opposed unambiguous realism and the tyranny of universals in stark contrast to the contemporary use of art as 'a currency for curatorial barter, an abstraction and a browsing object for the audience.'

The public/private polarity of Young's activities during the 1980s dealt with local cultural structures. However, during the 1990s his views on the management of artist's creative output expanded to consider developments at the international level. As Young travelled more as an artist, he became increasingly aware of the entanglement of local and international art agendas, as well as the disparate expectations and symbolic frameworks imposed on art because of where it came from. For Young, the proliferating economies of value and meaning in world art paralleled the speed of capitalist markets in the circulation of commodities. This circulation was propelled by a new band of contemporary art specialists, who, like other professional elites were 'far more cosmopolitan, or at least more restless and migratory, than their predecessors.'⁴¹ Young saw such individuals operating according to the logic of transnational capitalism, searching out the most resonant products and services around the world.⁴² This pushed the range of legitimated art well beyond its former basis in the work of white male artists from a few metropolitan centres of the Western world. By the 1990s, the canon of international art had grown to include increasing numbers of women, ethnic and non-Euro-American artists. However, to Young, world art, as organised by the 'ever growing, powerful cartel of international curators' presented its 'assortment of exotic moments from the first, second and third worlds' in ways 'more akin to a multi-national company's processed package.'⁴³

While the opportunity for artists of diverse backgrounds to practice at the national and international level expanded during the 1980s and 1990s, this was only if aspects of their work tied in with the quite specific nature of the mainstream's need for plurality. In such a climate, tribal art from Australia gained international recognition and consequently being used as the standard bearer of Australia's international cultural status.⁴⁴ The work of other Australians, including urban aboriginals, has to compete with the work of metropolitan artists all over the world. It has not had much impact, despite various attempts by the Australia Council to raise its profile in Europe and North America. Yet, things reverse inside Australia, where the work of tribal aboriginals is framed as other to the general stream of the contemporary, isolated in specific sections of galleries or in its own galleries.⁴⁵ As a Hong Kong Australian artist Young understood the privileged status of some artistic identities over others. Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope contend that the Australian art system marginalises ethnic artists by its emphasis on excellence, and its recognition and management of excellence in terms that are overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic.⁴⁶ They argue this happens in two ways:

First, excellence is a criterion for discriminating art from non-art, the worthy from the unworthy, the good from the bad, the canonical from the ephemeral. ... Second, the same notion of excellence can, in a negative sense, involve subtle and not-so-subtle forms of discrimination-mechanisms for exclusion, for keeping the benefits and resources of the arts within a limited scope and market of culture and art.⁴⁷

When Young made the decision to study art, he knew two other basic principles governed Australian art. The most deep-seated was the centrality of concepts of nation to Australian visual culture. Grafted onto this was subscription to the values and practices of Euro-American art, taking over from mythologies of national identity in certain circumstances.

This is not to suggest there is no interest in ethnicity in Australian cultural circles. The framework of multiculturalism that operated strongly in the Australian arts bureaucracy and wider Australian society from the 1970s until the rise of Pauline Hanson and John Howard's politics of white backlash in the mid 1990s readily absorbed Young's 'Chineseness'. However, Young saw the handling of the art of Others as reinforcing the centrality of mainstream visual culture, no matter how well intentioned. Young's views are born out by fact. Between 1974 and 1989, the Australia Council, while having managerial responsibility for the cultural needs of all Australians gave responsibility for ethnic arts to its *special* Community Arts Program.⁴⁸ Young knew that artists who made their ethnicity a focus of their work were positioned to the side of mainstream art. The value of their work became relative, signifying a state of cultural authenticity cosmopolitan vanguard art had lost. Alternatively, it was used to raise issues of difference or to demonstrate the tolerance and openness of Australian society. Artists wishing to assert their difference or make difference an issue can have an impact. However, in doing so they operate against the impediments of exoticism and marginalisation, the meaning of what they do negotiated according to principles and expectations that may not be their own.

For over a decade, these effects were a private concern for Young, who worked within the orbit of mainstream art. The Chinese dimensions of his practice operated at the level of process. Otherwise, his work reflected general concerns among postmodern artists for the crisis of meaning and imagination in an era of commodified art, globalization, and fast media and information. It was only after beginning the *Double Ground Paintings*, with their greater emphasis on the mixing of visualities and Asian art, that Young resolved to more directly address the position of the Chinese artist and East Asian culture in relation to the authority of Australian and Euro-American art. For Young, Asian artists inevitably served as understudies to more recognisably Australian artists, critics, curators and audiences lacking the cultural literacy to interpret their work at any engaged level. In 1993, Young organised the conference *Australian Visual Arts in an Asian Context* with Vicente Butron, Christina Davidson and Donal Fitzpatrick.⁴⁹ Its aim was to recognise and explore the influence of Asian culture on contemporary Australian art.

In 1996, Young initiated the exhibition space 4A (shorthand for Australian Asian Artists' Association) with Vicente Butron, inviting Melissa Chiu to be its curator with the intention of encouraging Asian patronage of contemporary Australian art, not just the fostering of Asian artists in Australia. The aspiration at that stage was a grand one, with the visual arts group amalgamating with a new performing arts group spearheaded by Chris Pang and Tek Tan. The gallery was located in Chinatown and also set about building an archive of historical and contemporary Australian Asian art. Then, in 1997, Young became the founding president of the Association when it was formally launched in its role of public advocacy for Australian Asia art. The establishment of the society was a response to the lack of discussion around being an Australian Asian artist. Motivating Young was a feeling that Australian curators and the broader artworld promoted a superficial idea of identity and its contemporary politics, forging careers on revealing the next set of artist outsiders. There were many exhibitions, and analytical and theoretical texts that explored issues of difference. Ethnic artists were increasingly represented in exhibitions of contemporary Australian art, both in Australia and overseas. There were Australian Asian artists but at that time there were no critics with an Asian background. For Young and his associates in the founding of the society, Vicente Butron, Melissa Chiu and Chris Pang, and later Dachi Dang, Emile Goh, Felicia Kan, Lindy Lee, Victoria Lombregat, David Lui, Kate Mizrahi, Kim Moore, Laurence Tan, My Lee Thi, and Guan Wei, this meant that Australian Asian artists

had to construct a critical discourse and position for themselves. The alternative was to be spoken for and about.

Between 1997 and 1999, Young was deeply involved in the activities of the society, which was housed in a beautiful, historic building in Chinatown on a peppercorn rent from the City of Sydney and funded through private patronage and donations. However, in early 1999 Young moved to Melbourne and resigned as President. He missed out on seeing the enterprise grow into the Asia Australia Centre. However, in some ways the move was fortuitous because he was beginning to seriously reconsider the general discourse regarding 'Asianness' after long discussions with his old friend Vicente Butron, who was also exploring alternative views. For Young, these discourses had come to reflect the vicious circle ethnic artists fell into when trying to assert their identity and overcome stereotypes. When Australian Asian artists advocated for their 'Asianness'—outside their use of the representational languages and symbols of Asian culture in their work—they positioned themselves outside all discourses of Australian identity except multiculturalism, which had lost most of its authority by the late 1990s. The idea of the Australian Asian artist, although a factual reality, was inherently paradoxical; the decision to express cultural allegiances outside a performative Australianness suggesting not only a lack of identification with Australia but a capacity to subvert the idea of Australian culture. The AAAA expressed to supporters, opponents and onlookers the specificity of Asian artists' position and attitudes, that is, their separation from a fixed Australian identity. By demonstrating disruption and mutation, it underscored the impossibility of any such thing while working against the sense of diversity within Australian Asian cultural identity.

