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WORLD PICTURING IN CONTEMPORARY ART: ICONOGEOGRAPHIC TURNING

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“The prospect of multiple art histories, now a concern of the ‘world art history’ debate in Europe and North America, offers a particular challenge to scholars and artists working in the southern hemisphere.” The statement by the editors of this volume reflects a healthy scepticism, based on centuries of evidence, that determinations made by Euroamericans are likely to have hegemonic outcomes for the rest of us. As it happens, most of the ideas that shape this text were actually arrived at, and first written down, in a small room in the Schaeffer Library, here at the University of Sydney. But they are, in the deepest sense, the outcome of my constant travelling between the hemispheres. Mobility of thought and practice, I submit, is at the core of the best answer to the dilemma perceived by the editors, and to the problem of situatedness posed by the convenors of this conference. Not North *or* South (that way lies half-truth, limitedness and, ultimately, apartheid), but a dialogue between the “facts on the ground” established by both, a dialogue dedicated—despite the odds being so heavily stacked against them—to finding ways of world-making more generative than those so far achieved.

This is, I believe, the broadscale answer being given by at least some of the most innovative artists working today—artists of all generations, on all continents. Contemporary art is fundamentally shaped by the most searching questions posed to it: it has, since the 1960s, been marked by an antimonial tension between two great polarities—themselves cultural manifestations of the North/South “clash of civilizations” and the internal clashes endemic to all human association¹—a tension that has become

interlaced with, and is, perhaps, slowly being overcome by, artists and others in active pursuit of globally alert, yet specific situatedness within the flows of contemporaneity. This is my picture of world art today; it is also my world picture of art today. It is a claim that contemporary art has been, and still is but differently, deeply concerned with world picturing, in ways that are important for all of us. Let me show you how by concentrating, in turn, on the three core concepts in my title: “world,” “contemporary,” and “art.”

World Pictures and Worldmaking

World picturing is, on the face of it, an impossible reach for comprehensiveness, an unrealistic ambition for any individual or group: common sense, academic propriety, and human frailty all counsel against it, predicting the failure of all such enterprises. This may, indeed, be their inevitable outcome. But the urge itself is not a matter of choice. In his famous essay, “The Age of the World Picture,” Martin Heidegger recognized that modernity was characterized above all by its driving need “to conceive and grasp the world as picture.”² To him, this was a lapse from the possibility open to the Greeks, and to some of the living (he made bad choices in this regard), to be able to reach beyond the modern, that is, to achieve Being. Yet, as W.J.T. Mitchell has recently pointed out, whether or not we ever arrive at Being, “there is no getting beyond pictures, much less world pictures.”³ Events and practices are accessible to us above all, and increasingly, through representations, primarily imaged ones. Such representations do not merely mirror the world, they are, in Nelson Goodman’s telling phrase, “ways of worldmaking.”

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There are a number of senses of the term “world” in play here. I will emphasize the juxtaposition of two. First, efforts to understand, through various kinds of projective picturing, how the interaction of political, economic and cultural forces around and across the globe are making the world turn—making it work, and making work for it. This is big picture picturing, imagined as the view from outside in. But this kind of generality only works—if it does—in concert with smaller acts of worldmaking—constant or occasional,

and conventional or exceptional—in local, specific, concentrated situations. Important among these acts are those of representation, of imaging, of stocking *this* setting, or leaving it as is, noticing things afresh, or adding to it new elements, some invented here, others brought in...small scale worldmaking; the view, you might say, from inside out. Artists do a lot of it. It is, in fact, what artists, mostly, do.

The best of current art historical and art critical thinking deploys these two senses of “world,” and understands that it is the recent, and growing, contestation between South and North, between (I will argue) the forces of decolonisation and those of globalization, that has thrown up “world art history” as a problem for the discipline of art history and “world art” as a problem for art practice and criticism. The best of such thinking also recognizes that these crude polarities will not provide the solutions.

Despite these dawning realizations, it remains a notorious fact that the biggest-selling, most influential art history survey texts, the ones that introduce the discipline in schools and at universities, that set the undergraduate norm in the West at least, are founded on narratives that have a structure now at least five centuries old: primitive, ancient, modern, with most emphasis on the last as a triumphal progress of Western art and architecture. The better among these—such as Hugh Honor and John Fleming’s *A World History of Art*, now in its 6th edition 5—acknowledge the otherness of the cultures covered in their “pre-modern” and “early modern” sections, and include breakouts and inserts celebrating key moments of “non-Western” art. Perhaps the best of these is Describing world art is an enterprise that goes back to the beginnings of modern art history, especially in Germany, as Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann shows in his *Towards a Geography of Art*. 6 But it is not a framework that can be imposed on “non-Western art” for a number of obvious reasons: many societies do not share the same concept of art, and some have none that even approximate it; the same goes for aesthetic experience, however that might be understood; most have a concept of visual art that is broader in range of media and in cultural spread than that privileged in the West; and few treat art as an essentially secular enterprise that advances progressively through stages and periods defined mostly by style. 7 This latter approach is under profound revision in Western art history—how

perverse, then, to seek to read “non-Western art” through its anachronistic lens! Furthermore, there is no consensus in the West as to what “art” might mean, even less about the nature of “aesthetic experience”—many insist that it is the open contention of these concepts that is of their essence. What an export! It is as janus-faced as the world wide, “soft culture” impact of Hollywood.

Modern Art Histories; Imperial to Regional

Trenchant objections to grand narrative art history were advanced in the 1970s—that it excluded the contributions of women artists, downplayed social factors in both intention and context, felt itself superior to popular and commercial culture and relegated the art of the rest of the world to imitative dependence. The variety of methods that constituted the “new art history”—feminist, Marxist, psychoanalytic, structuralist, poststructuralist and deconstructive, then postcolonial—were energetically applied to break apart the inherited, imposed framework and to supply rich, alternative explanations. We can say now, thirty years later, that they (we) have, however problematically, succeeded—indeed, that our use of such methods has expanded the field itself such that it incorporates multiplicity within it. You might chose to call this expansion visual culture studies, or art history that has returned to its roots—the essential point is that it has, on the whole, made this welcome shift. While it remains Euramerican in its main focus, there are increasing numbers of scholars who have turned to the study of regional cultures, then to their interaction with other regions, while others trace the work of artists within international currents and global movements. Together, and in this way, we might integrate the two senses of “world” that I outlined in the beginning, and begin to discern a genuine world picture: one that shows the passages of differencing and connecting that is worldmaking.

