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No More Provincialism: Art & Text

ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the writing and personalities surrounding the 1981 establishment of the Australian art magazine, *Art & Text*, and traces its progression under Paul Taylor's editorship up to his relocation to New York. During this period, *Art & Text* published Taylor's own essays and, more importantly, those of other writers and artists — Meaghan Morris, Paul Foss, Philip Brophy, Imants Tillers, Rex Butler, Edward Colless — all articulating a consistent and complex postmodern position. The magazine sought the niche and status of an antipodean *October*. The essay argues that the magazine's founder and editor, Paul Taylor, personified the shattering impact of postmodernism upon the Australian art world as well as postmodernism's limitations. Taylor facilitated a new theoretical framework for the discussion of Australian art, one that continues to dominate the internationalist aspirations of Australian art writers. He produced temporarily convincing solutions to problems that earlier critics had wrestled with unsuccessfully, in particular the twin problems of provincialism, and the relationship of Australian to international art.

Introduction

Australian art writers and critics of the early 1980s used a methodology and a vocabulary that were new for writing on Australian art. Like good avant-gardists, they said that they were freeing themselves from traditional assumptions, relationships and strictures, questioning and deconstructing the unchanging truths to which their antecedents putatively subscribed. Instead of beginning with revelatory foundational models such as Marxism, young postmodern theorists in Melbourne and Sydney eclectically combined ideas from the new, still fluid canon of French post-structuralist philosophy. In particular, their art criticism often layered Jean Baudrillard's concepts of the simulacrum and the copy onto the idea of Australia, discarding both the privilege of artistic authenticity and the search for an artistic self-definition based on national uniqueness. When 'truth' was removed from art, the nature of art changed, and so did its camp followers. In contrast to the engaged critics of the 1970s, the new Australian writers and artists of the 1980s were no longer true believers or ideologues. They were no longer political in the sense that the social activists of earlier magazines such as *Lip* or *Art Network* had been Australian Labour Party political. At the heart of this shift was the magazine *Art & Text*, and its flagship Melbourne-based editor, Paul Taylor. Taylor's years with *Art & Text* were an explosive combination of education, eclectic erudition, acuity, entrepreneurship and personal ambition. Taylor's achievement during this time was to popularise a combination of postmodern theory with the emergent theories of subculture, taken from the expanding university disciplines of cultural studies and visual studies, charting and interpreting a radical new contemporary art scene that incorporated visual art, punk and disco music and New Wave fashion.

Before Art & Text

By the end of the 1970s, a mere three Australian art magazines were active, apart from a few special-interest publications that catered to miniscule audiences. The publications *Other Voices*, *Art Dialogue*, *The Great Divide* and *Arts Melbourne* had

all folded. *Art and Australia* continued as it had begun in 1963, under its founding editor, Mervyn Horton. Despite the funding vicissitudes and committee burnout of the late 1970s, *Lip* was in a momentarily confident prime. *Art Network* had begun publication in 1979, full of pluralist optimism, hoping to draw on the support of a wide cross-section of art students and artists. *Lip* and *Art Network* were motivated by the collective politics of social and institutional reform. Unlike overseas journals such as *October*, *ZG*, *Critical Inquiry* and *Diacritics*, the two publications were focused on promoting and celebrating art from outside the commercial mainstream, but not overly concerned with publishing theoretically inclined writing, nor the implications of postmodern theory for Australian art. Australian art writers who wished to explore complex theoretical issues were in effect left without a venue in which to publish.¹ For Paul Taylor, this was a gap to be filled.

Art & Text was the creation of Paul Taylor, even though he was to remain its editor for only a very short, though remarkable, period. Taylor was already very familiar with Australian art magazines and their politics and he wanted to publish an Australian art magazine that would become international and important. To do that, he had to come up with a practical solution to the provincialism divide, a solution other than ‘ignore it and it will go away’. The debate was already old. The terms of the argument had changed little since the Cold War-inflected stalemate of 1974, when Terry Smith had concluded that the centre (American artists and critics) had responsibilities to the periphery—‘the most responsible kind of exhibition would be one that took as its aim, not the supposedly “neutral” presentation of selected art works, but the display of the very problematic which its own incursion into a provincial situation raises.’² Change was long overdue, with cracks widely noticed in the façade of America’s political and economic hegemony from the Vietnam War and the 1973 OPEC Petrol Crisis onwards. New York had lost its reputation as a centre for innovation within, as opposed to the marketing of, international art. During the early 1970s, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) had gained prominence to the point that American conceptualist artist and critic Les Levine (who visited and exhibited in Australia during the 1970s) speculated that NSCAD might be the best art school in North America.³ Los Angeles art schools, in particular CalArts, in suburban Valencia, had displaced East Coast studio schools in influence and their graduates would become the first generation of postmodern American artists. In other words, it had become increasingly obvious that New York’s position as political, economic and cultural centre of the world no longer appeared unassailable.

In Australia, Taylor received a firm grounding in modernist art history at Monash University. Patrick McCaughey was the charismatic foundation Professor of Visual Arts, and it was from McCaughey’s that Taylor’s predilection for applying the methodology of literary criticism to art criticism arose. Taylor graduated with a B.A. in 1977, majoring in Visual Arts, and almost immediately was appointed a lecturer in Art History (Theory) at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart. The Tasmanian School of Art under its Dean, Geoff Parr, had a reputation for hiring adventurous

1. Denholm, 1994, p. 94.

2. Smith, 1974, p. 58.

3. Levine, 1973, p. 15, wrote, ‘the institution’s great strength is its openness to new ideas and its aim to move with educational needs as they arise. It is, then, an empirical, self-defining institution in a continual process of adjustment, a process helped by the school’s informal posture.’

young staff from the mainland, and an ambitious and substantial weekly program of visitors to compensate for its isolation.

Taylor needed money to launch his new magazine. His application to the Australia Council for a grant to establish *Art & Text* was the culmination of a carefully developed strategy, exceptional in that funding was requested in advance of the first issue.⁴ He had already organised the articles for the first issue and much of the second issue.⁵ The timing of the application was important. Of all the Australian art magazines that began in the 1970s, no clear alternative to *Art and Australia* had appeared, and certainly none that could be characterised as promoting emerging art. Taylor would have known (Holmes recalled) that the Visual Arts Board (VAB) was making a ‘concerted effort to lift critical discourse at the time.’⁶ His proposal, coming as it did from a young writer properly trained in an art history department, was bound to be received favourably. Taylor’s decision to apply from Tasmania, his place of employment, was deeply strategic: he correctly calculated that the VAB should be supportive of a regional application from a small, usually under-represented state.⁷ In *Art and Australia* (Autumn 1993), curator Nick Waterlow recalled the VAB meeting that considered Paul Taylor’s initial application for funding:

Jon Holmes, the Tasmanian representative, spoke supportively but added it was a good thing Taylor was not present to plead his case as after having us eating out of his hands for the first ten minutes he would then have castigated the Board’s entire value system and within half an hour we would have had him thrown out, with his application.⁸

Waterlow also remembered Paul Taylor’s tenacity, obdurateness, iconoclasm and ‘highly tuned critical acumen.’⁹ The application was approved and \$15,000 was granted to Paul Taylor for the 1980–81 financial year.¹⁰

The emerging shift in writing on art was by no means an exclusively Melbourne (and by extension Hobart) affair. Sydney-based writers were equally important, as were more isolated groups of artists and writers in Brisbane and Perth; both of the latter centres saw small publications emerge of a broadly similar but less programmatic nature at approximately the same time. Several magazines around the nation specifically Ashley Crawford’s *The Virgin Press*, Arthur and Connie Cantrill’s *Cantrill’s Filmnotes*, as well as *On the Beach*, *Slug*, *Frogger*, *New Music* and *Zerex* — covered musical and performance work, comics, fashion shows, super-8 films, independent records, posters, and program notes. In 1980, a collective of recent young graduates, not all involved with art but with an intense enthusiasm for recent French philosophy generated *Foreign Bodies: Semiotics in/and Australia*, a major

4. Jonathan Holmes, Taylor’s senior colleague at the Tasmanian School of Art, was also a member of the Visual Arts Board (VAB) between 1977 and 1981. Of the application, he later recalled ‘talking about it a lot’ with Taylor.