Similar paradoxes characterised Young's activities and situation outside Australia—where the symbolic role of national cultures is well established and the production of difference central to the art market. Just as Young's work concerns the historical diffusion of cultural reference points, he has had a longterm interest in how individual artists and localities gain value and authority in art. His varied experiences as an Australian, Hong Kong, and Chinese artist demonstrate how artworld relations mirror regional, class, and cultural struggles at the heart of international capitalist exchange, abstracting art and ideas in the pursuit of on-going commercial and institutional expansion. Yet, aspects of globalisation also undercut the construct of the nation-state in ways that are both positive and negative. Nationality, of course, was already under attack from competing social and political objectives during the modernist period. In the cultural sphere, the desire to encourage international communication, community and understanding drove aspects of abstract art and the development of synthetic languages like Esperanto and Makaton.⁵⁰ Today another globalising force has taken over, all nations now coming under the universal reign of capital. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri see the globalisation of markets and information disrupting old forms of domination such as the hegemony of the nation-state and the condition of peripheral territoriality associated with the age of imperialism.⁵¹ In an era of open and adaptable markets, the centres of world art do not exercise authority over the international art system in the same way they did in the modernist period when essentialised and universal visual languages were the ideal but art of international distinction only came from certain places. The institutionalisation of the international art market has only become complete in the era of postmodernity, along with the system of international art publishing and exhibitions. Globalisation is known as a force for cultural homogenisation. However, in reflecting post-Fordist criteria of production and consumption, that is, strong commodity differentiation, niche markets and boutique production it also demands cultural diversity. While the mechanisms of international art continue to endorse only a select range of cultural products, their choices and

interests now reflect globalised cultural flows and exchanges rather than being centralised and context-specific as in the past.

In this environment, both nationalism and nativism can be important codes for differentiating cultural products and investing them with value. However, not all nationalities and ethnicities signify in the same way, the demand for difference producing, for example, a bias towards ordinary or readily brandable cultures. The semantics of national culture, identity and ethnicity also play out differently in different circumstances. As someone who has moved across national and cultural borders, Young had to consider his place in the world from an early age, a demand that only intensified on becoming an artist. While living overseas in 1980, he drew a number of complex flow charts in a notebook. The diagrams described relationships in modern and contemporary art leading down to him in a blunt attempt to figure out where he fitted into international art at a time when only certain aesthetic activities and cultural locations registered. The same notebook shows his interest in the relationship of mainland China to the international art system. An entry dated 2 April 1982 includes a tiny clipping from a current issue of *Art Monthly*. It reads, ‘...in Peking a Chinese art magazine recently ran a long article, well illustrated, on abstract art, one of the first such articles for many years.’⁵² For Young, the item signified a potential opening of mainland art and society to outside influences following the end of the Cultural Revolution.

Since 1982, the international art system increasingly operates across and without regard for national borders. This, and China’s new economic openness, has overturned the mainland’s marginality to international art. Beijing, for instance, now has 789, a vast contemporary art facility supporting art magazines, exhibition spaces and artist’s studios. Chinese contemporary artists like Cai Guo-Qiang, Chen Zhen, Gu Wenda, Yin Xiuzhen and Xu Bing are major figures on the international festival circuit and in the global art market. There is no longer any need for Chinese artists to adopt international artistic discourses and practices to be accepted. Young has also seen contemporary art developments from mainland China celebrated in the region, as exemplified by the 1993 exhibition *Mao Goes Pop* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and the 1992 exhibition *China Post’89* in Hong Kong. While the international art world is now a diffuse conglomerate of institutions, processes and effects, suggesting that the former division of world art into cultural centres and outsides is in decline, it still works to reinforce entrenched cultural agendas and relations. For Young, the work of Chinese artists must represent an immanent ‘Chineseness’ or deal with Chinese issues to be of interest. He also sees international curators adopting a deterritorialised perspective on artistic products and subjectivities. Working without a transcendent perspective, they specialise in the thematic manipulation of artworks, weaving art from diverse contexts into their abstract interpretive schemas.⁵³

Young has benefited and lost out from this situation. The work of diasporic Chinese, including those from Hong Kong, does not stand as readily as an example of Chinese culture as art from Mainland China. Chinese artists have a strong consciousness of this symbolic difference however much they understand issues of transculturality, especially mainland artists who now operate from a position of unprecedented power. During the late 1990s, Young was travelling frequently to Hong Kong and Guangzhou, heightening his connections with Asia but also his awareness of being neither Western nor Eastern. Then, in late 1999 he spent time with the Chinese artists Chen Zhen, Cai Guo Qiang and Xu Bing in Melbourne, who were in Australia for the Asia Pacific Triennial. On meeting up again in Brisbane, Cai half-jokingly but half-seriously announced that Young was ‘half Chinese’. Spending time with these artists as friends prompted Young to make a decision that from then on he would refer to himself as a Hong Kong Australian

artist, reflecting the world's view of him even if it didn't necessarily fit his own perception of himself.

This decision came after more than a decade of international exhibitions and curatorial activities that began in 1988, when Young, John Nixon, Robert Owen and Jenny Watson represented Australia at the Seoul Olympics Art Exhibition. Initially, his participation suggested acceptance of a person with an Asian background as an Australian artist. After Seoul, Young had other opportunities to travel as a 'cultural representative' of Australia. Whenever he exhibited overseas, he would travel to the country to explore opportunities for cultural exchange. In 1991, he went to Singapore to take part in events around the first Asialink exhibition, 'Art from Australia: Eight Contemporary Views' curated by Alison Carroll.⁵⁴ The founding of Asialink, which the Australia Council of the Arts partly funded, exemplifies the changing role of the arts in Australia. The Whitlam Labor Government established the Australia Council in late 1972 as the main federal funding body on the basis of ideas of the innate value of High Art, the universality of cultural experience and the need to compensate for cultural deficiencies in Australian society. By the late 1980s, however, arguments about the economic and symbolic contribution of the arts to Australia—by shaping national identity and forging international relations—validated arts funding.⁵⁵

During the late 1980s and first half of the 1990s, this increasingly meant using art to build relations with Asia. Proclaiming that 'Asia was substantially where Australia's future lay', Paul Keating, Australia's Prime Minister from 1991 to 1996, argued that Australia had to engage with Asia 'at a level and with an intensity [it] had never come close to doing in the past.'⁵⁶ Although there is a history of Australian cultural exchange with Asia before 1990⁵⁷, engagement with Asia through culture became part of a clear strategy of Australian governments and arts organisations in the 1990s. Initially, Young saw this as a hopeful development, not only for the connections that might develop with Asia but also for cultural relations within Australia. It certainly raised the possibility that ethnic artists would no longer be seen as cultural outsiders even if artist's independent creative projects would be used to leverage political and economic advantage. Nonetheless, the Australia Council's commitment to exhibiting in Asia was genuine. In the mid 1990s, when it had very limited resources to send large-scale exhibitions internationally, the Council still found some funds to support exhibitions of Australian art to Asia. In this lean funding climate, the groundswell of enthusiasm for such projects was taken over by private individuals, notably Gene Sherman through exhibitions such as *System's End* (1996) and the *Rose Crossing: Contemporary Art in Asia* (1999-2000) that were organised by Sherman Galleries.