Despite this need, most texts on the art of the twentieth century, or on modernism in art since the mid-nineteenth century, retain a Western focus, even as they add chapters that include remarks on the work of contemporary artists and architects from elsewhere. Unfortunately, metropolitan exclusiveness seems exacerbated in the latest addition to this field, *Art Since 1900*, jointly authored by leading art modern historians and critics Hal

Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh. 8 In line with the authors' strengths (to which they insist that they are alone accountable), the book applies a range of methodologies—formalist, structuralist, psychoanalytic, social materialist and poststructuralist—and is organized so as to evoke the contemporaneity of modernism: chronological entries treat specific events—the making of a key work, an epochal exhibition, or an influential publication—in vivid, evocative detail. But only two of the 107 entries focus on art originating outside of Europe or the United States. An author imported for the purpose wrote one of the two (Amy Dempsey on Diego Rivera, who also wrote on the Harlem Renaissance). Only two boxes point outside the main narrative: Rosalind Krauss on “Black deco” and Hal Foster on “Australian Aboriginal Art”—these are, by far, the least expert, most superficial in the book.

It might fairly be said that texts such as those so far discussed either treat the question of world art self-servingly or reject the obligation to set the art they discuss in a world setting. They may do so because their authors are the equivalent of realists among political theorists—that is, they take the disposition of power to be what it is, and tacitly presume that the most interesting art is that which prevails in the existing system of interests—or because their authors reject this system in favour of regional, national or local, values, seeing them as providing sufficient priorities for art. Both approaches have in common a willingness to let that which is beyond their scope slip from view, to surrender any connection with what is in effect at the core of the other, perhaps in the hope that it will take care of its own business and make no demands on them. This is easier to do the more powerful, or the more parochial, you are, but it can be done by anyone, looking from any angle.

Putting the problem this way highlights the shortcomings of both power-presumptive Western imperialist approaches and narrowly conceived postcolonial ones (the latter are narrow when they see postcoloniality as only a local phenomenon or as, at most, exchange, rather than as a global situation). 9 It also points us at the conceptual core of the issue: the evident difficulty in recognizing that, despite their contrary purposes, their definitional antipathy and their actual street warfare, cultural incommensurability and

cross-cultural commensurability are irrevocably tied together, that difference and connection are two faces of the same phenomenon (humanity on the planet, with animals, with other things, other faces). What is the figure of this paradox? How might we think difference and connection at once? How might they be conceived so as to capture the complexities of the relationships between them?

Comparative Regionalism

One strategy to which art historians and critics are increasingly turning in order to imagine these relationships is what might be called comparative or critical regionalism. This has been an emphasis in architectural theory for some time, following the suggestions of Kenneth Frampton. ¹⁰ John Clark's *Modern Asian Art* (1998) is the first in a series of comparative studies of the specifics of interchange and internal distinctiveness in the visual arts of the Asian region. ¹¹ Some continents are so internally complex and so complexly interlinked with externalities that they constitute regions in themselves: thus the question of multiplicity in Africa, and of "Latin America" on the South American continent. ¹² In some areas, this thrust has been led by artists themselves: for example, for their *East Art Map 2002*, Group Irwin mobilized twenty art critics, curators and artists from the East of Europe to present up to ten crucial art projects from their respective countries during the past fifty years. ¹³ The most productive of these studies acknowledge the inequitable distribution of power and influence in the specific circumstances under examination while remaining alert to the potentialities for critical creativity everywhere in the system. In other words, they know that the entire ensemble is motivated by the traction exercised by its apparently several elements on those closest to them, that it moves by means of its internal frictions, that—in a word—connectivity is all.

The example from anthropology

Having had, by definition, to deal with the contradictions of the persistence of "not moderns" in a world seemingly everywhere bent on modernization, anthropologists have

been in advance of art historians in thinking these through these issues. Anna Lowenstein Tsing's careful tracing of the broken but powerful chains between those experiencing the destruction of Indonesia's rainforests and those consuming the refined paper products of Japan alerts us to the nature of friction as connector of differences. 14 On the other hand, Alfred Gell exemplifies an anthropology that seeks to open the concept of art so that it is shown to operate in ways commensurate across cultures. 15

These efforts have had their impact on art historians who seek to resist the drift towards incommensurability. In his *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western modernism*, David Summers attempts to perpetuate the geography of art tradition, with considerable but mixed success. He begins and ends with the right questions: "Why was the world shaped as it was by those people then? Why is it being shaped as it is by people now? What may we best do about the past, our various histories, in the present?" 16 He rejects, rightly, the idea that there exists some universal essence "Art," the history of which can be pursued across time and place. Yet he substitutes for this essence something close to another—a set of "ways of making" (such as "real space" in the case of sculpture and architecture, "virtual space" in the case of paintings, photography and other image-on-a-surface arts, "cardinality" and "planarity" in most cases) derived from Heidegger. He takes these to be universal to human being, albeit realized differently in different places and times due to the social and other needs of humans in those places. These latter are "shapes of time" in George Kubler's famous formulation, that is, local histories of art that occur because they meet local needs, and connect with others on a basis of contiguity and contingency. Between these two levels lies, as Summers recognizes, ambiguity: "...both the world of absolute centers and the world that embraces all centers are deeply ambivalent." 17 The two types of world are totally implicated in each other, as I suggested before, but they do not, for Summers, add up to form a world picture. Assessing whether they do, and showing how they do at given times, is, I will argue, the main task facing art history and visual culture studies today. Summers' approach falls short, I believe, partly because his rejection of critical theory has deprived him of some important tools (that would help him grasp difference more deeply), but also because his

commensurabilities (real and virtual space) are too general to exclude their being articulated in incommensurably other forms in different cultures.