5. Holmes, 2003.

6. Holmes, 2003.

7. Crawford, 2004.

8. Waterlow, 1993, p. 336.

9. Waterlow, 1993, p. 336.

10. Australia Council for the Arts, 1981, p. 149.

international conference, which was to be held at the University of Sydney in February 1981. *Foreign Bodies* was designed to address issues raised by the new ‘Theory’, the post-1960s wave of French structuralist and post-structuralist philosophers that included Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard. New Theory was beginning to have an immense impact on the way Anglophone sociologists, historians, architects, art theorists and artists thought about culture. Sydney University’s art history department—the Power Institute—was already teaching cinema theory, and it was far more open to new discursive shifts than Melbourne’s longer established and more conservative Department of Fine Arts, or Patrick McCaughey’s Department of Visual Art at Monash University. The young organisers of the Sydney conference devoted an obsessive amount of time and care deciding on the invitations, negotiating with the speakers and publicising the event, which foregrounded the theme of the ‘foreign’ in relation to the already intense and, it was emerging, surprisingly positive Australian reception of Theory. (In the next decade, the trope of foreigner was to blur into the multicultural image of the exile; images and theories of diaspora, along with the associated phenomenon of globalisation, were to periodise and supplant postmodern Australian art.¹¹)

The conference was a watershed: it summed up the political and feminist discourses of the 1970s but also signalled the direction of the postmodern 1980s. The two key Australian speakers at the conference, Sydney cinema theorist Meaghan Morris and science-trained Paul Foss (later to succeed Paul Taylor as editor of *Art & Text* upon Taylor’s permanent relocation to the US), were familiar enough with this philosophy in the original French to have begun, in collaboration with philosopher Paul Patton, to translate it into English almost as it was published.¹² Some of those translations, most notably Jean Baudrillard’s essay ‘The Precession of Simulacra’ by Paul Foss, became the first published English translations.¹³ Both Foss and Morris used Baudrillard’s theories to turn upside down questions surrounding Australian identity. Their conference papers were aimed squarely at Australian art writing.¹⁴ ‘Import Rhetoric: Semiotics in/and Australia’, by Meaghan Morris and Anne Freadman, consisted of two parts, one by each author. The first part, Meaghan Morris’s ‘Catatonia’, remains particularly important. She wrote about Australian reactions to foreignness in relation to the endlessly discussed ‘problem’ of cultural importation: in other words, she was re-working the ‘provincialism problem’. Her discussion centred on the inability to ‘speak’ — to culturally construct — Australia. This was caused, Morris suggested, by the ambiguity of the cultural space that Australia occupied. Morris ridiculed existing points of view, both the jingoistic right and the nationalism of the left, demonstrating in her encyclopaedic citations her own virtuoso cosmopolitanism and the ‘flagrant and flaunted pleasure’ of the rapidly emerging postmodern enterprise.¹⁵ In his equally influential paper, ‘Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum’, Paul Foss argued that the space that Australia occupied was a zone of representation hovering between the map created by European images of the Antipodes and the territory that their map purported to represent. Both papers, though not specifically about Australian art, were

11. Green, 2002.

12. Foss, 1978, pp. 3-37. Paul Foss referred to his own translation; see Baudrillard, 1978.

13. Baudrillard, 1983, also see Baudrillard, 1983, originally published as *Simulacres et Simulation*, Paris: Galilée, 1981. For a commentary on Baudrillard see Storey, 2001.

14. See Foss, 1981; Morris and Freadman, 1981.

15. Morris, 1981, p. 129.

intensely preoccupied with visuality and nation. They indicated the direction that Australian art writing would take in the 1980s, employing the literary studies rhetoric that was to be adopted by later art writers such as Rex Butler.

The process of evolving a theoretical framework was well under way by the time Taylor watched Foss deliver 'Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum' at the *Foreign Bodies* conference.¹⁶ As Foss recalled: 'Paul Taylor once told me that he attended the semiotics conference and that my paper gave him the inspiration for *Art & Text*. Though I think the notion is fanciful at best.'¹⁷ Foss is correct, for *Art & Text* was already into production by February 1981. Foss had, however, confirmed Taylor in his inspiration that a new art-critical framework, constructing an international place for Australian art beyond that of a province, would exploit the concept of the unoriginal, the copy and the simulacrum.

Art & Text 1

In retrospect, *Art & Text* was the logical development for Australian art writing, and this explains the powerful hold the myth of *Art & Text* exercises upon its contemporaries. Upon its publication in 1981, it appeared to be a controversial, even iconoclastic departure from the norm. But everything about *Art & Text* was carefully planned to be different. Taking the American journal, *October* (founded in 1976) as its model, *Art & Text* was an art magazine visually dominated by text. This text was invariably complicated and difficult. Illustrations were few and were in grainy, modish black and white. The magazine sought the niche and status of an antipodean *October*. Most challenging of all, the magazine was extremely well funded, in advance of its first issue, by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council. The first issue of *Art & Text* appeared in March 1981. Paul Taylor, an art history-trained but eclectic, intellectual bowerbird, was constructing a new and unique image for Australian art within the global landscape.¹⁸ Taylor took English cultural studies theorist Dick Hebdige's idea of subculture to shift the site of contemporary art, expanding the signifiers available, discarding much else (except the art object) as old-fashioned. Taylor appropriated Foss's re-interpretation of Baudrillard and his channelling of early Bernard Smith to describe a space in international art that only Australia could occupy though, as we shall see, this exceptionalism was myopic. Other settler societies, notably in Brazil, had arrived there first, decades earlier. This neat reformulation meant that the model of centre versus periphery lost its power to marginalise. The antipodean position could only be held by uniquely unauthentic Australian art. *Art & Text* was the perfect venue for the promotion of this happily perverse new art. Not even an editorial board complicated the first issues, though

16. Foss, 2002; in a lecture delivered at ARCO, the Madrid contemporary art fair, Paul Foss recalled, 'Back then, I was attempting to position debates about centre and periphery in the strict terms of postcolonial discourse, contrasting these debates with narratives about the legendary hollowness or never-never-land thinking that dominates Australia's historical and cultural relationships to itself and to the rest of the world.'

17. Foss, 2003.

18. Crawford, 2004, noted, 'A great editor? No, but choosey. He recognised talent and placed it. Paul was a bower bird.' Armiger, 1982, wrote that Paul Taylor 'moved with the confidence of a man with an idea whose time has come.'

Taylor drew on all his associates and former mentors for advice and copy. *Art & Text* was, above all, initially a one-man show.

The first *Art & Text* editorial explained the magazine's theoretical position and aims.¹⁹ The title, 'Editorial: On Criticism', signalled that good writing was crucially important to the magazine. This was exceptional; for almost all other art magazines, writing was the means from which to project art. But this editor was projecting a sophisticated understanding of critical genres. In true essayist style, Paul Taylor began with the statement that Australian art writing was 'underrated and neglected',²⁰ asserting that no healthy art critical forum existed in Australia. His view was that 'the continuing factionalisation of our writers is a direct result of Australia's involvement in internationalist art history and art politics.'²¹ Australian criticism was shaped by two particular art histories that believed in the linear continuity of artistic styles and which were, therefore, as exclusive and reductive as they pretended not to be. Taylor cited Patrick McCaughey, Terry Smith and Janine Burke, tracing their indebtedness to Greenberg. He then packed them neatly away in the back of the Australian art criticism cupboard, quoting Margaret Plant who had written, 'the critic passes with the style he espouses.'²²

Taylor then moved on to discuss the term 'pluralism'. This, he wrote, was a reaction to the teleological historicisms defined above. But it had become all-inclusive and, in doing so, had lost any sort of intellectual rigour. A final pluralist method, he hissed, 'is barely criticism at all': this was what he rightly pilloried as 'list-making'. Here, the critic was a passive, non-judgemental 'onlooker and bookkeeper'.²³ His assessment of Marxist criticism was that it was neither historicist nor pluralist because it was more concerned with sociology, with 'the premises of the contemporary art world' more than with contemporary art.²⁴ In other words, Marxist critics (by whom he meant Terry Smith, Ian Burn, Ann Stephen and Charles Merewether) were preoccupied with describing the power relationships between art institutions, especially galleries and artists, rather than art. It allowed this analysis to replace art. Taylor asserted that in reality the publishing opportunities for difficult, ambitious writers had been severely limited. *Art & Text* was going to provide a venue for such writing.

Taylor then carefully constructed an argument to support the journal's second ambition: to 'sustain a level of cultural critique in which the artist, more a "producer" (in Walter Benjamin's sense of the word) than a "performer", actively features.'²⁵ By invoking Walter Benjamin, who had been resurrected from obscurity in the US during the previous decade, he tied his editorial to intellectually impeccable avant-garde foundations. Taylor continued in the same vein, quoting Xavier de Ventos, whose *Heresies of Modern Art* (1980) called for the redefinition of art in relation to other

19. Taylor, 1981a.

20. Taylor, 1981a, p. 5.

21. Taylor, 1981a, p. 6.

22. Plant, 1978; Taylor took three quotes from Plant's essay, referring to it as a 'most intelligent and straightforward assessment of the mid-seventies Australian art scene'. See Taylor, 1981a, p. 7; Taylor knew Plant well, as one of her younger students; she was McCaughey's successor at Monash University's Department of Visual Arts, a transitional figure in writing on Australian art, a perceptive, precise commentator on late 1960s and 1970s art who commented little on contemporary art after that.