For much of the 1990s, Young used the institutional spotlight and the expanding machinery of international exchange programs to explore geographic and cultural divides. In 1994, he travelled to Taiwan and Hong Kong with the exhibition *Transcultural Painting*, which he co-initiated with Alison Carroll, Christina Davidson and Frances Lindsay.⁵⁸ The idea for the exhibition was to develop a critical dialogue with Asian artists, critics and audiences about the importance of transcultural practices in globalisation; hence the choice of Tony Clark, Linda Marrinon, Lindy Lee and Young for the exhibition; each artist, in their own way, investigating the complicated translation of cultural materials between temporal and cultural contexts. Within postmodernism, there was a wide range of art investigating issues of hegemony and dominance. This work represented the psychic life of individuals as comprised of an endless flow of signs and images from capitalism's highly developed media and communications sectors. By 1994, Young's work had moved beyond this point to explore a transcultural mixing of representations, cultural practices and ways of seeing, suggesting a radical disruption of cultural boundaries and

hierarchies. His history of self-generated activity also eschewed postmodernism's refutation of human agency, which precluded the possibility of people acting alone or in groups in their own interest. For Young, processes of globalisation challenged old conceptions of the collective subject grounded in nationalism and geography. By travelling with *Transcultural Painting* he sought to establish an active dialogue between Asian and Australian art circles around issues of cultural specificity and locality to challenge the 'Euro-American tradition' of making, disseminating and understanding art'.⁵⁹

In Taiwan, this failed, demonstrating the difficulty of overcoming the influence of people's immediate context to achieve an inter-cultural perspective. The exhibition created much good will for the artists involved. However, its underlying principle of undetermined cultural relations was too raw for Taiwanese artists and audiences struggling with very blunt issues of identity and nationhood due to relations with mainland China. Young also recognised that the Taiwanese and especially the Japanese art worlds had a highly centrist perspective, looking to Euro-American art for legitimisation. Having worked hard to establish connections there, they had little use for Australian art and artists. For Young, the main point was keeping things as open as possible to see what would emerge. His great concern was that art from the Asia-Pacific region would be made to fit Euro-American ideas of art rather than contributing new understandings of the nature and function of cultural enterprise. He raised these issues in a paper he gave at *Austral Constellations*, a conference held at The University of Hong Kong in 1994.⁶⁰ He argued that while the work of non-Western artists brought 'different aesthetic, literary and temporal registers' to the practice of art, this potential was routinely denied. Rather, connections to Euro-American aesthetic practices and issues were privileged—any such links also being celebrated as the sign of progressiveness in artists' home contexts. Otherwise, art from the Asia-Pacific was received in sociological terms through issues of 'identity and indigeneity' or had to fundamentally reflect its source. Young illustrated this by the expectation that contemporary Chinese artists should offer social and political resistance to repressive conditions in China, where artists in more liberal situations could develop their own interests.

Young reserved his strongest denunciation for the position of Australian artists in relation to international art. He argued that although postmodern strategies of reiteration and appropriation had allowed Australian artists to feel 'a psychological proximity to mainstream Euro-American Modernism', the centres of such art extended no such reciprocity towards Australian art.⁶¹ These arguments came home to Young in 1995 when he participated in *Antipodean Currents* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. The curator, Julia Robinson, and the catalogue writers, Eleanor Heartney, Catharine Lumby and Christina Davidson, had produced subtle critical frameworks to help explain the different artist's positions to an audience unfamiliar with Australian culture. The American response to the work and the visiting artists was polite. However, as Young had argued the year before, it was not possible for Australian art 'to be part of the history and institution of the avant-garde in Euro-America'.⁶² No matter how much artists—and perhaps more significantly the arts bureaucracy that sent exhibitions like *Antipodean Currents* overseas might claim or wish it—factors of power, economy and distance precluded this, the living proof being the rapid rise of Chinese artists internationally. Any patronage of outlying manifestations of Euro-American culture by major institutions of the old artworld was likely to be temporary, superficial and driven by opportunistic reasons as a genuine effort to engage in cultural exchange. As Young had experienced the difficult status of the Asian artist in Australia, he understood that for Australian artists wanting to operate in the international artworld the 'provincial effect [was] as big as ever ... neo avant-gardims [being] a last ditch effort of post-historical longing.'⁶³

Unable to function as an equal cultural partner in overseas contexts, Young depicted Australian artists as equally captive to the policy perspectives of the local arts bureaucracy. The escalating institutionalisation of contemporary Australian art, he argued, had collapsed critical distance in the cultural sphere. This was achieved by 'framing national cultural policy' in 'absolutely democratic, experimental terms' so that every 'anti' manoeuvre artists developed, including actions against the bureaucracy, was already absorbable before it took place.⁶⁴ A parallel example is the modelling of the publicly funded alternative gallery on the artist-initiated exhibition venues and hybrid art practices of the 1970s. The subsequent transformation of the alternative gallery into the contemporary art space in the early 1980s, followed by the rehousing of what were once humble galleries dedicated to programming in deluxe, icon buildings in the 1990s reveals the lengths taken to recuperate, then package, vanguard art as entertainment.⁶⁵ Young argued the arts bureaucracy rewarded artists for acting out projects of individuation, identity, cultural specificity and ideology critique. Where radical artists had developed these things in the spirit of opposition, administrators now used them to demonstrate the open and affirmative cultural system they had created. Young's lecture depicted the arts bureaucracy as expert in its management and articulation of cultural issues, but lacking any conception of history, canon, or value in relation to vanguard Australian art, turning artists into objects not subjects while closing off possibilities for actual engagement in critical culture.

By the late 1990s, Young's experiences as an artist had put the complexity under which all artists operated beyond doubt for him. His knowledge of theory and of the fortunes of radical artists since the early twentieth century in enacting critique and resisting co-optation only added to this awareness. Recognising little possibility of changing the art system, Young accepted the annexation of the public cultural sphere and the contemporary *zeitgeist* of globalisation as the context in which he necessarily worked. His current position is to engage with the artworld in less direct ways than previously, seeing his work as the primary means of exploring the erosion of time and place under globalisation. He also knows that living between cultures has some advantages. He can work in different capacities in different places, avoiding some of the pressure to project a fixed artistic identity. While he has represented Australia in the international cultural arena, he has also maintained his cultural links with his homeland. In 2001, for example, he executed a large-scale public installation over five floors of the North Point Interchange for Hong Kong's Mass Transit Railway.⁶⁶ Through a sequence of wall images and abstract, looping patterns imbedded in the station floor, the installation addressed issues of culture and spatiality in globalisation. As a product of shifting colonial, hemispherical and economic relations, Hong Kong is an exemplar of the decentered effects of the evolving global culture and information space. Young's installation reflected this in physical, representational and aesthetic form.

Young's recent experiences as an artist highlight the ambiguity involved in determining contemporary identity. Since 2002, he has exhibited in Europe as a Hong Kong artist with the added irony that the Hong Kong of his origins no longer exists. In their own ways both Hong Kong and Australia are places where questions of cultural transrelation are entirely apposite but which defy forms of analysis that are geographically deterministic and culturally essentialist. Young also recognises that many diasporic artists, writers, filmmakers and intellectuals who make Hong Kong the subject of their work do so from outside Hong Kong, dealing with the idea not the everyday actuality of the place. Young's current work explores the difficulty of meaning and identity under the forces of globalisation, ultra-high technology and seemingly insurmountable cultural divisions. Once he saw art as having a strong hermeneutic function. Today his views on the capacity for interpretation and analysis have changed, although he is still interested in the

subjective interplay between artists, artworks and audiences. Working purely pictorially, Young's major sources are now the poets Kenneth White and Charles Olsen. Both writers involve themselves in complex dialectics of here and there. White is a traveller to extreme places beyond the sphere of global modernity, who makes a point of leaving something of himself wherever he goes. Olsen engages in conceptual travelling. Living in a small community, he pulls things about the world into his writing.