This challenge runs both ways. Of the recent emphasis on cultural incommensurability, Matthew Rampley has acutely noted that “Its radical particularism, stressing the absolute heterogeneity and incommensurability of visual practices in different cultures, militates against the possibility of comparison to highlight *either* similarities *or* differences.”¹⁸ He is right to point out that one cannot be distinguished without the other. What remains, however, is the dilemma of how to gauge the relativity of their relationships, the challenge of calibrating it in given situations.

Iconogeographic Turning

In the past decade it has become routine for texts surveying recent and contemporary art to include work by women artists, artists of colour, and artists from outside the main exhibiting and market centers: in this sense, they could be seen as world art books. Most, however, tend to do treat this as if it was, somehow, natural to art today, and that it just, somehow, happened. This is to present contemporary art as an array, as an arrival, a spectacle without a formative history.¹⁹ It is one of the seductions of contemporaneity, this illusion of relief from the weight of history. Indeed, in some circumstances, it is a deferral necessary to creativity, a forgetting that enables invention. The downside, however, is that it blinkers historical consciousness, disables understanding, and invites the farce of ignorant repetition. On the larger scale—as we currently see in the conduct of the war in Iraq—it precipitates tragedy.

How, then, in the case of contemporary art, might we integrate the two senses of “world picturing” and “worldmaking” that I have outlined, and do so with an accurate regard for the flow of difference and connectedness? Recently, I came across a diagram drawn in December 1972. I had been in New York for about three months, studying art history at the Institute of Fine Arts (under Robert Goldwater, William Rubin and Robert Rosenblum), and had just been invited into the Art & Language group by Joseph Kosuth,

Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn, with whom I discussed, among much else, the ideas about Australia's provincialist situation that Bernard Smith had long outlined, and that I had been debating with Patrick McCaughey and others just before I left. Around that time, Lawrence Alloway invited me to propose an article on Australian art to *Artforum*, of which he was a contributing editor. This eventually became "The Provincialism Problem" essay. 20 The sketch shows my thoughts in formation, at their crudest.

The notes are headed "Models for a viable notion of artmaking." Two models are outlined. A "Contextual model" lists a set of conceptual, social and material forces that I thought most bore on recent art: "formalism, postobject scatter, art theory, society touching art at points, spaces." I contrast this artworld babble (as it now seems) to a "Metropolitan/provincial model," which in my diary notes is characterized as an "image of Australia's consciousness of itself." The diagram is an attempt to think the slash (solida) between metropolitan and provincial. The metropolitan formation moving through time along the top is the great force of European academic and genre/minor arts that sometime between the 1810s and the 1830s (the time of Blake and Goya) turns into an avant-garde, which, in turn, pushes forward in spear-like thrusts, along tracks marked "Paris" and "German Romanticism," in phases (probably thought of as styles, or "isms"). 21 By the 1940s "America" (thought entirely in Northern terms) takes over, until the 1960s when the avant-garde thrust dissipates and a series of "temporary global villages" come into being ("transient" was probably meant). New York, Germany, Holland and London are named. After that, the unknown. Provincial art cultures are imagined as tied to the metropolitan centres via a two-way traffic (of artists, images and ideas) across a "Netherland." Each thrust, or movement, is connected, in a somewhat delayed way, but they are connected. In Australia's case, the connections are shown to relay through Sydney and Melbourne only.

Two points of possible interest. The string of global art villages—the concept comes of course from Marshall McLuhan—is understood to be creating a new relationship, one that would, possibly (note the question mark), flatten out the metropolitan/provincial power hierarchy, and replace the nebulousness of the "Netherland" with a connected

sphere of optimistic opportunity. Second, I evidently thought of the east coast of Australia as tied to the outback, as a peculiarly local magnetism (the marginal note reads: “at my back I always hear, the empty continent pushing/withdrawing”). This is, of course, embarrassing now, in its total ignorance of what was happening at Papunya, and of earlier Aboriginal art. It does, however, recognize that the pushes and pulls of a provincial setting are multiple, especially for settler colonies. It also sees them as energizing, for this Australia is an egg that (presumably like the other Souths) hurtles through its latitudes. Perhaps this is why the bottom line gives me the instruction “Superimpose this on a sociological model of interactions and progress.”

I make no special claims for this diagram. It was, mainly, a summary of prejudices, and conventional wisdoms, its one virtue, perhaps, lying in its attempt to move from the artworld internality of the “Contextual model” to some kind of world picturing, however literal. That, of course, is exactly what many artists and theorists did do during the following years, and continue to do so today. Picturing, literally, the world’s appearance is a start. Alfredo Jaar, in *Weltanshauung* 1998, drew attention to how different the world looks when mapped according to the Peter, as distinct from the Mercator, projection. Visiting Arno Peters in Bremen, he gave its author the opportunity to explain that this projection simply puts the equator in the center of the given space, rather than Mercator’s lowering the equator line to allow more detailed representation of the northern hemisphere. Like all artists from South America, Jaar is alert to the power of mapped images: Joaquim Torres-Garcia’s 1936 inversion is perhaps the best known image relating to art from South America. ²² Jaar is well known for his *A logo for America*, as shown in Times Square, New York, in 1987: maps of North America appeared alongside the slogan “This is not America,” and were replaced with an image of the Americas. Last year, the artist began a website *Project for a Revolution of the World Wide Web*, in which one can log on to a Peter projection, choose a country in which you would like to start a revolution, and then, after much apparent electronic activity, a message from Gandhi appears. “First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win.” It is the same message, no matter which country you choose. ²³ This quality of mild yet unswerving persistence towards liberation is a powerful mood in these times.