23. Taylor, 1981a, p. 8.

24. Taylor, 1981a, p. 6.

25. Taylor, 1981a, p. 8.

cultural practices. He was justifying the relocation of visual art inside the field of mass cultural production. He cited John Cage on Beethoven, then wrote: ‘As Michel Foucault writes of Flaubert and Manet, Cage too “produced works in a self-conscious relationship to earlier paintings or text . . . erect[ing] art within the archive”.’²⁶ Taylor connected art to music, firmly grounding the New Wave practice of quotation in the past, and in particular within conceptualism’s archival turn. He placed all this in the context of the new and difficult, but stylish and fashionable, Theory.

From here, Taylor deftly took up Roland Barthes’ suggestion that ‘the critic, too, will be an artist.’²⁷ Raising Robert Venturi’s 1966 book, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, to legitimise quotation from past styles, Taylor declared, ‘As an architect, Venturi himself manipulates signs and symbols from the existing architecture and (urban) landscape rather than seeking to innovate a building’s form by means of technology.’²⁸ Finally, he tied this back again to Barthes: ‘both Venturi and Barthes propose what could be called a “lateral” or trans-historical approach to form.’²⁹ This was the last stop in Taylor’s argument. He had gathered impeccable sources (Benjamin, Foucault, Barthes and Venturi) to construct an academic model that placed mass culture, music and architecture firmly within the horizon of contemporary art. Taylor concluded with the following proclamation:

[T]he counter-cultures of the early and mid-seventies, which espoused pluralism as an alternative, have themselves become an institution; their critical apparatus has become a block to analysis. In the form of alternative spaces, journals, collectives and so on, an ‘alternative institution’ has sprung up in which the artist’s implicit role remains that of historical performer. As such, pluralism, and its related alternative institutions of power, compels the experimenter to transgress further boundaries.³⁰

Taylor was insisting that although pluralism had been the necessary antidote to formalist hegemony during the early 1970s, it had become institutionalised. It was now an irrelevant idea. To reach this point, Taylor had relegated conservative art critics such as Patrick McCaughey, radical art critics such as Terry Smith, feminist art critics such as Janine Burke and Suzanne Spunner, newspaper art critics such as Sandra McGrath, and well-meaning poets such as Gary Catalano to the past. He had done this in the style of an academic, citing references that most in his list would not have known. Taylor had argued that these leading Australian art writers employed old art critical frameworks that had become irrelevant, in an excellent example of the rhetorical technique of declaring one’s opposition irrelevant, boring and old-fashioned. It was another technique often used by *Art & Text* writers. Taylor’s editorial ended with a statement of what the journal would include and what it would avoid. Essentially, *Art & Text* aimed to do what other Australian art magazines did not, and steered clear of existing models. *Art & Text* was going to publish reflective essays

26. Taylor, 1981a, p. 9.

27. Taylor, 1981a, p. 10, cites Barthes, 1970.

28. See the citation of Venturi, 1966, in Taylor, 1981a, pp. 10-11.

29. Taylor, 1981a, p. 11.

30. Taylor, 1981a, p. 11.

about art and visual culture, not lavishly illustrated reviews. The later introduction of reviews and feature articles on artists was a matter of careful deliberation by *Art & Text*'s second editor, Paul Foss and managing editor Jeff Gibson, who had begun working for the magazine in 1988 and who was crucial in its later, transnational incarnation and new-found visual elegance, the opposite of the determinedly worthy monochrome of Taylor's early issues.³¹

As well as setting out the magazine's editorial aims, *Art & Text*'s first issue included essays detailing what was to be the magazine's theoretical position: an article, 'Australian "New Wave" and the "Second Degree"' by Taylor and a book review of Dick Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* by artist-musician Philip Brophy. Taylor's and Brophy's articles were effectively the journal's mission statements but the issue also included articles by a surprisingly broad range of well-known writers, including *Lip* regular Janine Burke on artistic collaboration, US pluralist art critic Suzi Gablik on 'Modernism and Morality', and Australian artist-theorist Ian Burn on 1960s art. Although he was associated with an identifiable group of artists and writers, Taylor cultivated contributors from across the spectrum of the art-writing world.³²

Taylor's first issue feature article considered the work of four artists within what he termed the 'realm of the second degree'.³³ This was a postmodern realm constructed from Hebdige's theory of subcultures and Barthes' concept of the 'second degree'.³⁴ Taylor adapted three concepts—subcultures, subversion and signs—to postulate the existence of a new New Wave. The proposition went like this. Subcultures such as the Mods, Beats, Gays and Punks had emerged in Western consumer society post-World War II. They had repositioned and reconceptualised mainstream cultural codes and sign-systems inside small, exclusive subcultures. Recontextualisation subverted the mainstream's codes, new configurations appearing from the entropy of older elements. The body was a prime signifier, Taylor wrote—closely echoing Hebdige—so that 'clothing, hairstyles and accessories speak of the tastes and sensibilities of the wearer and, most crucially, identify him.'³⁵ These subcultural methods, which subverted conventional values and created new relationships, characterised a New Wave

31. On the strength of his work at the magazine, Gibson was able to move to New York as managing editor of *Artforum*'s literary sister-journal, *Bookforum*, and then to become the managing editor of *Artforum* itself.

32. Crawford, 2004. In the first eight issues of *Art & Text* there were essays by artists John Nixon, Peter Tyndall, Imants Tillers and Richard Dunn, all associated with John Nixon's Art Projects; Philip Brophy and Adrian Martin from the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre; artists Juan Davila and Vivienne Shark LeWitt; and curator Judy Annear. But there were also articles by well-known, mainstream writers and curators such as Bernard Smith, Patrick McCaughey, Donald Brook, Julie Ewington, Ian Burn and Terry Smith, with all of whom Taylor was on at least reasonable working and speaking terms. The magazine consistently drew on a wide range of subjects including the pedagogical perennial ('What Can We Do With the Art Class' by Donald Brook in *Art & Text*, 4, Summer 1981); the art historical ('The Sixties: Crisis and Aftermath' by Ian Burn in *Art & Text*, 1, Autumn 1981); and the feminist ('Feminism and Fragmentation' by Julie Ewington in *Art & Text*, 7, Spring 1982) as well as an increasing component of French Theory.

33. Taylor, 1981b.

34. Taylor, 1981b, pp. 23–32.

35. Taylor, 1981b, p. 23; see Hebdige, 1979. Hebdige's book immediately became the definitive text on subculture; it was Paul Taylor's major reference; Taylor commissioned a review of the book by Philip Brophy for *Art & Text*'s first issue. Hebdige's book analyses youth subcultures in post-World War Two Britain. He looked at teddy boys, mods and rockers, skinheads and punks; he applied semiotic theory, especially Roland Barthes, along with Gramsci's theory of hegemony, to argue that subcultures adopted styles — 'those emphatic combinations of dress, dance, argot, music, etc' (p. 101)— that deliberately subverted conventional codes and set out to provoke.

aesthetic. Adrian Martin remembered that *Art & Text* had to be seen in the context of a vibrant scene and a cultural life that was characterised by ‘militant dilettantism’ and ‘cultural *amateurism*.’³⁶ Rejecting Terry Smith’s accusation that this was ‘anything goes silliness’, Martin emphasised that ‘anything goes’ meant the ‘free, open possibility of *experimentation*’, not to ‘*do* anything’ but to ‘*try* anything’.³⁷

The fashion, music, and art of the New Wave were, Taylor argued, ‘steeped in the vocabulary and information channels of the mass media.’³⁸ Its young audience and artists quoted from popular styles of the past, particularly from the 1960s, detaching them from their political and economic history: ‘[New Wave’s] pleasure’, wrote Taylor, ‘exists in this very dislocation of memory.’³⁹ Again, we see the conjunction of pleasure and dislocation. Taylor’s argument to this point was that subcultures now had a significant cultural presence. The New Wave artist would place cultural signs in new relationships, re-interpreting the history of Modernist art ‘as a series of signs and as a style that can be quoted.’⁴⁰ This artist was a ‘tinkerer (bricoleur)’ who collected and combined fragments, ‘a pure surface crossed by cultural flows.’⁴¹ In other words, the artist was not a creator or a visionary but a ‘producer’ or a ‘mixer’ who ‘originated nothing but tinkered furiously with pieces—pieces of thought or “theory” as much as aesthetic forms and mass cultural signs.’⁴² We see this in Jenny Watson’s painting, *Twiggy by Richard Avedon (for Paul Taylor)* (1979). The work is a crude rendering in oddly but consistently textured brushwork of a famous photographic portrait of the British model Twiggy set amidst the geometric fields of an abstract painting. As the title makes clear, Watson was quoting other art and making no attempt to look original. The work was dedicated to Paul Taylor, acknowledging the world of fashion (which Taylor adored) was made up of quotations (the use of which he championed).