In 1991 Jean-François Lyotard wrote, 'the work of art is not merely a cultural object ... It harbours within it an excess, a rapture, a potential of associations that overflows all the determinations of its "reception" and "production"'.⁶⁷ The trajectory of Young's artistic career has, in many respects, moved from the one point to the other. He began making art acutely aware of its limitations and the boundaries in which he practiced. Like many artists, he has struggled against the art system's dexterity in instrumentalising the creative core of what artists do. His activities today are less immediately engaging than when he involved himself in a range of artist-initiated endeavours. Although these pursuits demonstrated the different ways in which artists can operate as engaged intellectuals, Young is now less interested in the functionality of his actions. In exploring the instability of personal and collective experience, the poetic connections and imaginary spaces of his work are his primary means of engaging cultural relations. At the same time, the lessons of the past are not forgotten. While the *Double Ground Paintings* seek to make the viewer aware of the potential of looking at things in an open-ended way they continue to raise questions of art and art making.

Notes

¹ In 1985, Young started Jungian analysis with Janice Koh-Daw, the only analyst trained at the Jung Institute, Zurich practicing in Sydney. This was a great turning point, suggesting that art making was also a process of what Jung calls 'individuation'. He stopped analysis around 1995.

² For a summary of these views, see Steven M. Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 62–63. Part Two of Buechler's text deals with diverse theoretical readings of the intersection of socio-historical structures at the global, national, local and individual level, particular in the work of Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, and Alberto Melucci,

³ This was for the period 1974 to 1977, and was an honours degree for which he received a first. In the Philosophy Department Young studied general philosophy with John Burnheim, philosophy of science with Alan Chalmers and Denise Russell, anarchism with Georg Molnar, phenomenology with Janet Vaux and Wittgenstein with K.T. Fann. In the Department of Fine Arts, he studied with Mark Booth, Anthony Bradley, Robin Cooper, Clive Evatt, Michael Nicholson and Bernard Smith. He missed working with the critic and theorist Donald Brook, who had left that year to work in Adelaide.

⁴ The effects on Hong Kong were very real and explain Young's parents sense of the pressing need to send their child to safety far away from Hong Kong. For example, Rey Chow, writes, 'My most vivid childhood memories of the Cultural Revolution were the daily reports in 1966 and 1967 of bodies floating down into the Pearl River Delta and down into Hong Kong harbour, of local political unrest that led to disruption of school and business, and of the brutal murder of Lam Bun, an employee of Hong Kong's Commercial Radio (a pro-British institution ...) whose work during that period involved reading a daily editorial denouncing leftist activities.' Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 20.

⁵ Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, London, Granta, 1991, pp. 124–125, cited in Ien Ang, 'Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Podtmodern World', *Mots Pluriels*, No. 7, 1998, <http://arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriel/MP798ia.html>, unpaginated.

⁶ This position also reflects the British social theorist Anthony Giddens's argument that the formation of the self in recent society is the product of a reflexive process of social construction. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1991.

⁷ Ang, Ien, 'Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Podtmodern World', *Mots Pluriels*, no. 7, 1998, <http://arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriel/MP798ia.html>

⁸ Ien Ang, 'Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Podtmodern World', *Mots Pluriels*, no. 7, 1998, <http://arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriel/MP798ia.html>, unpaginated.

⁹ For a discussion of how different patterns of Chinese migration determine different relationships to Chinese ethnic identity and Chinese cultural heritage see Marie-Paule Ha, 'Cultural Identities and The Chinese Diaspora', *Mots Pluriels*, no. 7, 1998, <http://arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP798mph.html>, and her source Gungwu Wang, *China and the Chinese Overseas*, Times Academic Press, 1991.

¹⁰ Ien Ang, 'Migrations of Chineseness: Ethnicity in the Postmodern World', *Mots Pluriels*, no. 7, 1998, <http://arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriel/MP798ia.html>, unpaginated. Also see Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991, pp. 28–29. Cited in Ang.

¹¹ He located Panow by looking up artists in the Yellow Pages and selecting one that lived close to his school. Panow was a graduate of the St Petersburg Art Academy. His practice continued to be driven by the shift from realism to impressionism in early twentieth century Russian art. Young worked with him between the ages of thirteen and sixteen.

¹² The drawing was of the champion St George player Billy Smith being tackled by a player from the Balmain Tigers.

¹³ Murray was a graduate of Sydney's National Art School and favoured gestural abstraction.

¹⁴ Marie-Paul Ha, Ha, Marie-Paule, 'Cultural Identities and The Chinese Diaspora', *Mots Pluriels*, no. 7, 1998, <http://arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP798mph.html>

¹⁵ He also studied life drawing at the Julian Ashton School of Art at night to develop his skills.

¹⁶ Young had already identified a topic for his doctorate, aiming to write on Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Colour*, a response to Goethe's colour theory.

¹⁷ This was as a result of winning a competition at Sydney's Royal Easter Show.

¹⁸ Young knew from Eva Murray that gestural and painterly abstraction was the main orientation of the painting department at the National Art School, Brett Whitely being its most celebrated recent graduate.

¹⁹ He was also introduced to the Conceptual art collection of the Power Foundation at the University of Sydney.

²⁰ Joseph Kosuth, Art After Philosophy Parts I, II, and III, *Studio International*, Vol. 198, No. 915, October 1969, pp. 134–137, No. 916 November 1969, pp. 160–161, No. 917 December 1969, pp. 212–213. Parts I and II are reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 1999, pp. 158–177.

²¹ The full statement on this matter reads, 'Works of art are analytical propositions. That is, if viewed within their context—as art—they provide no information what-so-ever about any matter of fact. A work of art is a tautology in that it is a presentation of the artist's intention, that is, he is saying that a particular work of art is art, which means, is a definition of art. Thus, that it is art is true a priori (which is what Judd means when he states that "if someone calls it art, it's art"). Joseph Kosuth, Art After Philosophy Part I, *Studio International*, Vol. 198, No. 915, October 1969, reprinted in Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson, *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Cambridge Mass., MIT Press, 1999, p. 165.

²² Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October* 55, Winter 1990, pp. 130–131.

²³ Young spent much time looking at Magritte's work while he wrote his honours thesis.

²⁴ Young was introduced to conceptual photography, especially the work of Richard Long, Jan Dibbets by through his friendship with the British sculptor John Penny and the photographer Lynn Silverman. This interest was reinforced when Young saw the Third Biennale of Sydney, *European Dialogue*, in 1979. Curated by Nick Waterlow, the Biennale had strong complement of conceptual photography, including a specific section on recent European photography. In demonstrating aesthetic indifference to the medium and the use of the camera as a simple recording device, this work emphasised a phenomenological model of perception and the semiotic underpinnings of photographic images. It included artists like Laszlo Beke, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Victor Burgin, Jan Dibbets, Hamish Fulton, Richard Long, Robert Owen, Annette Messager, Helmut Schweizer, and Ger Van Elk.

²⁵ Hans-Johann Glock, 'Kant and Wittgenstein: Philosophy, Necessity and Representation', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 1997, p. 295.

²⁶ That is from the modernist metaphysics of art to an ontological stance that considers issues of the representation of essence.

²⁷ Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight; Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, second edition, revised with an introduction by Wlad Godzich, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1983, p. 148.

²⁸ Biographical notes provided to the author by the artist.