Think of a toy globe, a metal or plastic sphere with an image of the world map on its surface. Think of it as a double cup, cut at the equator, two halves to be fitted together. So it might serve as a container. Think of it as having the Mercator world map on it, with the top and bottom halves connected by the two-way lines of arrows of my 1972 diagram, but the whole being turned by the greater force of the metropolitan cultural centres. This kind of iconogeographic twisting persists until sometime in the 1970s, when the cultural centres in the bottom part of the world, and in all the Souths present in the northern hemisphere, themselves start to generate enough energy to do some turning. A struggle ensues, one that is still going on. But, as Jarr indicates, the Peter projection is taking over, the halving of the world will—eventually, after much struggle—cease to be definitive. The turning, however, will not stop.

Art in the conditions of contemporaneity

I come now to the core of my argument, the basis of the different kind of world picturing that is called for today and of the roles of art within it. *Contemporaneity* is the most evident attribute of the current world picture—encompassing its most distinctive qualities, from the ideoscape of global politics to the interiority of individual being. This picture can no longer be adequately characterized by terms such as “modernity” and “postmodernity,” not least because it is shaped by antimonial friction that resists universal generalization. It is, nonetheless, far from shapeless. Within contemporaneity, at least three sets of forces contend, turning each other incessantly, breaking the dominant North to South movement typical of modernity, and substituting a South to South laterality, followed by migrations northward as the occasions arise, then a multi-directional spreading. The three contending factors are these: globalisation’s thirst for hegemony in the face of increasing cultural differentiation (multeity freed by decolonisation) and for control of time in the face of the proliferation of asynchronous temporalities; the accelerating inequity between peoples, classes and individuals that threatens persistent dreams of liberation; and an infosphere shaped by the uneasy coexistence of highly specialist, closed knowledge communities and the potentially

instant yet always thoroughly mediated communication of all information and any image anywhere. These developments have long prehistories: their current configuration was signalled in the 1960s (not least in the arrival of art—such as Pop—that prioritised various kinds of immediacy), has been evident since 1989, and unmistakable since 2001.

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The achievements and failings of modernist, colonial and indigenous art continue to pose inescapable challenges to current practice, but none of them, singly or together, are able to provide an overarching framework. Art today is shaped most profoundly by its situation within contemporaneity. In art worlds, this appears in many ways, for example, as a set of tensions that sometimes stands out in stark relief as polarities of cultural power. Other artists treat these disjunctions as what they always were: densely connected dichotomies that nowadays amount to a wide stream into which they may take small but significant steps. I will set these elements out in contrast and then in their current irresolution, exaggerating for purposes of exposition.

Contemporary Art: the new Modern

1. Contemporary Art as a movement—as, perhaps, a period in art’s history—took shape in economically advanced societies in the 1980s, those committed to spectacle capitalism in their own domains and globalisation in the world at large. This movement was driven, mostly, by markets seeking to recover from the political and conceptual preoccupations of artists during the 1960s and 1970s, as well as by artists who rejected these preoccupations, and by institutions, especially museums of modern art, seeking to maintain their relevance and audiences. It celebrated, primarily, those artists who continued to work in traditional mediums (especially painting), who could adapt existent mediums to modernist taste (notably large-scale sculpture and colour photography), and who could perpetuate traditional subjects through calibrations of new media (including installations, video and digital streaming). It tends to recuperate modernist values and practices, returning to them constantly, as if to a touchstone. In being Contemporary Art as a new Modern Art (and thus a contemporism), it courts residuality.

The strongest artists within this tendency were, and remain, of two sorts. First, those who developed practices that tackled questions arising from their experiences living in the centres of contemporaneity, or on their edges, who generated personal yet profound (if sometimes sensational) works in fresh, often surprising mixtures of mediums: performances, environments, installations, processes and projects, videos and new media arts. Some examples. Jeff Koons's reworking of a Warholian fascination with consumption through parody into bemused acceptance has been taken up and extended by a younger generation, notably Takashi Murakami. Damien Hirst has produced powerfully pointed imagery of the inevitability of death and the depredations of the pharmaceutical industry. Matthew Barney creates elaborate, protracted allegories of portentous striving, paralleling the quest narratives popular in blockbuster movies. Bill Viola's video installations are striking instances of motivated belief, tied to bodily ritual and the myriad passages of time.

An equally strong body of work within this movement is that of those artists who have been able to find ways of transforming traditional mediums so as to carry content as pertinent as that being explored in more contemporary modes. This is exemplified by the art historical reversal in Richard Serra's passage from the anti-form experimentality of his famous *Verb List* of 1966-67 to the baroque spatiality of his *Torqued Ellipses* 2000. Installed at dia:Beacon, New York, they seem to embody the spirit of this institution most fully: it is, perhaps, the first unmitigated museum of Contemporary Art, in that it embalms the great formal shifts of the 1960s, and the shifts from form during that decade, treating key instances of them as installations—that is, as snapshots of the artist's studio, itself cleaned up as if it were a prototype of the first gallery showing of the work. The contradictions of contemporaneity are evident, too, in Gerhard Richter's oscillation between his enchanting *Abstrakt Bildern* (themselves transposed photographic or digital images which are then shifted out of register) and his recent history paintings (such as his 1988 series *October 18, 1977* on the lives and deaths of the members of the Red Army Faction, known as the Baader-Meinhof Group) based on newsphotographic imagery that is blurred into deathly ambiguity. Andreas Gursky's painting-scale photographs are a

seductive yet hard poetry of the alluring, alienating spaces of globalization; those of Thomas Demand apply the same sharp aesthetic to the settings of political scandal.

Difference and Connection

2. The other main tendency in contemporary art does not constitute a movement, but two major streams may be discerned within it, each resulting from underlying forces: the decolonisation of countries and cultures formerly part of Euramerican empires, and the persistence within the “advanced” societies of the critical spirit that had manifested itself during the 1960s.