But the Australian New Wave remained within the dominant culture and was a cultural sensibility linked to the notion of subculture, not to an actual counter-culture.⁴³ The distinction between the two was crucial to New Wave art, making it a very different product from the substantially counter-cultural—or alternative—political art of the 1970s. This distinction is crucial. It was the intellectual impetus that gave Taylor’s identification of subculture with Australian popist postmodernism its power: a member of a subculture does not want mainstream membership, but the fashion-conscious mainstream (the art world) admires subcultures. Add to that the postcolonial spin possible upon the subculture’s cannibalism of mainstream signifiers

36. Emphasis in the original. Martin, 1988, p. 16; Martin’s paper is a retrospective and very nostalgic account of the very distinctive Melbourne subculture that embraced *Art & Text*. It successfully evokes the social context of *Art & Text*—but it tells only one part of the story of Australian art writing in the early 1980s.

37. Terry Smith and Adrian Martin were both speaking in ‘The Present and Recent Past of Australian Art and Criticism.’ According to endnote 2 (p. 19) of Martin’s paper, Smith’s comment was made in his paper ‘Art Criticism in Australia: The Mid-1970s’ but it does not appear in the edited paper published in the *Agenda* supplement’ see Martin, 1988, p. 17.

38. Taylor, 1981b, p. 23.

39. Taylor, 1981b, p. 23.

40. Taylor, 1981b, p. 24.

41. The terms ‘bricoleur’ and ‘bricolage’ were adopted from Hebdige, 1979; he used ‘bricolage’ to describe a technique that re-assembles signs to create a new discourse; see pp. 1–19 and p. 103.

42. Martin, 1988, p. 16.

43. Martin, 1988, p. 15.

(here, of canonical North Atlantic art; a cannibalism already embraced by Brazilian artists decades before, as we shall see) and the equation was complete.

Who was inside the subculture and who was outside? Carol Squires later was to comment that, ‘As Paul’s friend you were the smartest, cleverest, funniest, most talented person around,’ suggesting how he was able to mediate a ‘Melbourne alliance’ of artists, musicians, writers and curators.⁴⁴ The significance of the term ‘alliance’ should not be underestimated. This was not a collective, a club or an association. It was a disparate collection of people who were brought together for projects or activities by the entrepreneurial intervention of Taylor. The alliance held together for about two years, long enough to become a recognisable presence in the Australian art world and beyond. This was also the reason for its reputation as an elitist clique, for it was a ‘province of the white, urban leisure-class’ whose obsessive consumption ‘cut creative trails through a culture of objects both shiny-brand-new (12" import records) and functionally obsolescent (op shop bric-a-brac).’⁴⁵ There were two overlapping groups of *Art & Text* contributors: one was based around Art Projects, an important artist-run gallery orchestrated by John Nixon in Lonsdale Street; the other was centred at the Clifton Hill Community Music Centre. According to Adrian Martin, Paul Taylor—along with artists Juan Davila, Vivienne Shark LeWitt and curator Judy Annear—occupied ‘a mediating position’ between the two groups, though some artists spanned both. The artists showed or performed at Art Projects, the George Paton Gallery, the Clifton Hill Music Centre and the Seaview Ballroom in St Kilda.

The relationship between New Wave music and visual art was particularly close. Taylor’s friend, Philip Brophy, leader of the art-music group Tsk Tsk Tsk (- ↑ ↗), recalled in 2005 that ‘Paul was a big fan of my *Asphyxiation* project of 1980—that’s how he contacted me—as well as the work of Maria Kozic. He reprinted my catalogue essay to the exhibition “What is This Thing Called ‘Disco’?” in the third issue [of *Art & Text*].’⁴⁶ *Asphyxiation* consisted of three separate performances and a month’s installation at the George Paton Gallery. It dissected the world of disco: ‘We broke it up into every part possible,’ said band member Ralph Traviato in a 1981 *Virgin Press* interview.⁴⁷ Taylor immediately grasped the similarity between appropriation art and disco and was soon to write, ‘Disco’s *modus operandi* is repetition within the fertile space of the cover version, the re-staging of an original in terms of a specific use-

44. Squires, 1993, p. 16.

45. Martin, 1988, p. 17.

46. Brophy, 2004. The core members of Tsk Tsk Tsk were Philip Brophy, Maria Kozic, Ralph Traviato, Jane Stevenson and Leigh Parkhill however, there was an ‘organically changing personnel’ and more than 60 people were involved in Tsk Tsk Tsk; for further information see Jenkins, 1988.

47. Crawford, 1981, p. 12. The name of the band was actually - ↑ ↗, a name that Brophy invented in 1977 to indicate three descriptions of volume: length, width and height. Tsk Tsk Tsk appears in different spellings, sometimes hyphenated and sometimes not. Brophy was the spokesman for the group in the interview and gave the following explanation in the *Virgin Press* interview, ‘The basic approach of the band’s work is to pick an area of interest to us, which is usually part of an area of popular culture such as television, disco music, rock, muzak, Hollywood movies and we dissect these things looking from the point of view of them being constructed objects and we de-construct them and try to present everything back to an audience showing them these parts and how they operate . . . Semiotics comes into our work not as dogma or something we follow really rigorously, more than anything it’s a very practical analytical process we can use.’

value (dance).⁴⁸ In 1977, artist Jenny Watson had documented her association with singer Nick Cave's band, The Boys Next Door, in a series of portraits of band members based on photographs.⁴⁹ As Chris McAuliffe explained, she first went to hear the group because Cave was one of her students at the Caulfield Institute of Technology.⁵⁰ In 1979, she had persuaded Cave to hold aloft her painting, *An Original Oil Painting (Black and White): For Nick Cave (1979)* while the band performed a song called 'Let's Talk About Art' at the Crystal Ballroom. The artwork became a prop within a three-minute performance. What McAuliffe called a 'telling symbiosis' between art and music is a little overstated, but his delineation of the importance of punk as community, citing the movement of musicians between bands and the blurring of boundaries between performer and audience, was accurate. The Melbourne New Wave, accompanied by Paul Taylor, invented itself according to this model, ostensibly rejecting established institutional values and putatively seeking a space like Watson's prop within a wider world than that of art. In fact it made a space for itself inside the existing culture but immune from its criticism. If artists and musicians had already made the link between art and subcultural style, Paul Taylor took the notion across into the covertly structured culture of art writing and criticism through which artists were accredited.

Taylor's art critical method was clever and calculated—Adrian Martin later recalled that 'Paul revelled in this provocateur status.'⁵¹ Vivienne Shark LeWitt remembered that, 'Paul could heap scathing, withering scorn and merciless contempt on anything or anyone he deemed "second-rate" or "know-nothing".'⁵² Taylor's version of the New Wave, according to Adrian Martin, had a 'serious playful' relationship with history and politics, which manifested itself in 'an extra edge of irony, intractability, extremism or outrageousness' that marked Taylor's first issue of *Art & Text*.⁵³ Serious-minded critics later began to accuse Taylor and *Art & Text* writers of not understanding the theory they espoused.⁵⁴ Comments such as 'I write from a position of having nothing to say' and 'I'm very fond of contradicting myself', combined with constantly shifting argument and personal flamboyance, were calculated to induce near apoplexy in the magazine's buttoned-down, slightly older opponents.⁵⁵ Taylor's appropriation of subcultural theory could not be criticised for its lack of political and ideological commitment because it did not assign the same commitment to codes and signals. Worse still for his feminist and Marxist precursors, his argument ignored or ridiculed everyone who disagreed. *Lip* writer Julie Ewington admonished feminists to

48. Taylor, 1982a. The essay 'Popism: The Art of White Aborigines' was commissioned for the international magazine, *Flash Art* and first printed in *On the Beach*, 1 (1982).

49. McAuliffe, 1997. Chris McAuliffe's remarkable evocation of this moment examines the relationship between art and pop music, proposing that art schools were places where high and mass culture met: 'punk rock was the ultimate art school music movement'. McAuliffe was a student in Melbourne during the early 1980s and a young contemporary of the group Adrian Martin wrote about in 'Before and After *Art & Text*'; see Frith and Horne, 1987, pp. 2–3.

50. McAuliffe, 1997, p. 505.

51. Martin, 1993, p. 14. Sadly, apart from 'Before and After *Art & Text*', many of the recollections of Paul Taylor appeared in obituaries after he died in 1992, aged just thirty-five. Such recollections are hardly objective but they convey a sense of the impact of his personality on *Art & Text* and beyond.