²⁹ At University Young had become interested in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in particular *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and *The Visible and the Invisible*. In the first book Merleau-Ponty advances the idea that the body is an expressive entity, its perceptual capacities a point of entry to the world and hence a source of meaning.

³⁰ Biographical notes provided to the author by the artist.

³¹ Ahern was a child prodigy who had studied with Karlheinz Stockhausen, Cornelius Cardew, John Cage and Nam June Paik.

³² For a more developed discussion of this tussle see Andreas Huyssens, 'Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context', in Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1993, pp. 140–151.

³³ Andreas Huyssens, 'Back to the Future: Fluxus in Context', in Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, 1993, p. 149.

³⁴ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 125. In the same passage, Chow comments that in the case of the Chinese, 'The farther one is removed from this centralised literacy, the more dubious is one's claim to the culture.'

³⁵ Tillers was born in Australia of parents who migrated to Australia from Latvia.

³⁶ Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'. Page numbers cited here from the version in Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984, pp. 8–25.

³⁷ Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'. Page numbers cited here from the version in Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984, p. 18.

³⁸ Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'. Page numbers cited here from the version in Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984, p. 18.

³⁹ Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'. Page numbers cited here from the version in Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984, p. 18.

⁴⁰ Ian Burn, 'The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath'. Page numbers cited here from the version in Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984, p. 17. For a slightly different perspective on this failure see Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual

Art 1962 – 1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions'. For Buchloh, Conceptualism's negation of art's mythic nature could not result in the critical transcendence artists imagined, despite its achievements in rediscovering art's institutional nature and significantly extending its analytical understanding. Rather, they demonstrated the *impossibility* of escaping art's historical condition. By reducing art to an 'aesthetic of administration', Buchloh argues Conceptualism reflected autonomous art's 'perpetual efforts' to 'emulate the regnant episteme within the paradigmatic frame proper to art itself' on altered terms. He argues, Conceptualism's mute representations of the empirical facticity of art echo the bureaucratic 'operating logic of late capitalism and its positivist instrumentality.' For Buchloh, Conceptualism was bound to a 'profound and irreversible loss' of critical function, though he contends that this was largely unrecognised by artists, who 'optimistically' regarded their practice as a process of enlightenment and liberation, posed against institutionalising forces in the artworld and wider society. Nonetheless, he credits Conceptualism with generating an understanding of the collapse of the divisions between the structures of advanced capitalism and administrative domination well in advance of existing understandings of the nature of art. p. 143.

²⁷ For more information on these developments, see Helen Grace, "So I joined the Teamsters" in Ann Stephen (ed), *Artists Think: The Late works of Ian Burn*, Sydney, Power Publications in association with Monash University Gallery, 1996, pp. 55–59. Though it is important to note that in largely depending on government funding, these activities were still connected to pervasive economic and administrative forms of control.

²⁸ After participating in a reading group with the Chinese-American philosopher K.T. Fann in 1975, Young started reading Mao, Marx and Lenin.

²⁹ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 149.

¹ The ingrained hostility to the art of the post during the 1960s should not be forgotten from this historical vantage point after historicist postmodernism's return to artistic tradition. Josuth Kosuth, for example, asserted in 1969 that. 'Art before the modern period is as much art as Neanderthal man is man. It is for this reason that around the same time I replaced the term 'work' for art *proposition*. Because a conceptual *work* of art in the traditional sense, is a contradiction in terms.' Joseph Kosuth, *The Sixth Investigation 1969 Proposition 14*, Cologne, Gerd De Vries/Paul Maenz, 1971, n. p., Quoted in Benjamin Buchloh, 'Conceptual Art 1962–1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October* 55, Winter 1990, p. 108.

² During his stay in Paris he was also reading the work of Louis Aragon and Jung's speculations on alchemy.

³ 'Recollections 1990', reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 136.

⁴ Frank J. Hoffman, 'Dao and Process', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2002, p. 208.

⁵ Frank J. Hoffman, 'Dao and Process', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2002, p. 208.

⁶ Young's work *The First Mirage* was a photograph of an Imants Tillers exhibition at the Temple of the Winds in Melbourne. The Temple of the Winds is a neo-classical pavilion near Melbourne's Botanical Gardens that artists including Tony Clark, John Nixon and Imants Tillers used as a temporary exhibition space.

⁷ John Young, 'Recollections 1990', reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 136. 'n-space' was one a group of virtual and actual exhibitions spaces established by John Nixon and Imants Tillers in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane around this time. Some were titled according to the state they existed in, as for example, V-Space and Q-Space. N-space was Tillers's insight, reflecting the idea of exhibiting anywhere.

⁸ *Documenta 7* was curated by Rudi Fuchs who argued that he wanted to free art of the 'various constraints and social parodies it is caught up in.' The exhibition had a strong emphasis on installation art. Germano Celant curated the section of *Documenta 7* in which Nixon and Tillers participated. Nixon presented a large-scale installation of paintings, *Self Portrait (Non-Objective Composition)*. The installation was a wall of 'paintings' executed on newspaper and red cloth, each with a single cross as a motif. Tiller's work was *One Painting (two public ventilations)*, one of his 'ventilations' series, which investigated the diverse implications of a mis-registered postcard of the Basilica of St Francis at Assisi that Tiller's had found. Young had worked with Tillers on one painting in the series of 'ventilations'.

⁹ See Terry Smith, 'The Provincialism Problem', *Art Forum*, September 1974, pp. 54, 55, 58. Reprinted in Paul Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984. By the 1960s it was often positively accepted that the agenda in Australian art would be singular and set by the artists producing the most 'advanced' work in the international art arena. For example, when commenting on recent purchases at the National Gallery of Victoria, in his revealingly titled 1969 essay "One World", curator of Australian art at the NGV, Brian Finemore wrote, 'Recent purchases by the National Gallery of Victoria have concentrated around the area of geometric abstraction earlier clarified in "The Field" exhibition. All seven of the young artists acquired, Ball, Coleing, Doolin, Hickey, Hunter, Lendon and Partos, invite comparison with the stars of the international firmament, Stella, Poons, Newman and Reinhardt, scorning the local teacup in which the Antipodean storm raged.' Brian Finemore, *Freedom From Prejudice*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 1977, page 99.

¹⁰ John Young and Terry Blake, 'On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City-dweller', *Art & Text*, No. 2, Winter 1981, pp.

¹¹ This is exemplified by the statement, 'In advanced Capitalism, language does not function on the representation model, representing 'reality', commodity carefully weighted by use-value, since there is no more correspondence between word and object. Only the abstract, discontinuous manipulation of the code and its reproduction exists. We consume not an object but an element in a code.' John Young and Terry Blake, 'On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City-dweller', *Art & Text*, No. 2, Winter 1981, p.

¹² On this point they wrote, 'In the domain of art criticism ... Marxists and Foucaultians (usually apostate Marxists) become so captivated by their new theories that they begin to establish the very "supermarket of ideas" that they denounce.' John Young and Terry Blake, 'On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City-dweller', *Art & Text*, No. 2, Winter 1981, p.

¹³ See for example Greg Heath and Ian Milliss's essays in the catalogue of the 1973 National Gallery of Victoria exhibition *Object and Idea*. Gregory Heath, 'new aesthetic?', *Object and Idea*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 1974, pp. 4–5. and Ian Milliss, 'new artist?', *Object and Idea*, Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria, 1974, pp. 6–7.