At different times and in distinct ways, artists from Africa, South America, North and South East Asia, Australasia, Oceania, (East of) Europe and the Middle East experienced cultural developments that, in general, and over the forty years since the later 1960s, have unfolded in three overlapping but sequential phases. A social call to emphasize endangered, newly-asserted or revived nationalism in their work; a reaction in favour of their personal imperatives as individual artists, and towards seeking some profile within international contemporary art; a forging, in some cases, of a hard-won but still tentative alloy of these two elements, whereas for others the contradictory calls from and between these two remain the problematic that drives their art, and that becomes, often, its content. Ruminating on the mobility of artists from Africa, Simon Njami puts it this way:

There are many reasons for leaving beyond the obvious political and economic ones: no longer being able to share, in the case of contemporary artists, for example, your inner language with the people around you. Realising that you will have to go elsewhere to find a silence that corresponds to you. This is no doubt what being contemporary is all about. Artists share the same quality of silence, expressed according to different accents and sensibilities, and through these silences their background and vision of the world appear. 25

It is difficult to imagine a more acute pointer to the inner trajectories of thousands of artists around the world today. While Njami is thinking of artists as different as Georges Adéagbo and William Kentridge, Australians will be most familiar with internal and external migrations that are at the core of the work of artists such as Gordon Bennett and Tracey Moffatt.

For a few artists (such as Kentridge, or Adriana Varejão from Brazil) who have been active across the period, the changes occurred in the three-part sequence described above. Others chose to stay with one of these phases, while others, of course, began their careers as artists during one of the latter. This picture is complicated in many cases by the fact of closely contested nationalisms, civil war, ethnic cleansing, foreign interventions and displacement due to economic necessity. Chinese artists, for example, have, since the 1980s, experienced these phases in jumbled, accelerated order. Overall, these factors have led to worldwide webs of diasporic cultures—a trafficking as dense as that of commercial globalisation. They also play out within what used to be called “Fourth Worlds”—that of Afro-Americans and Hispanics in the US, for example—and seem to persist as these long-term immigrations evolve into yet higher degrees of complexity.

Spectacle capitalism and globalisation has not won total consent from among artists in the advanced economies: many are alert to its costs, both home and abroad. They have developed practices—usually entailing research over time, widespread public involvement and lengthy, didactic presentations—that critically trace and strikingly display the global movements of the new world (dis)order between the advanced economies and those connected in multiple ways with them. Outstanding among these is Allan Sekula, whose *Fish Story* and *Titanic’s Wake* series of photographs underscore the huge quantity of commodity exchange that is the material basis of globalization as well as trace in sharply observed detail the social impacts of this world culture of work. 26

Parallel concerns appear in Mark Lombardi’s “conspiracy” charts, the frozen tableaux of Jeff Wall, Thomas Hirshhorn’s anti-monuments and participatory settings, Steve McQueen’s videos of exploited labor, Susan Norrie’s video ruminations on displaced time, David Goldblatt’s images of apartheid geographies and the poignant portraits of

Marlene Dumas. A number of other artists base their practice around exploring sustainable relationships with specific environments, both social and natural, within the framework of ecological values. Andy Goldsworthy, Olaf Eliasson, and Carsten Höller are best known in art circles, but increasing numbers of artist collectives—inspired by pioneers such as Helen and Newton Harrison—are involved in direct action at local levels: these include Ala Plástica (Buenos Aires) Park Fiction (Hamburg), Wochenklausur (Vienna), and Huit Facettes (Dakar, Senegal). 27

There is much trafficking between the two ends of the spectrum I have described—indeed, trafficking appears in all aspects of contemporary practice. I will illustrate one such theme: the imagery of women’s self-fashioning. Tracey Emin takes as her subject her own life as an abused child of immigrant parents who has fought her way to public notoriety and artworld stardom. She displays the pleasures and abjection of such a journey in *I’ve Got It All*, 2000: an enlarged Polaroid of the artist viewed from floor level, where she sits, in a Vivienne Westwood dress, stuffing pound notes and coins into her crotch—or is she struggling to contain their flow out of her, as if striving to prevent a miscarriage? Her best-known work is *My Bed* 1998-9, which gained extraordinary media attention when entered for the Turner Prize that year. A variable installation of her unkempt and human stained bed, it was strewn about with personal memorabilia such as snapshots, toy, slippers and suitcase, as well as other items such as discarded bottles, cigarette butts and condoms. In one version a noose hangs from above. In all installations the bed is surrounded by Emin’s wall quilts, on which she attaches crudely cut out statements that appeal for love, express anger at rejection or fear of violence. While on one level *My Bed* simply displays the remainder of a confused life, and seems the product of a terminal narcissism, on another it registers the struggle by members of her generation to achieve personality in post-feminist, corporatized, politically reactionary societies. 28

The sensationalist aspect of Emin’s quest is taken up, and exaggerated into parody, by Serbian artist Tanja Ostojic. Her 2002 installation *Strategies for Success* draws on all aspects of Emin’s style to display the lengths to which, Ostojic implies, she has been willing to go to achieve recognition as an artist: in one corner a pile of plastic packets is

labelled “All the condoms I have used while sleeping with curators to get my work shown.” A related work shows paparazzi style snapshots taken of her while on a seaside holiday with a curator. Her participation in the 2001 Venice Biennale consisted of her escorting director Harold Szeeman throughout his time in Venice. The resultant work *I’ll Be Your Angel*, was verified by Szeeman’s signed agreement that he had seen her work *Black Square on White* 2001, that is, her pubic hair shaven into the shape of the famous symbolic image of Russian Constructivist Kasimir Malevich. Ostojic’s best known work is *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport* 2000-2: she posted an internet advertisement featuring a image of herself naked, all bodily hair shaven, in the manner of a prisoner. What is it that attracts, or drives, certain women artists toward such “edgy” work? Notoriety is assured by its code-breaking behaviour, but Ostojic’s works are at the same time critiques of the necessity for such practices. In Central and Eastern Europe they have a local resonance: radical art and transgressive performance has, for decades, been enacted across imagery of naked or near-naked women produced mainly by male artists. Marina Abramovic continues to be an outstanding exception, and an inspiration to younger artists. Ostojic’s strategies might be seen as the most recent, and, in the context of sensation-saturated, “reality television” dominated mass media, a necessarily literal, development of the kind of feminist critique that had been carried on, mostly via symbolic indirection, by her predecessors in the region such as Slovakian artist Ilona Németh, whose *Polyfunctional Woman (Get Laid!)* installation of 1996 consisted of an gallery floor filled with a red bed, the buttons of which were small speakers that broadcast a variety of texts conveying a wide range of female experience. 29