52. LeWitt, 1993, p. 14.

53. Martin, 1988, p. 17.

54. Anson, 1983.

55. Davidson, 1983, p. 46.

beware. In her article, 'Fragmentation and Feminism,' published in *Art & Text* 7 (Spring 1982), she explained that New Wavers believed that only those with a New Wave sensibility could understand the New World.⁵⁶ This was fairly accurate; the members of Taylor's circle dismissed anyone who hadn't 'caught up' with the 'pulse of hyperreality'.⁵⁷ In 1988, Adrian Martin remembered how *Art & Text* 'made short work of many "counter cultural" enemies' and 'revelled in an almost irrational, *de rigueur* disdain for "message" art, community art, artworkers' collectives', a disdain that certainly included *Art Network* and *Lip*.⁵⁸ It was Taylor as provocateur who featured in Adrian Martin's short memoir, 'Before and After *Art & Text*' (1988). With considerable affection, Martin described New Wavers as naughty children who meant no harm.⁵⁹ The Lip Collective and *Art Network* certainly would not have agreed that there was much about their relationship with *Art & Text* that was playful. Many of the rhetorical and critical wounds inflicted at the time were still raw and open while Martin was walking down memory lane. He conceded that the New Wave campaign against *Lip* and *Art Network* had probably been a mistake: they were not the true enemies at all. The rhetorical gulf between worthy Marxism and feminism on one hand and the 'wicked clever delights of New Wave' on the other, was greater than the actual divide. The true enemy was the Establishment, the almost unchanged institutions, and the 'echelons of high culture'. Nothing the New Wave did really impacted on that Establishment. 'But', Martin said, it was 'polemically necessary'.⁶⁰ Why? Because the New Wave was trying to establish a new and radical critique *against other publications*. It was a battle for discursive territory with contemporary Australian art as the prize. According to Martin's account, Taylor was trying to create a subculture. We disagree completely. What is surely significant here is that Paul Taylor identified and tapped into an *existing* art critical subculture. He didn't need to expand it because its sub-groups provided all the writers, artists and events that he needed in order to establish *Art & Text* as [in Martin's words] the 'public flagship of new writing, new theory, marginal culture.'⁶¹

Four paragraphs into 'Australian "New Wave" and the "Second Degree"', Paul Taylor had already quoted essays by Umberto Eco, Hal Fischer, Val Hennessy, Dick Hebdige and Susan Sontag.⁶² Two of these (Fischer and Sontag) were essays on gay and camp subculture and two (Hebdige and Hennessy) were examinations of subculture. Developing the idea of 'pleasure in dislocation', Taylor introduced Roland Barthes' concept of the 'second degree':

'The second degree is . . . a way of life. All we need to do is change the focus of a remark, of a performance, of a body, in order to reverse altogether the enjoyment we might have given it.'⁶³

Barthes provided Taylor with the most memorable description of the New Wave's highly erotic aesthetic: 'As soon as it thinks itself, language becomes corrosive.'⁶⁴

56. Ewington, 1982.

57. Martin, 1988, p. 17.

58. Martin, 1988, p. 17.

59. Martin, 1988, 15.

60. Martin, 1988, p. 17.

61. Martin, 1988, p. 15.

62. Eco, 1973; Fischer, 1977; Hennessy, 1979; Hebdige, 1979; Sontag, 1967.

63. Taylor, 1981b, 23. Taylor broke Barthes' sentence to omit the word 'also'.

64. Taylor, 1981b, p. 24.

Such an aesthetic would clearly distance itself, even whilst claiming descent from, conceptual art. Language literally constituted Art and Language's art; feminism's reform of language was a project in itself; arcane terminology was crucial to Marxist ideology. Taylor's eclectic New Wave was anti-literary but not anti-textual.

So, Taylor took sociology, cultural studies and semiotics — all emerging sub-specialisations in the academy, all new university disciplines that threatened enrolments in the only-recently established discipline of art history — to define New Wave art as a subculture, and to take advantage of this identification to give its appropriation a political — and geopolitical — spin. This was not necessarily obvious: Taylor's favoured artists, from Jenny Watson, Maria Kozic, John Lethbridge, Howard Arkley and the collective art music group Tsk Tsk Tsk were making relatively conventional artistic objects, after all, though they were using popular culture as their major artistic source. Taylor wrote, 'immediate taste reactions are crucial to work's experience, and many such "gut reactions" — subversive, discriminatory and highly strung — are ultimately just as willing to embrace a good pair of shoes as a good painting.'⁶⁵ He was rhetorically assaulting the central assumptions of Australian art criticism. When he referred to Kant, to 'immediate taste reactions' and 'gut reactions', he was stealing the language of his art history training, at Monash, under formalist critic McCaughey, but dismissing its claims to competence. Instead of elevating mass culture to the level of art, Taylor — like visual culture theorists before him — had done the reverse: denying art any special, paradigmatic status, he relegated it to a lesser role, as one sign system amongst many. Taylor's condemnation of educated taste and its 'gut reaction' linked him powerfully to Donald Brook's earlier rejection of art history's pretensions to particular competencies, as well as his rejection not just of Greenberg's taste, but also his eye and nose. If the greatest Australian proponent of the art critic's 'gut reaction' had been Laurie Thomas, and if his taste had been closely related to blood and soil, not footwear (unlike Taylor), then Taylor was in many ways Donald Brook's successor in rejecting both art history and art criticism.

Much of Taylor's writing that we have described was melodramatic and frankly silly. Paul Taylor was not unique. His rise to prominence as an art critic was very similar to that of Robert Hughes and Patrick McCaughey. They, too, were examples of the flamboyant *wunderkind* who were supported, even indulged, by the institutions and publications of the art world. There would have been no *Art & Text* without the institutional support from Taylor's established academic colleagues in Tasmania, the Visual Arts Board and the Prahran College of Advanced Education (CAE) which, with astonishing generosity, provided *Art & Text* with free office space and a free phone and fax service; this was the result of sculptor John Davis's and painter Vic Majzner's support. Assisted by part time lecturers, including the flamboyant Howard Arkley, the two were encouraging the most experimental approaches from their students. Prahran had an important artist in residence program, where famous English painter John Walker first encountered Australia. Downstairs, Taylor's Art Projects friend John Nixon taught in the college's foundation year program, along with Tony Clark and Aleks Danko.

65. Taylor, 1981b, p. 30.
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Antipodality

In 1981, Patrick McCaughey was appointed the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). He invited Taylor to curate a large exhibition of contemporary Australian art at the NGV as a freelance curator, a generous and almost unprecedented invitation—one that certainly sidelined the NGV's own curators who had been crucial in the definition of the art of the previous decade. This nevertheless left little time to create a major exhibition, for *Popism* opened on 16 June 1982. It featured twelve artists, including *Art & Text* contributors Juan Davila, Imants Tillers, Peter Tyndall and Richard Dunn, and two bands, one of which was Tsk Tsk Tsk. The exhibition catalogue essays were a loud and strong declaration of a break between past and present generations of artists and critics, and were clearly intended as part of the same campaign as the June 1982 issue of *Art & Text* (Issue 6), which featured a special section comprising essays by artist Imants Tillers, Meaghan Morris and Paul Foss under the title, 'Antipodality'. This special section was closely linked to the direction underpinning *Popism*, and in retrospect we notice New Wavery less than the reconfiguration of Australianness.⁶⁶

The semi-standard Director's preface that McCaughey contributed to *Popism* carried a caveat: it warned visitors that contemporary art could be challenging, requiring 'an open mind as well as a critical one.'⁶⁷ Taylor's own essay, 'Popism', set out to explain the challenge, the apparent amateurishness of the works he had chosen. It was crucial that the show's 'blatant excursions into amateurism' be understood and accepted before Taylor introduced the more complex argument in which he recapitulated the themes of New Wave.⁶⁸ For the works in the exhibition were apparently deliberately badly painted or badly photographed; they used everyday and popular culture images; they copied and were superficial; and they blurred the distinction between high and low culture. Perhaps just as disconcerting was that in conjunction with this de-skilling, the art wore its theory self-consciously and blatantly on its sleeve: it was unapologetically knowing. And theorists were central to the essay's next argument. Heavily indebted to Douglas Crimp's catalogue essay for the famous Metro Pictures exhibition, *Pictures* (1979), which had been reprinted in *October* the same year, Taylor noted that the works in the show were all in some way indebted to photography, the medium of the indexical transmission of images and the postmodern theories surrounding photography.⁶⁹ Further, the 'act of picturing in these works is the act of referencing and cross-referencing' pre-existing images or images 'borrowed' from an earlier source.⁷⁰ The images, he continued, could be seen as a palimpsest, a 'surface that has been written on, erased, and written on again', in the sense that images take on new and different, unintended meanings dependent on reader reception rather than artistic intention.⁷¹ Taylor's essay adopted the terms 'quotation', 'assimilation' and 'appropriation', referring to 'an art which layers meanings on old meanings', and this catalogue essay, over-reliant upon Crimp, was in many ways a first draft for his next major piece of writing, written immediately after he completed 'Popism', where he began to clearly depart from the reification of New York