- ¹⁴ See especially his 'Australian New Wave and the 'second degree'', *Art and Text*, 1981, reprinted in Paul Taylor ed., *Anything goes: Art in Australia 1970–1980*, Melbourne, Art & Text, 1984, pp. 158–167.
- ¹⁵ John Young and Terry Blake, 'On Some Alternatives to the Code in the Age of Hyperreality; the Hermit and the City-dweller', *Art & Text*, No. 2, Winter 1981, p.
- ¹⁶ Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*, Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983, p. xii.
- ¹⁷ Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: essays on postmodern culture*, Port Townsend, Bay Press, 1983, p. xii.
- ¹⁸ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *The Postmodern Turn*, New York: Guilford Press, 1997, p. 137.
- ¹⁹ See, Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method: Outline of an anarchistic* theory of knowledge*, London, Verso, [1975] 1978.
- ²⁰ E-mail to the author 6 September 2004.
- ²¹ In 'Notes on Thirst (Spring-Summer 1983), Young wrote, 'Does my Dobril-Wittgenstein head represent something for me – the desert's hermit. But of course, this head is the most wanted object (of a certain tremendous significance) in this desert. Can it go any further – an object of identity and desire, and at the same time it is the coming to terms with its significance (the philosophy of L.W./art). That it stands at a special juncture for me, (both of these are lacking in Australia) so it is not so much as what it stands for perhaps – but a symbol of attainment. Like the grail, it is a condition and depth of thought that we need to comprehend and grasp at its very roots – there is nothing short of a new way of looking at 'art' which is necessary.' 'Notes on Thirst (Spring-Summer 1983), reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 135.
- ²² 'Notes on Thirst (Spring-Summer 1983), reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 135.
- ²³ Although Young did not know it at the time, Derain frequently painted from photographs.
- ²⁴ His sources include Poussin and Cézanne, the Italian Primitives, Douanier Rousseau, Byzantine and French Gothic and Romanesque art.
- ²⁵ John Young, 'Angels, landscapes and molluscs: the work of David Strachan', *Art and Australia*, Vol. 36, No. 1, September 1998, fn. 1.
- ²⁶ Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 122.
- ²⁷ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Album-catalogue de l'Exposition André Derain*, Paul Guillaume Gallery, 1916, reprinted in Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and reviews 1902–1918*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman, London, Thames and Hudson, 1972, pp. 444–446.
- ²⁸ Guillaume Apollinaire, *Album-catalogue de l'Exposition André Derain*, Paul Guillaume Gallery, 1916, reprinted in Guillaume Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and reviews 1902–1918*, ed. Leroy C. Breunig, trans. Susan Suleiman, London, Thames and Hudson, 1972, p. 445.
- ²⁹ Rosalind Krauss, 'Perpetual Inventory', *October 88*, Spring 1999, p. 88.
- ³⁰ Rosalind Krauss, 'Perpetual Inventory', *October 88*, Spring 1999, p. 88.
- ³¹ Henry McDonald 'The Ontological Turn: Philosophical Sources of American Literary Theory', *Inquiry*, 45, 2002, p. 16.
- ³² Simon Malpas, 'Sublime Ascesis: Lyotard, art and the event' in *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Volume 7, Number 1, April 2002, p. 199.
- ³³ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 39.
- ³⁴ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 61.
- ³⁵ Young also had a knowledge and appreciation of the writings of Gilles Deleuze, another French philosopher with an interest in the liberation from fixed, rule-bound conventions, especially those in language. Terry Blake introduced Young to Deleuze's work.
- ³⁶ 'Propositions for the *Polychrome Paintings* (1989), reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 136.
- ³⁷ 'Propositions for the *Polychrome Paintings* (1989), reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 136.
- ³⁸ 'Propositions for the *Polychrome Paintings* (1989), reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 136.
- ³⁹ E-mail to the author 6 September 2004.
- ⁴⁰ For a discussion of the complexities of collaboration see, John Roberts, 'Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004, pp. 557–564. With the beginning of the Double Ground Paintings in 2003, Young regarded the artists that worked with him in the studio as assistants rather than 'collaborators', Renata Petanceski and Brett Smith being the first.
- ⁴¹ 'Propositions for the *Polychrome Paintings* (1989), reprinted in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 136.
- ⁴² Miwon Kwon, 'One Place After Another: Notes on Site Specificity', *October 80*, Spring 1987, p. 88.
- ⁴³ Roland Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath, New York, Hill & Wang, 1977.
- ⁴⁴ These included the titles *Model in Movement*, *Adam's Fifth Rib*, *Artist's Model*, *Seen in England*. Graham Coulter-Smith, 'Ecstasy and Administration John Young's Major Work's 1979–1992' in *John Young Silhouettes and Polychromes 1979–1992*, Melbourne, Schwartz City, 1993, p. 42.
- ⁴⁵ Some elements in the *Polychrome Paintings* pull the frame of reference back to that of serious, vanguard art. *The Proletariat's Child (Bonomo)* (1991) include a detail of *The Large Glass* and refers to a collaboration between John Cage, Jasper Johns and Merce Cunningham to Imants Tillers, the Joe Bonomo Story being a performance he was involved in the early 1970s. *BellJar Naturalism* (1991) includes references to Yves Klein, the work of John Nixon and the physical act of painting, privileging artisanship over the technological modes of production.
- ⁴⁶ E-mail to the author 6 September 2004.
- ⁴⁷ Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer, New York, St Martins, 1990.

⁴⁸ Notebook entry 2 April 1982

¹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Appendix: Answering the question: What is Postmodernism', trans. Regis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 74.

² Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London and New York, 1989, p. 154.

³ Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, London and New York, 1989, p. 154.

⁴ Biographical notes supplied to the author by the artist.

⁵ He also closely read Clark's *Modern Asian Art in Asia*, North Ryde, Craftsman House in association with G+B Arts International, 1998.

⁶ Western culture is also the focus of most art historical writing.

⁷ See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Manchester, University of Manchester Press, 1984.

⁸ Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw, Manchester [University of Manchester Press], 1984, p. 22.

⁹ See Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 118.

¹⁰ Takis Fotopoulos, 'The Myth of Postmodernity', *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2001, p. 32.

¹¹ Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994, p. 6, quoted in Benzi Zhang, 'Identity in Diaspora and Diaspora in Writing: the poetics of cultural transrelation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Number 2, August 2000, p. 126.

¹² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1967 [1953], No. 139, p. 54. For example, he argues that while individuals might have private experiences they cannot have 'private language'. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1967 [1953], Nos. 267-280, pp. 94-97.

¹³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1975, pp. Nos. 44-50, p. 8, Nos. 113-115, p. 17.

¹⁴ Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 122.

¹⁵ See Veronica Vasterling, 'Body and Language: Butler, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard on the Speaking Embodied Subject', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2003, p. 205.

¹⁶ John Hay, 'The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?' in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlowe (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 42.

¹⁷ See Veronica Vasterling, 'Body and Language: Butler, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard on the Speaking Embodied Subject', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2003, p. 210.

¹⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, New York and London, Routledge, 1995 (1945), p. 197. Cited in Veronica Vasterling, 'Body and Language: Butler, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard on the Speaking Embodied Subject', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2003, p. 211.

¹⁹ Veronica Vasterling, 'Body and Language: Butler, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard on the Speaking Embodied Subject', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2003, p. 211.

²⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, New York and London, Routledge, 1995 (1945), p. 189. Cited in Veronica Vasterling, 'Body and Language: Butler, Merleau-Ponty and Lyotard on the Speaking Embodied Subject', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2003, p. 211.

²¹ John Hay, 'The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?' in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlowe (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 43.

²² John Hay, 'The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?' in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlowe (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 43.