Situation and Flow

3. These examples show that the polarity between official and critical art outlined above is, in fact, a densely connected dichotomy, not only because all artists of serious intent continue to acknowledge the legacy of the great artistic “shifts” of the 1960s, nor simply because they all work in the same overall conditions of contemporaneity, but because art continues to be subject to the generational drive of the incessant taking up of art by new artists. We can note the emergence, during the past decade, of a wide stream of artists

who use archival, surfing strategies and remix, postproduction aesthetics to move beyond the binary character of the two great tendencies, while using many of their signature elements. 30 The preferred mode? Slight gestures, feral strategies, mild subversions, small steps...

But to which purposes? And in the names of which values? Unofficial contemporary art is only apparently random. At least four themes seem to course through the heterogeneity that is natural to contemporaneity. They appear to be the outcomes in art of the iconomic and psychogeographic (that is to say, the iconogeographic) turning with which I began.
31

All of the artists I will now mention, and the thousands more of whom they are representatives, seem to focus their wide-ranging concerns on questions of time, place, mediation and mood. Better put, their concerns are with the nature of multiple temporalities, the experience of (dis)location, with communication through transmediation and with how all of these shape individual affect and collective effectivity. In other words, they are alert to the conditions of contemporaneity—bleak as they are—yet seek situatedness within them, however transient.

The multiple yet asynchronous temporalities characteristic of contemporaneity preoccupies many artists but of course in different ways. 32 Mariko Mori creates time capsules that invite users to experience eternity, or at least glimpse something of its imagery. New Age yearning is treated less superficially in the work of Bill Viola. Eve Sussman's 2004 video *89 Seconds at Alcazar* pans around the site, and the moment, of Velasquez's famous painting *Las Meninas*. Art historical temporality is also evoked by Ricky Swallow, his *Killing Time* 2004-5 is a carefully carved meditation on Dutch still life, whereas previous works had presented the artefacts of globalized industry (sneakers, softdrinks) as if they were fossils from a period of artisanal workmanship. The jarring synchronicity of disparate temporalities is acutely brought out by Chieh-Jen Chen in his video *Factory* 2003 which filmed the visit of a group of Taiwanese workers to the now empty building in which they had previously worked in order to view an earlier film shot

by the artist of their protests against the closure of the factory. For her work *Should I Live to Be a Hundred*, begun 1998 and still continuing, Emese Benczúr ordered thirty eight rolls of clothing labels machine embroidered with the words “day by day.” She then commenced sewing below this inscription the words “I think about the future,” pledging to repeat the sewing of this one phrase each day for the rest of her life. Just this quality of integration—quiet, everyday, unobtrusive yet committed, insistent and independent—is the ground zero of the ways in which contemporary artists approach the strangeness of their time. 33

“Media specificity” remains a concern of some theorists of Contemporary Art, yet artists have for decades been transposing the qualities of one medium into another with an inventive abandon that makes mobility as to media the most obvious marker of any art that is contemporary. Many do so at the level of style, creating hip, club-like, shopfront environments: John Armleder, Jim Lambie, Imre Knobel. Some remix already mediated imagery to imply different narratives: Douglas Gordon, Stan Douglas, or to open out fissures in cinematic and media narration: Pierre Huyghe, Candice Breitz. In his series *The Iberoamerican Legend*, Martin Shastre has created a Leigh Bowery-like scenario filled with counter-stars from Montevideo (“the fountain of video art”), actors within a funky future world imagined to be run by Americans of Spanish heritage. Others seek to intervene directly through the manipulation of media: in the spirit of the 1970s group Antfarm, the Yesmen managed to convince BBC World that they were spokesmen for the Dow Chemical Corporation, and offered, on television on December 3, 2003, the company’s apology for the deadly chemical spillage at its plant in Bophal, India. In Ayanah Moor’s 2004 wall installation, *Never Ignorant, Getting Goals Accomplished*, the words of the title—an exhortation used by the hip-hop group De Prez—are juxtaposed with a mural-sized image taken from a magazine colour photograph of Condoleezza Rice being kissed by President George W. Bush during the presentation of her as Secretary of State. Seen one way, the words and the image are in exact complementarity, flush with self-evident realization of equal opportunity. This looks like the televisual promotion it was intended to be: a resplendent advertisement for the American Dream. When, however, we read the words as marching on the image, and link left to right the first

letters of each word, the opposite meaning erupts. Moor has taken an oath to no longer accept invitations to exhibitions in which “black American” is either the overt or the covert organizing principle.

Small-scale interventions, do-it-yourself subversions, gentle suggestions for living differently. Ernesto Kac draws attention to the dangers of genetic cloning via a series of newspaper stories about a rabbit that would turn luminescent green when exposed to ultra-violet light. The subtlest explorer of the pleasures and dangers of cross-species mutation is Patricia Piccinini: her life-like mutant figures share the details of ordinary life with equally life-like humanoids. In his work *Dis-Amor*, developed since 1995, Krystof Wodiczko has invented a prosthesis that enables the shy or the repressed to communicate their deepest thoughts to others, even to strangers, via indirection. Jorge Macchi extracts details from telephone books, street directories and newspapers consisting of just a few words, or the blank spaces around words, and reassembles them into imagery of city life: skyscrapers, speakers’ corners, meetings—an echo still, in Argentina, of the years of the surveillance and dangers of the years of the dictatorship. Working in a similar but perhaps more open climate in Brazil, Rivanne Neuenschwander has moved from works that record the passage of time across places to those that trace the incidentals of human usage: the map-like imagery in her series of “paintings” entitled *Starved Letters* 2000 was made by snails consuming the mounted ricepaper; whereas in *Conversations* 2002 she collected the “sculptures” made by friends while unconsciously playing with items on a table during meals. Erwin Würm both performs, and offers us opportunities to create, “one-minute sculptures.” In Buenos Aires a group of artists known only by the name La Baulera (junk, storage space, leftovers) perform delicate acts of temporary transformation: for example, ping-pong balls bouncing once or twice at the same moment in every room of the main public library...