66. Tillers, 1982, pp. 51-60; Morris, 1982, pp. 61-73; Foss, 1982, pp. 74-88.

67. McCaughey, 1982, front cover.

68. Taylor, 1982c.

69. Crimp, 1973. Crimp, 1979, pp. 75-88.

70. Taylor, 1982a, p. 1.

71. Taylor, 1982a, p. 1.

postmodern art's particular preoccupation with appropriation. In his new essay, 'Popism—The Art of the White Aborigines', which appeared in a small Sydney journal not dissimilar to his own, *On the Beach*, Taylor developed the connection between a palimpsest and Australian national culture, with an attendant undercurrent of history, memory and trauma that marked his essay as diverging from Crimp's, which was already three years or more old.⁷²

'Popism—The Art of the White Aborigines' was written just after the catalogue essay for *Popism* but it appeared while the exhibition was still open. It is subtly different from Taylor's catalogue essay. He had modified his earlier, largely received, statements about unoriginality, understanding that originality now occurs as it does in disco, as variations of the original.⁷³ He had moved on slightly from Crimp. The most significant change, however, was the model he now constructed, heavily indebted to Foss, of Australia as palimpsest. There was, he suggested, no 'real' Australia, just images and representations, 'the flak of an explosion not of our detonation.'⁷⁴ That is, the search for a 'regional Australian culture' would always be futile because it does not exist. Australia is uniquely unoriginal and inauthentic because of the circumstances of its definition by others. This had been Paul Foss's argument in 'Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum', but now Taylor reasoned that recent Australian art was taking this world-view as a starting point for its particular quotation or appropriation of images. Australian art, according to 'Popism', was perfectly placed to use the practice of appropriation 'in a carnivalesque array of copies, inversions and negatives.'⁷⁵ By taking the idea of an Antipodes and reflecting it through Foss's prism of French theory, Taylor's argument appeared to prise Australian art from the centre/periphery bind. 'In this new scenario', triumphantly wrote Paul Taylor, 'Australian art can become the well-paid beneficiary of its timely, profound and radical superficiality.'⁷⁶

This was an art critical moment when everything seemed to come together perfectly and coherently with powerful explanatory force. Taylor argued that Popist culture included visual art along with fashion and music. He had taken the ideas of subculture from Hebdige and the second degree from Barthes, locating the New Wave at the forefront of pop culture. Foss contributed the third idea, an image more than an argument, that Australia is Europe's complement, a simulacrum of the Great Southern Land. His suggestion that Australia is an idea, existing in a void between map and territory, allowed a corollary: that Australian identity is unauthentic and unoriginal. From there, it was a small step to argue that true unoriginality was uniquely Australian, making Australian appropriation art unique. In a masterly introduction—

72. Taylor, 1982a, p. 2. The article was illustrated by one of the first Imants Tillers canvas board paintings, *Suppressed Imagery*, 1981, his famous painting that reproduces a blurred postcard of the Church of St Francis at Assisi; reprinted in Butler, 1996, pp. 85–7; 'Popism—The Art of White Aborigines' had been commissioned for the international art magazine, *Flash Art*, in 1982 but was published first in *On the Beach*, 1; Taylor wrote the catalogue essay for *Eureka! Artists from Australia*, in London, also in 1982.

73. See also see Butler, 1996; Rex Butler's 'Introduction' to *What is Appropriation?* remains the only detailed periodisation of Australian postmodernism.

74. Taylor, 1982a, p. 86.

75. Taylor, 1982a, p. 86.

76. Taylor, 1982a, p. 87.

the best introduction to the Australian spin on theory ever published—for the anthology, *What is Appropriation? An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the '80s and '90s* (1996), Rex Butler explained that *Popism* was the inauguration of appropriation in Australia.⁷⁷ Butler, himself intellectually shaped by these arguments and the period, noted that Tsk Tsk Tsk's performance, *Texts* (1979), and Judy Annear's exhibition, *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1981), both predicated on an understanding of postmodern appropriation, pre-dated *Popism*. But, he correctly argued, Taylor was the first to 'give this practice of appropriation its rhetorical charge', making the connection between appropriation and Australian cultural identity.⁷⁸

Taylor's introduction to 'Antipodality', the special section of *Art & Text* 6 (Winter 1982) declared:

Ours is a multinational, not an international art. The question of our artistic imagination is not a question of national and natural characteristics Our specificity is undermined by our reproducibility, a condition of being nowhere in particular within the multinational image.⁷⁹

Art & Text 6 and *On the Beach*, with Taylor's and his friends' redevelopment of the exhibition's thesis, were in circulation (in numbers that were of course not large) at the same moment as *Popism* was on the walls. Now, Paul Taylor was concentrating on Australian identity and antipodality, emphasising that Australian art was *neither international nor national art*: it could stand in for art from anywhere (that is, it quoted from all art) and was therefore truly multinational. To support this claim, 'Antipodality' assembled essays by Imants Tillers, Meaghan Morris and Paul Foss, and photographs by Lyn Silverman, to argue that the problem of 'Australia' was not one of geography and origins, but one of texts and textuality.

The first essay in 'Antipodality' was by artist Imants Tillers.⁸⁰ In 'Locality Fails', a much-quoted essay, Tillers began by explaining how Australian artists and writers—and international visitors—had attempted to create an 'indigenous' Australian art by incorporating aspects of Aboriginal art and culture into their work. But the amnesia of late 1970s and 1980s Australian consumerism, heading towards the Bicentennial year, urgently demanded forms of collective memory that could both encompass the world beyond Australia and also the dispossession of Aboriginal people. White Australian works and theorists of the 1970s attempted to construct solutions to the provincial bind, identifying with an Aboriginal Dreaming—a landscape of traces—attempting cross-cultural image making and a link with aboriginality. Apart from Tim Johnson's paintings and Imants Tillers' early canvas boards, the best and most audacious examples were in film. Michael Glasheen's avant-garde video, *Uluru: Mythology of the Dreamtime*, 1978, used time-lapse photography, superimpositions, video mixing and rapid montage in a layered, stratified, extravagantly psychedelic twenty-four

77. Butler, 1996, pp. 16–17.

78. Butler, 1996, p. 20.

79. Taylor, 1982b. The fourth essay in 'Antipodality' is Paul Foss, 'Meridian of Apathy', pp. 74–88; as Taylor explains in the Introduction, this is Part 2 of Foss's previously published 'Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum'.

80. Tillers, 1982.

minute portrayal of Uluru. The work was screened in art house cinemas in Melbourne and Sydney. On the other hand, overseas artists—German artist Nikolaus Lang and London artist collective, The Boyle Family, came to Australia for the 1979 Biennale of Sydney, visiting the Outback then and on repeat visits to record and painstakingly mimic the strata and textures of the red landscape, with more conventional results. Lang's works attracted negative criticism, Gary Catalano writing, 'his works trespass on the terrain of a host of other disciplines—among them geology, anthropology, geography and archaeology—and effectively trivialize both their objects of inquiry and their procedures.'⁸¹

Even when this tactic appeared to be successful—and even when it attracted a degree of international attention—it soon became clear that international interest was really going to turn to Aboriginal culture, not the culture of white Australia. Tillers went on to argue that white artists' incorporation of indigeneity could never succeed because 'locality fails'. He eccentrically based his argument against a local Australian art, especially one tied to a particular time and place, upon a scientific theory, Bell's Theorem (1964). Bell's Theorem emerges from the domain of quantum physics. It shows that either the statistical predictions of quantum theory or the principle of local causes is false.⁸² The Clauser-Freedman Experiment (1972) confirms, in turn, that the statistical predictions of quantum theory are correct and, therefore, that the principle of local causes is false. Tillers then argued:

The failure of the principle of local causes implies that there can be unexplained connectedness between events in different 'space-like separated' places and that this connectedness allows for example, an experimenter (eg. an artist) in one place to affect the state of a system in another remote (apparently unconnected) place. Or this can happen in reverse.⁸³

In other words, the development of a genuinely local art is not possible. Even where obvious contact has not taken place, provincial or regional art can be *seen* as influenced by metropolitan art. Tillers's second point—that influence travels in two directions—was certainly not new. It had been the central premise of Bernard Smith's *European Vision and the South Pacific* (1960). But it was now very important. If accepted, Tillers' argument removed the pervasive taint of provincialism and put

81. Catalano, 1989.

82. See the simplified explanation of Bell's theorem in Felder, 1999. Felder defines locality as 'the principle that an event which happens at one place can't instantaneously affect an event someplace else.' In 1935, Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen had published a paper that predicted the breakdown of locality, showing that putting a particle in a device at one location could instantly and arbitrarily influence another, far distant particle. They refused to believe that this could happen and it was Einstein who called the result 'spooky action at a distance'. In 1964, J.S. Bell published a paper that showed that no theory that preserved locality could explain results predicted by quantum mechanics. Bell's Theorem states that 'no physical theory which is realistic and also local in a specified sense can agree with all of the statistical implications of Quantum Mechanics.' Tillers took the idea of the failure of locality out of its scientific context and used it to support an entirely different and unrelated argument about cultural identity.