²³ John Hay, 'The Body Invisible in Chinese Art?' in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlowe (eds), *Body, Subject and Power in China*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1994, p. 43.

²⁴ François Cheng, *Empty and Full: The language of Chinese painting*, trans. Michael K. Hong, Boston, Shambhala Press, [1991] 1994, pp. 134-135.

²⁵ Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 113.

²⁶ Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, pp. 113-114.

²⁷ See Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 119.

²⁸ See Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 111.

²⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Appendix: Answering the question: What is Postmodernism', trans. Regis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984.

³⁰ Christine Battersby, 'Terror, Terrorism and the Sublime: rethinking the sublime after 1789 and 2001', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2003, p. 87.

³¹ Young-Bae Song, 'Crisis of Cultural Identity in East Asia; on the meaning of Confucian ethics in the age of globalisation', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 2002, p. 119.

³² For a discussion of Daoism as a utilitarian socio-political philosophy see Rui Zhu, 'Wu-Wei: Lao-zi, Zhuang-zi and the aesthetic judgement', *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2002, p. 62.

³³ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1967 [1953], No. 186 p. 75 and No. 213, p. 84.

³⁴ Benzi Zhang, 'Identity in Diaspora and Diaspora in Writing: the poetics of cultural transrelation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Number 2, August 2000, p. 136.

³⁵ Clark quoted in Graham Forsyth, 'The Strangeness of Panorama', Sydney, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, 1997, reprinted in Max Delany, *Tony Clark: Public and Private Paintings 1982–1998*, Bulleen, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, p. 37. Forsyth's text does not give the original source of the quote.

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. L. S. Roudiez, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991, p. 104, quoted in Benzi Zhang, 'Identity in Diaspora and Diaspora in Writing: the poetics of cultural transrelation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Number 2, August 2000, p. 137.

² These were taken from a CD-Rom of historical photographs of Hong Kong,

³ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 24–25.

⁴ Rey Chow, *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 118.

⁵ Kate McFarlane, Kate, 'Diaspora, Cultural Practice and Syncretic Visuality', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2004, p. 176.

⁶ This list reflects the characteristics Lyotard argues defeat the demand for realism in art. See Jean-François Lyotard, 'Appendix: Answering the question: What is Postmodernism', trans. Regis Durand, in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 73.

⁷ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1991, pp. 412–413.

⁸ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p.42.

⁹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p.43.

¹⁰ Benzi Zhang, 'Identity in Diaspora and Diaspora in Writing: the poetics of cultural transrelation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Number 2, August 2000, p. 127.

¹¹ Christine Battersby, 'Terror, Terrorism and the Sublime: rethinking the sublime after 1789 and 2001', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2003, p. 85.

¹² Christine Battersby, 'Terror, Terrorism and the Sublime: rethinking the sublime after 1789 and 2001', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2003, p. 85.

¹³ See Karl-Heinz Pohl, 'Chinese and Western Values: Reflections on a Cross-Cultural Dialogue on a Universal Ethics', http://www.cass.net.cn/e_waishiju/infoShow/Arcitle_Show_Newsletter.asp?ID=330&Title=Newsletters

¹⁴ See Karl-Heinz Pohl, 'Chinese and Western Values: Reflections on a Cross-Cultural Dialogue on a Universal Ethics', http://www.cass.net.cn/e_waishiju/infoShow/Arcitle_Show_Newsletter.asp?ID=330&Title=Newsletters

¹⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation', in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London and New York, Routledge, p. 132, quoted in Benzi Zhang, 'Identity in Diaspora and Diaspora in Writing: the poetics of cultural transrelation', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 21, Number 2, August 2000, p. 136.

¹ Cornford & Cross, 'Inside Outside', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004, p. 658.

² See Cornford & Cross, 'Inside Outside', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004, p. 660.

³ See John Roberts, 'Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004, p. 558.

⁴ See Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, New York, Knopf, 1991.

⁵ Harold Perkin, *The Third Revolution: Professional Elites in the Modern World*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 1.

⁶ See Eve Chiapello, 'Evolution and Co-optation: The 'Artist Critique of Management and Capitalism'', *Third Text*, Vol. 18, Issue 6, 2004, p. 589–590, p. 592.

⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Brian Massumi and Geoff Bennington, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 46.

⁸ For a discussion of the role of 'expertism' and social organization see, Harold Perkin, *The Third Revolution: Professional Elites in the Modern World*, London, Routledge, 1996.

⁹ John Nixon, *Interview: An interview with Ashley Crawford*, Melbourne, City Gallery, 1992, unpaginated.

¹⁰ Peter Cripps, *Recession Art & other Strategies*, Clayton, Monash University Gallery, p. 3.

¹¹ Peter Cripps, *Recession Art & other Strategies*, Clayton, Monash University Gallery, p. 7.

¹² The main participants in Anti-Music with Nixon were Tony Clark in Melbourne and Gary Warner in Brisbane, among many others.

¹³ See Carolyn Barnes, *Contested Space: an investigation of the structural foundations and historical consequences of conceptualist art practices in Australia, 1968–1988*, PhD thesis, The University of Melbourne, 2004.

¹⁴ For information on Sheridan's time at the EAF see Stephanie Britton (ed.), *A Decade at the E.A.F.: a history of the Experimental Art Foundation 1974–1984*, Adelaide Experimental Art Foundation, 1984. For information on Nixon and Cripps' time at the IMA see Bob Lingard and Sue Cramer (eds.) *Institute of Modern Art—A Documentary History*, Brisbane, Institute of Modern Art, 1989.

¹⁵ Lingard and Cramer, *History of the IMA*, p.) *Institute of Modern Art—A Documentary History*, Brisbane, Institute of Modern Art, 1989, p. 79.

¹⁶ This was organised with the help of Michael and Tony McGillick.

¹⁷ This variously comprised David Atkins, Mark Austin, Mark Down, Emmanuel Gasparinatos, John Gilberg, Leslie Holden, Sue Manigan, Kathy Marmor, Peter Myers, Ot Ratsaphong, Patricia Silvas, Neil Stevenson, and Young. The Sydney College of the Arts Student's Association was the publisher.

¹⁸ The other important examples of this attitude are *Art and Text*, which began publication in 1981, and *On The Beach*, which began publication in 1983.

¹⁹ The interview appeared first in *La Nouvelle Observateur*, 12-3-77, and then in *Telos*, No. 32, Summer, 1977. *ZX*, Issue 2, 1978, pp. 24–27.

²⁰ Jean-François Lyotard, 'Reply to the question What is the Post-Modern?', trans. Meaghan Morris and Ross Gibson, *ZX*, Winter 1984, pp. 10–18. Burchill and McCamley edited this issue under the pseudonyms Y White and A Chambers.

²¹ Alex Benchimol, 'The Cultural Politics of the Habermasian Public Sphere: A re-examination of the Modernity/Postmodernity Debate in its National, Social and Political Contexts', *The European Legacy*, Vo. 6, No. 4, 2001, p. 482.