The interplay between personal and collective experience is explored in the work of Turkish filmmaker Kutlug Ataman. The four video projections of his *The 4 Seasons of Veronica Read* 2002 followed closely the annual cycle of growth, decay and hibernation of the amaryllis flower as it is cultivated by a collector whose obsession with the plant

has made her subject to its temporality. In contrast, in *Kuba* 2004, Ataman interviewed forty residents of an “outlaw” district of Istanbul, giving each of them the chance to tell the stories of how they pass their time in the suburb and how they feel about it. The installation consisted of 40 monitors, placed apart and set up before homely chairs. Individuality is evident, but so is community, along with the complexities of the relationships between both. The installation invites you into the community, to take the time to learn what kinds of time it takes to create community. Rirkrit Tiravanija is the best known of the many artists who stage demonstrations of possible ways of living a more flexible life. Since the mid-1990s he has invited spectators to be participants in shared meals, musical performances, local broadcasts and the like. In contrast to the multiple precedents for such actions in the 1960s, the utopic urge is no longer accompanied by any kind of political prospect. A longer-term commitment on the part of Tiravanija and friends is *The Land*, a farming area in Thailand where artists from all over the world work with locals on reclamation projects. Similar goals are pursued on a larger scale at the Echigo-Tsumari Triennial at Niigata, Japan.

These artists and the institutions that support them are making visible a paradox: a shared sense that the fundamental, familiar constituents of being are becoming, each day, steadily more strange, unfamiliar, and not shared. Nevertheless, the urge to seek sustainable flows of survival, cooperation and growth continues unabated. Whatever the forces arraigned against these aspirations—including those of cooption (the latest being the art fair, for example, Miami Basel, a paradise for collector mania that requires the art system to present itself as a bazaar)—I believe that they are, on balance, succeeding.

Paradoxes

Contemporaneity as I describe it is characterized by intense competition between world pictures that claim to be universal but which—conspicuously, and often dangerously—fall short. In so far as it can be taken as a whole, this amounts to a picture of a world in which no encompassing picture of its wholeness is possible. We may well have arrived at a time in human history so immersed in so many temporalities that are so

asynchronous, as cultures class incommensurably, that, despite the instantaneity of imaged knowledge of events and places happening all over everywhere, we cannot picture this as any kind of coherent time, we cannot draw the strings of commensurability together into a recognizable figure. Perhaps this failure, this impossibility, this anxiety about incoherence, is precisely the quality of this time that makes it “ours.” We may have reached a stage that is past periodization; a moment after the end of history that is nonetheless replete with historical and historicist constructions, each fighting for place. I am suggesting that, despite this, and again paradoxically, artists such as those I have mentioned, along with many others, are offering us places, pauses, and pathways through important aspects of our estrangement. That is, they present embodied connectivity and situatedness within worlds of difference. Thus the final paradox: by describing the gathering darkness of these shape-shattering antinomies, I am attempting to discern the outlines of the labyrinth of contemporaneity, and to identify art’s shining within it.

1. The “clash of civilizations” thesis is advanced in a reductive form by Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Its crudity has not inhibited its influence—on, for example, US foreign policy.
2. Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture,” in *The Question concerning Technology*; transl. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 130.
3. W.J.T. Mitchell, *What do pictures want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiv.
4. Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1978).
5. Hugh Honor and John Fleming, *A World History of Art* (London: Laurence King, 2005).

6. Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Towards a Geography of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
7. James Elkins is one among many to make these points, see his *Stories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 2002).
8. Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin Buchloh, *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).
9. Thus the importance of the argument advanced by Okwui Enwezor, “The Postcolonial Constellation,” in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee eds., *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).
10. See Kenneth Frampton, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985 and subsequent editions). Most recently, Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism: architecture and identity in a globalized world* (Munich, London: Prestel, 2003).
11. John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (North Ryde, N.S.W.: Craftsman House 1998).
12. On the first, see, for example, Olu Oguibe, *The Culture Game* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), on the latter, see, also for example, Gerald Mosquera ed., *Beyond the Fantastic: Contemporary Art Criticism from Latin America* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1995).
13. These included Albania, Belorussia, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, the former East Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldavia, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine and Yugoslavia. See Marina Griznic, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices, Art, Theory and Activism from (the East of) Europe* (Frankfurt am Main: ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana and Revolver, 2004).

On Group Irwin see Inke Arns ed., *Irwin: Retroprincip 1983-2003* (Frankfurt: Revolver 2003). More generally, see Piotr Piotrowski, "Between Place and Time: a critical geography of 'new' Central Europe," in Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann and Elizabeth Pilliod, *Time and Place: The Geohistory of Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 153-171.

14. See Anna Lowenstein Tsing, *Friction: Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

15. Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency, An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also Fred R. Myers and George E. Marcus, *The Traffic in Cultures: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

16. David Summers, *Real Spaces: World Art History and the Rise of Western modernism* (London: Phaidon, 2003), 664.

17. Summers, *Real Spaces*, 660.

18. Matthew Rampley, "Art History and Cultural Difference: Alfred Gell's Anthropology of Art," *Art History*, vol. 28, no. 4 (September 2005), 528.

19. These range from compilations of images with little, mainly fact driven text, mostly promotional in tone, such as Uta Grosenick and Burkhard Rieimschnieder, *Art Now, Artists at the Rise of the New Millenium* (Köln: Taschen, 2005), those with sketchy attempts at interpretation, such as Edward Lucie-Smith, *Art Tomorrow* (Paris: Terrial, 2002), to more thorough narratives such as those of David Hopkins, *After Modern Art, 1945-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Michael Archer, *Art Since 1960* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002, 2nd ed.) and Brandon Taylor, *Contemporary Art, Art Since 1970* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005).