83. Tillers, 1982, pp. 55–6.

Australian art on an equal footing in the world of multinational art simultaneously posited by Paul Taylor.

Taylor, Foss, Morris and Tillers were constructing a theoretical framework that supported an art practice that absorbed and processed existing images, producing new but unoriginal works. This is to say, in a fashion, that appropriation artists *ate* images, in particular those of the North Atlantic canon. *Art & Text's* theories were an autonomous recapitulation of the Brazilian modernist Oswald de Andrade, who had attempted to orchestrate national identity by proposing in the 1928 'Manifesto da Antropofagia' ('Anthropophagite Manifesto') that all European culture be subsumed by Brazilians, in the same way that ritual cannibalism was a way of gaining strength through the consumption of the enemy's power.⁸⁴ Australian and Brazilian culture shared a colonial settler heritage that generated in settler artists' sense of subordinated status, unoriginality and an underlying inadequacy. Paul Taylor's promotion of Australian art as uniquely unauthentic introduced irony to the critical method, exactly as the adoption of cannibalism as a metaphor for cultural exchange had done in Brazil in the 1920s. So, although the eventual aim (the national independence of Australian and Brazilian culture) was always important, the process was not necessarily phrased through straightforwardly legible metaphors. Ridicule is a powerful weapon and, as we have seen, was a key New Wave tactic.

Antipodality's second essay was by Meaghan Morris, written to accompany photographs by Lynn Silverman.⁸⁵ Silverman was a photographer who worked in strict series, commenting on the environment. She had moved from New York to Australia in 1975, and by 1980 was teaching photography at Sydney College of the Arts.⁸⁶ Morris's essay starts with a hand drawn map of Silverman's journey from Port Augusta across South Australia, through outback New South Wales via Bourke and Lightning Ridge to Sydney, and then back through Broken Hill and Tibooburra to Innamincka, Birdsville, Mara and Port Augusta.

The texts' photographs are printed four per page with two accompanying essays: one above the photographs and the other below them. The first essay is a reflection on the desert as a concept of generalised space. It picks up ideas of preconception and myth. Morris wrote, 'The desert is always a pre-existing pile of texts and documents, fantasies, legends, jokes and other people's memories.' She was explaining that the desert did not, and could not, exist apart from what had been read, heard and remembered.⁸⁷ The essay's second idea was the desert as contrast: 'In urban imaginations, that space is *there*—immense, unique, invested with meaning, and rather expensive to tour.'⁸⁸ Instead of following the usual trope of characterising the

84. See De Andrade, 1928; Lima, 1999, pp. 37-38. He writes, 'Against the fear of the enemy or other, the 'Manifesto da Antropofagia' proposes to cannibalise it: devouring the enemy, absorbing the other as nourishment, destroy (or deconstruct) it and use the energies thus liberated to invigorate the self.' The 1998 Sao Paulo Biennale revisited the *antropofagia* movement and curator Paulo Herkenhoff adopted 'Only anthropophagy unites us', the opening declaration of the Anthropophagite Manifesto, as its theme.

85. Morris, 1982 and Silverman, 1982.

86. Silverman said of her work in 1980, 'I like the notion of anchoring the reading of an image by using other images in sequential, collective, or paired relationships. Each photograph derives its meaning from the others around it within the series. The photographs all comment on one each other.' See Annear, 1982, p. 24.

87. Morris, 1982, p. 64.

88. Morris, 1982, p. 65.

desert as a threatening space, Morris noted the features that might have been threatening but in fact reduced the desert to a tourist destination. The third proposition was also reductive, designed to re-assert the postmodern view as well as to contain the idea of the desert: 'Documented, measured, mapped and crossed, the inland is viewed through a grid of pre-established procedures of possession.'⁸⁹ This owed much to Barthes and Baudrillard but it neither cited nor referred to either; nor did the essay refer to the photographs. The photographs could just as well have been added as illustrations by the designer. The second essay was completely different, beginning with the statement: 'I see Lynn Silverman's photographs as a study in the construction of inland space', in an engaged and personal response to an artwork.

In summary, Tillers and Morris had adopted different approaches to the problem of Australia's place in relation to the rest of the world. Tillers used scientific theories to argue that there was no problem. Australian art was in an equal relationship with world art because 'locality fails' as a barrier. Morris argued, just as Foss had in 'Theatrum Nondum Cognitorum' and Taylor did in 'Popism—The Art of White Aborigines', that Australia occupied a unique place, distinguished by its unauthenticity and its existence between territory and map. Both writers negated the centre/periphery problem by reconstructing the situation that produced it. These arguments had little in common with Bernard Smith's attempts in the 1950s to convince the scions of the UK art establishment that Australian art had matured and was now vigorous enough to revive flagging British art. Nor with Terry Smith's pleas in 1974 that it was America's responsibility, as the centre of world art, to support and nurture the provinces. Paul Taylor published 'Antipodality' as a defiant statement, as a new approach to the centre/periphery relationship. The approach posited a place for Australian art, and for Taylor, in a postmodern, globalised art world.

Secondary market art dealer and critic Jane Rankin-Reid had begun working in New York galleries in 1981. She was accustomed to assisting visiting Australian artists and art professionals. She met Paul Taylor in Melbourne in 1984 and found that when he relocated to New York shortly afterwards, he was already very attuned to the New York and European art scenes. According to her, he clearly saw himself and was briefly seen as one of the new generation of Australian arts identities, but astutely added, 'Paul's "Australianness" was an unquantified or unquantifiable component for him, New Yorkers didn't care about our pioneering characteristics, they're pretty game themselves after all.'⁹⁰ Taylor set up meetings with prominent Soho galleries for his chosen Australian artists but put considerable effort into promoting Imants Tillers:

I would say that Paul's most significant contribution around in his first year in Manhattan was in inserting Imants Tillers's work and theories into the Manhattan Appropriation mix. Imants is very retiring but a brilliant thinker (or was, and importantly his work matched his intellectual insight beautifully at that time) and Paul felt strongly that he belonged profile-

89. Morris, 1982, p. 72.

90. Rankin-Reid, 2005.

wise alongside rising stars Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince etc. He went in to bat for Imants in a way that he rarely did for other artists.⁹¹

Imants Tillers had solo shows in 1984 and 1985 at the Bess Cutler Gallery in New York. Venerable American critic Donald Kuspit reviewed Tillers's work in *Art and America* (March 1985). The review began, 'Taken together, the paintings in this exhibition constitute a super-parody which reveals the limits of the parody: the joke may have been on the joker.'⁹² Kuspit had read Tillers's artist's statement—he quoted it in his review — but he simply did not register the *Art & Text*-derived theoretical position — the combination of Second Degree and Antipodality — that it exemplified. In his book, *The Postmodern Art of Imants Tillers*, Grahame Coulter-Smith attempts to explain away Kuspit's negative judgement, claiming that the critic confused Tillers's appropriation with a New York deconstructive appropriation to which he was unsympathetic.⁹³ However, this was not Kuspit's only review of Australian art in that issue of *Art and America*. A few pages earlier, he had written a review, 'Australian Drawings at CDS', an historical overview of Australian drawings curated by American academic resident in Australia, Memory Holloway. In the course of his review, Kuspit mused about what makes Australia so appealing to Americans, linking this to the 'great issues of cultural identity'. He also referred to Holloway's catalogue essay — certainly inflected by *Art & Text* criticism, given Holloway's teaching position at Monash University where Taylor had studied, that Australian self-analysis had led to 'the disavowal, presumably once and for all, of any clear and distinct meaning to being Australian.'⁹⁴ Kuspit thought Holloway's comment was important enough to quote in his review, but he quoted it as an unfortunate development, not as a stunning new approach to Australian art or as a new imperative for art theory. Not only was *Art & Text*'s Antipodality more or less illegible in New York, but locality had failed. Ironically, Tillers was shortly after to begin a long transition in his paintings from the juxtaposition of Aboriginal motifs with quotations from European and American contemporary art towards an unabashedly poetic, metaphoric landscape painting (upon his move to Cooma, near Canberra). These paintings were constructed from quotations from Aboriginal art; they now exemplified a white artist's sincere and heartfelt incorporation of indigeneity; the Tillers of 1982 would never have accepted them because, still, 'locality fails'. Artist and writer Ian North was to later take up Imants Tillers' revision of 'Locality Fails', suggesting another term again, 'postAboriginality', carefully rebutting the paternalism and essentialist implications of the older term, 'Aboriginalism'.⁹⁵ This word had, North explained, been used in literary criticism as a parallel to the idea of Orientalism in order to register a movement of fascination with Aboriginal culture and a denial of Aborigines' right to speak on their own behalf. But 'postAboriginality' still sounded like it implied historical closure. So North coined the word, *starAboriginality*. This was an awkward idea, since white Australian art regarded Aboriginality as beyond the cultural pale, avoiding it out of a kind of courtesy while drawing deeply on the landscape's apparent presence and its colonised past. We are arguing that Taylor's writing was in intimate but unintended double dialogue with his historical moment: the Cold War and the looming issue of indigenous reconciliation. Though there were the overt references to

91. Rankin-Reid, 2005.

92. Kuspit, 1985a.

93. Coulter-Smith, 2002, p. 80.

94. Kuspit, 1985b, p. 154.

95. North, 2001.

indigeneity and Aboriginality, there was no sense of a debt, a moral responsibility for the dispossession of aboriginal people.