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- ²² See for example, Terry Blake and John Young, 'Master Science, Slave Art', *ZX*, #4, June 1979, pp. 22–23; *ZX (Baltic Issue)*, No. 2, August 1978; Ian Griffin and Jim Venturi, 'Run The Bastards Over!', *ZX*, Winter 1983, pp. 10–18.
- ²³ The core members of the group were Terry Blake, Graham Forsyth and John Laidler. Young organised for the band to perform at Sydney College and also had a hand in orienting its performances to Fluxus multimedia events.
- ²⁴ See for example, the mix of articles and contributors to contemporary issues of *Virgin Press*.
- ²⁵ Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present*, p. 45.
- ²⁶ Steven M. Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 177.
- ²⁷ Q Space was located in a derelict wool store in inner Brisbane. Nixon did not seek permission to use the warehouse, merely walking off the street when he wanted to install work there. Nixon established Q Space Annex in the living room of his apartment in Phillips Street, Spring Hill.
- ²⁸ N-space was a development from the names John Nixon gave various exhibition spaces to identify the state of Australia in which they were situated, hence V-Space, a subsidiary space in the building that housed Nixon's main gallery Art Projects, Q-Space and Q Space annex.
- ²⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Vol. 2, *Mille Plateaux*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1980, republished as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- ³⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Capitalisme et Schizophrénie*, Vol. 2, *Mille Plateaux*, Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1980, republished as *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- ³¹ See, Steven M. Buechler, *Social Movements in Advanced Capitalism: The Political Economy and Cultural Construction of Social Activism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 178.
- ³² Janet Shanks, 'Kerb Your Dog 1983 - 1992' in John Nixon and John Young (eds.), *Kerb Your Dog Textbook: independent's number*, Sydney, Kerb Your Dog, 1992, unpaginated.
- ³³ This issue of the publication also contains a list of contributors to the previous 11 issues of *Kerb Your Dog*.
- ³⁴ Deborah Stevenson, *Art and Organisation: making Australian cultural policy*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2000, p. 2.
- ³⁵ The artists included were Marianne Bailieu, Matin Boscott, Kate Farrell, Tim Johnson, John Lethbridge, Carole Roberts, Brendon Stewart, Ellen Thompson, Imants Tillers and Young. For a contemporary review see, Colin Hood, 'For the Life of Energies', *On The Beach*, 3/4, Summer/Autumn 1984, pp. 15–19.
- ³⁶ An example of this is Scott Reford and Luke Robert's exhibition *In full sunlight* which was organised as a response to *Victory over the Sun: White Square on White*.
- ³⁷ This are words Young used to describe this position in 2000. See John Young, 'Locality Flux', *Like Magazine*, No. 13, Summer, 2000, pp. 16–20.
- ³⁸ John Young, 'Angels, landscapes and molluscs: the work of David Strachan', *Art and Australia*, Vol. 36, No. 1, September 1998, pp. 56–57.
- ³⁹ Strachan was a member of 'the Sydney Group', that formed in 1945 and also included Jean Bellette, Paul Haefliger, Fancis Lymburner, Eric Wilson, Wallace Thornton, Wolfgang Cadamatis, Justin O'Brien, Geoffrey Graham, and G.F. Lewers. Subsuming these artists to the international return to order, Smith argued that despite their use of the classical their work was 'at heart romantic', 'decorative' and 'merrily eclectic'. Bernard Smith, *Australian Painting 1788–1970*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, Second Edition 1972, pp. 274–275.
- ⁴⁰ John Young, 'Locality Flux', *Like Magazine*, No. 13, Summer, 2000, pp. 16–20.
- ⁴¹ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, New York, Norton, 1995, p. 5, quoted in Timothy W. Luke, 'Globalisation, Popular Resistance and Postmodernity', *Democracy & Resistance*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2001, p. 321.
- ⁴² For an extrapolation of this argument see Timothy W. Luke, 'Globalisation, Popular Resistance and Postmodernity', *Democracy & Resistance*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2001, pp. 321–326.
- ⁴³ John Young, 'Locality Flux', *Like Magazine*, No. 13, Summer, 2000, pp. 16–20.
- ⁴⁴ See Jen Webb, 'Negotiating Alterity: Indigenous and 'Outsider' art', *Third Text*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, 2002, p. 144.
- ⁴⁵ See Jen Webb, 'Negotiating Alterity: Indigenous and 'Outsider' art', *Third Text*, Vol. 16, Issue 2, 2002, p. 144.
- ⁴⁶ Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, 'Vocabularies of excellence: rewording multicultural arts policy', in Gunew and Rizvi, *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p. 13.
- ⁴⁷ Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, 'Vocabularies of excellence: rewording multicultural arts policy', in Gunew and Rizvi, *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, St Leonards, Allen & Unwin, 1994, p. 17.
- ⁴⁸ It ended this in 1989 when it devolved responsibility for ethnic arts and cultural practices to all Boards of the Council. Deborah Stevenson, *Art and Organisation: making Australian cultural policy*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2000, pp. 166–7.
- ⁴⁹ The conference was held at Sydney College of the Arts and attracted participants from around Australia and overseas, the author included.
- ⁵⁰ Christopher Farrands, 'Language and the Possibility of Inter-community Understanding', *Global Society*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2000, p. 93.
- ⁵¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000.
- ⁵² *Art Monthly*, No. 53, February 1982.
- ⁵³ Consider Young's statement, 'With the global showing of a more or less selected group of contemporary works – these works are more often one proposition by an (any) artist, taken out of the artist's oeuvre, and placed within the curator's portfolio with other artist's propositions. In effect, the silent orchestration of these works by the curator if the curator's speech.' John Young, 'Locality Flux', *Like Magazine*, No. 13, Summer, 2000, pp. 16–20.
- ⁵⁴ The exhibition also went to Manila and Kuala Lumpur.
- ⁵⁵ See Deborah Stevenson, *Art and Organisation*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2000.

⁵⁶ Paul Keating, *Engagement: Australia Faces the Asia-Pacific*, Sydney, MacMillan, 2000, p. 17.

⁵⁷ See Neil Manton, *Cultural Relations: the other side of the diplomatic coin: Australia's cultural engagement with Asia in the visual arts since 1948*, Phillip, Homosapien Books, 2003.

⁵⁸ Frances Lindsay and Merryn Gates were the actual curators of the exhibition.

⁵⁹ This was a key point advanced by Young's paper, 'The Avant-Garde: the logic of bureaucratisation in contemporary Austral-Asian Art', which was given at *Austral-Constellations Conference*, organised by the Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong, 1994.

⁶⁰ John Young, 'The Avant-Garde: the logic of bureaucratisation in contemporary Austral-Asian Art', *Austral-Constellations Conference*, Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong, 1994.

⁶¹ John Young, 'The Avant-Garde: the logic of bureaucratisation in contemporary Austral-Asian Art', *Austral-Constellations Conference*, Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong, 1994.

⁶² John Young, 'The Avant-Garde: the logic of bureaucratisation in contemporary Austral-Asian Art', *Austral-Constellations Conference*, Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong, 1994.

⁶³ John Young, 'The Avant-Garde: the logic of bureaucratisation in contemporary Austral-Asian Art', *Austral-Constellations Conference*, Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong, 1994.

⁶⁴ John Young, 'The Avant-Garde: the logic of bureaucratisation in contemporary Austral-Asian Art', *Austral-Constellations Conference*, Department of Comparative Literature, The University of Hong Kong, 1994.

⁶⁵ See Carolyn Barnes, *Contested Space: an investigation of the structural foundations and historical consequences of conceptualist art practices in Australia, 1968–1988*, PhD thesis, The University of Melbourne, 2004.

⁶⁶ In 2003, however, officials removed Young from the short list of artists to represent Hong Kong at the Venice Biennale on the grounds of his residency status.

⁶⁷ Jean-François Lyotard, "Critical Reflections", trans. W.G.J. Niesluchawski, *Artforum*, Vol. 24, No. 8, 1991, p. 93, Quoted in Simon O'Sullivan, 'The Aesthetics of Affect: thinking art beyond representation', *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Volume 6, Number 3, December 2001, p. 125.