20. Patrick McCaughey, "Notes on the Centre: New York," *Quadrant* (July-August 1970), 76-80, and Terry Smith, "Provincialism in Art," *Quadrant* (March-April 1971),

67-71; Ian Burn with Mel Ramsden, "Provincialism," *Art Dialogue*, no.1 (October 1973), 3-11; Terry Smith, "The Provincialism Problem," *Artforum* vol. XIII, no.1 (September 1974), 54-59.

21. Given what and where I was studying at the time, it is no coincidence that there are echoes of Alfred J. Barr's famous use, in a 1939 report to the MoMA trustees, of the image of a torpedo marked with names of artists and movements to explain the development of modern art, and the scope of the Museum's commitments. By the early 1970s, however, a number of artists were thinking in terms like mine: an outstanding example is Brazilian born Swedish artist Örvind Fahlstrom, in, for example, his *Sketch for World Map (Americas, Pacific)*, 1972, a lithographic poster produced in an edition of 7,300 that showed countries in this region sized according to the amount of US military intervention and aid. See www.fahlstrom.com.

22. See, for example, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, *Torres-García* (Madrid; Ministerio de Cultura, 1991).

23. For the works by Jaar mentioned, see Mary Jane Jacobs and Nancy Princenthal, *Alfredo Jaar, The Fire This Time, Public Interventions 1979-2005* (Milano: Charta, 2005).

24. On the concept of contemporaneity see Terry Smith, Nancy Condee and Okwui Enwezor, *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity and Contemporaneity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, forthcoming). On contemporaneity and contemporary architecture see *The Architecture of Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). On its relationship to recent and current art see Terry Smith "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," *Critical Inquiry*, Spring 2006, and Terry Smith, "Primacy, Convergence, Currency: Marketing contemporary art in the conditions of contemporaneity," *Art Papers*, 29:3 (May/June 2005), 22-27 and 29:4 (July/August 2005), www.artpapers.org.

25. Simon Njami, "Chaos and Metamorphosis," *Africa Remix: Contemporary Art of a Continent* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2005), 18.
26. Sabine Breitweiser ed., *Allan Sekula: Performance Under Working Conditions* (Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2004).
27. See, for example, Grant H Kessler ed., *Groundworks: Environmental Collaborations in Contemporary Art* (Pittsburgh: Regina Miller Gallery, Carnegie Mellon University, 2005), <http://3r2n.cfa.cmu.edu/groundworks/index.htm>
28. Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend, *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).
29. On Ostojic, see Griznic, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices*, passim; on Németh, Gábor Hushegyi, *Ilona Németh* (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2001). On the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes as a site of contention in visual cultures throughout (East of) Europe see, for example, the essays in Jana Gersová and Katarina Kisová eds., *90s+ / Reflection of the Visual Art at the Turn of the 20th and 21st Century* (Bratislava: Slovak Section of AICA, Union of Theorists of Contemporary Fine Art, IVART, 2003).
30. These developments have been traced by Nicolas Bourriaud in his *Relational Aesthetics* 1998 (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002) and *Post-Production* (New York: Lucas and Sternberg, 2002), both reviewed in *October*, 110 (Fall 2004).
31. By evoking open situatedness in this way I echo, albeit on a global scale, Guy Debord's famous imagery of Parisian psychogeographies, which turned on the metaphor of the railway train turning circle, although against their prescribed directionality. See Guy Debord, "Unitary Urbanism at the End of the 1950s," in Elizabeth Sussman ed., *On the Passage of a Few People through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957-1972* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), 143-47. For assessments of the SI and architecture see especially Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge,

Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), and essays by Libero Andreotti and Tom McDonough in Tom McDonough ed., *Guy Debord and the Situationist International: Texts and Documents* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

32. I trace some of these in “Times Taken, Given by Contemporary Art,” in *(Im)performance: Cultures in/out of time*, ed. Judith Schachter Model and Stephen Brockmann (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Mellon University, 2006).

33. On Swallow see Damiano Bertoli, “The Sounds of Silence,” *Artlink*, vol. 25, no. 2 (March 2005), 12-14, and Peter Hill, “Australia and New Zealand go to Venice,” *Art Monthly Australia*, #183 (September 2005), 12-15; on Benczúr, see János Strucz, *L’Assunzione della Techné/Tackling Techné, Hungarian Pavilion, La Biennale di Venezia, 1999* (Budapest: Mester Nyomda, 1999).

AAANZ Journal article CAPTIONS

1. Terry Smith, Models for a viable notion of art-making, 1972, diagram on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches. Courtesy the author
2. Terry Smith, Copy of Models for a viable notion of art-making 1972, 2005, diagram on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches. Courtesy the author
3. Alfredo Jaar, *Weltanschauung*, 1998, 70 x 100 cm, color print. Courtesy Gallery Lelong, New York
4. Tracey Emin, *My Bed*, 1998-99, variable dimensions, installation view, Turner Prize Competition, Tate Gallery, London, 1999. Courtesy Saatchi Gallery, London.
5. Tanja Ostojic, *Strategies for Success*, 2002, sketch for installation. Courtesy the artist.
6. Ilona Németh, *Polyfunctional Woman*, 1996, detail of installation. Courtesy the artist
7. Emese Benczúr, *Should I Live to Be a Hundred*, 1998, mixed media. Manifesta 2 Photographic Archive . Courtesy Roman Mensing
8. Ayanah Moor, *Never .Ignorant .Gettin’.Goals.Accomplished*, 2004, wall installation, variable dimensions. Courtesy of the artist

9. Rivane Neueschwander, *Carta Faminta (Starved letters)*, 2002, 14-drawing series, rice paper on board (detail). Courtesy Gloria Fortes Vilaca, Sao Paulo

10. Kutlug Ataman, *Kuba*, 2004, variable dimensions, video installation. 54th Carnegie International, Carnegie Museum of Art. Pittsburgh 2004