But through the same, innovative period of *Art & Text's* appearance and emigration, from 1979 and 1983, Ian Burn, Nigel Lendon, Charles Merewether and Ann Stephen were writing a book that was belatedly published in 1988, *The Necessity of Australian Art: An Essay About Interpretation*.⁹⁶ Burn and his co-authors argued that existing interpretations failed to account for many recent developments in Australian art; this was what Donald Brook had been arguing since 1967. But they, unlike Brook, developed a political solution to the problem. They argued that although Bernard Smith's *Australian Painting* had expanded the understanding of Australian art, it had constructed Australian art history within a framework of dependency. That is, Smith's model, which Taylor had absorbed at Monash University, had pioneered the necessity of interpreting Australian art in terms of its dependency on English, European and American art. This 'inhibiting power of the interpretation' resulted in a 'process of cultural devaluation' that Burn and his co-authors set out to address.⁹⁷ In a carefully constructed, elaborate argument, they asserted that the dependency explanation was appropriate when it was written, at the early 1960s stage of Australian cultural development, but by the 1980s was no longer useful. They wanted attention to be paid to the often artistically conservative Australian landscape tradition, so that 'the idea of a regional tradition might be reclaimed, thus re-establishing a more complex and richer sense of cultural specificity.'⁹⁸ True to their neo-Marxist sympathies, the collective argued that Australian artistic practices should be interpreted 'in terms of a peripheral capitalist formation', and that the significant artistic traditions grew out of a relationship with the land.

In other words, the landscape tradition was fundamental because it reflected the Australian relationship with the land, moving from appropriation to a focus on imagining regional locations, and from there to a national symbolism that embodied a national cultural identity.⁹⁹ Their leftist solution continued the Australian Left's deeply conflicted Cold War attempt to reconcile nation with a cosmopolitan ideology. Burn, Lendon, Merewether and Stephen had developed a critical framework for contemporary Australian art that circumvented the centre-periphery dialectic, and in a way this uncannily doubled *Art & Text's* appeal to subcultural self-sufficiency. But theirs was a historicist framework that was inherently irreconcilable with *Art & Text's* postmodernist, opportunist Realpolitik, a politics defined and circumscribed by semiotic formalism that thought it understood, as Taylor thought he did, Burn's argument. *The Necessity of Australian Art* was to be influential in the 1990s, and it was a significant, if subliminal, part of sweeping aside the provincialism model that had been so powerfully codified and set in motion by Bernard Smith. It was ultimately more influential than Paul Taylor's essays. But even this was to be subsumed by new understandings about Australian art history in the reception of another landscape tradition altogether, one with a confident conversation with modernity based on cultural equality and semiotic appropriation: the efflorescence of Western Desert

96. Burn et al., 1988.

97. Burn et al, 1988, p. 8 & p. 9.

98. Burn et al, 1988, p. 145.

99. Burn et al, 1988, pp. 4-9.

painting and the reconsiderations its understanding was to force. This was to gather pace more or less from the 1988 Bicentennial onwards.

Expatriation

With *Art & Text*, an Australian art writer/editor — Taylor — was finally making a carefully calibrated bid to plausibly intervene with Australian-produced art in international art history on terms that rewrote international contemporary art. Whether this was to succeed at all is irrelevant. Rose-coloured recollections of the early 1980s emphasise the iconoclasm of Taylor's alliances. We think this perspective is marked by sentimentality, and underplays the audacity of Taylor's attempt — in collaboration with his friends, including Tillers — to rethink art history's historiography. *Art & Text* was more than a tool for promoting young artists and thumbing his nose at the art establishment. A magazine devoted to young, unknown Melbourne artists, however radical in Australia, was not going to attract international attention. Ashley Crawford remembered that Taylor saw publishing as a power base. From the start, Taylor planned and worked to establish *Art & Text* as an Australia-based but international magazine, to place Australian art and Australian art writing in an international context.¹⁰⁰ Ashley Crawford recalled that Taylor was fascinated by the international stage, always asking why Australia should be such a backwater; no chauvinism there.¹⁰¹ Jane Rankin-Reid recalled similarly. Asked what *Art & Text* did for Paul Taylor (2005), her reply was instant, 'He developed and used it as his international calling card.'¹⁰² He interviewed famous international theorists and critics including Clement Greenberg and Rosalind Krauss.¹⁰³ He co-published 'Double Trouble,' with British journal *ZG* (*Art & Text* 15 (Spring 1984) and *ZG* 11 (Summer 1984).

And then, of course, Taylor moved to New York. The Summer 1984/5 issue, *Art & Text* 16, was co-edited by Paul Taylor and Paul Foss. *Art & Text* 17 listed Foss as the Melbourne-based editor (Foss) with Taylor as the New York editor. *Art & Text* had applied to the Australia Council for \$10,000 to establish a New York office during 1985–1986.¹⁰⁴ The application letter reported on the magazine's management restructure: 'This last year has seen the setting up of a New York office and Paul Taylor's relocation, as well as the inauguration of Paul Foss as Melbourne editor and business manager.' The justification for the New York office was as follows:

This move could be described as one concerning intercultural relations, to aid the dissemination and discussion of Australian art and art criticism in North America and by proximity Europe, and the reciprocal process, to increase the circulation of overseas work in the Australian context and

100. Rankin-Reid, 2005, commented, 'He was quite ambitious on behalf of this goal and was quite successful I believe.'

101. Crawford, 2004.

102. Rankin-Reid, 2005.

103. See Taylor, 1980, pp. 13-15; Taylor, 1980b, pp. 141-44; Taylor, 1982-3, pp. 31-37.

104. See Australia Council, *Art & Text* file, document 10, Paul Foss to Project Officers – Publications, Visual Arts Board. This letter *Art & Text* letterhead is headed 'Application for Publications (Periodicals) *Art & Text* magazine 1985 – 1986'.

therefore to help expose in a more effective way the internationalist dialogue currently vitalising art everywhere.¹⁰⁵

This was a capitulation, a recanting of the carefully constructed bracketing of national art that *Art & Text* had evolved. Later in the letter, Foss referred to the ‘Double Trouble’ issue of *Art & Text* and *ZG*, noting that it gained a record total circulation of 14,000, demonstrating to Taylor and Foss that it was not enough to produce a good art magazine based in Melbourne: there had to be an editorial presence and distribution overseas. When Taylor wrote to Ross Wolfe, Director of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, on 1 April 1985, he had been living in New York for more than six months and was writing for *Vanity Fair* magazine. He wrote that he rejected an ‘extremely well-paid offer to be exclusive to the magazine, which pains a little but *Art & Text* comes first.’¹⁰⁶ He repeated this in a postcard from Stuttgart to Wolfe dated 9 January 1986 in which he wrote, ‘Am now also working for *Vogue* and *Flash Art* but *A & T* is still #1.’¹⁰⁷ Was he anxious to reassure the VAB that he was committed to *Art & Text* so that they would continue to fund the magazine, including a New York office? Or was he sincerely committed to the magazine he had founded and developed?

The answer to both questions is yes. By *Art & Text* 23/24 (February 1987), Paul Foss was sole editor and the magazine had moved to Sydney. Its office was located at the College of Fine Arts, in inner city Paddington. Paul Taylor continued to support *Tension*, a slightly more populist magazine founded by Ashley Crawford and others in Melbourne in July 1983. *Tension* survived until the 1990 recession, and never genuinely attempted any international reach (though Crawford’s later magazine, *World Art*, did; it also attempted a double office—one in Melbourne, one in New York — before its publisher relocated the operation to Amsterdam, where it collapsed). Taylor remained generous with his time to Australian art world visitors to New York and supportive of projects, including *Peripheral Vision* (1995).¹⁰⁸ Although *Art & Text* continued to publish essays on Australian identity and provincialism, most importantly Tillers’s ‘In Perpetual Mourning’ in issue 15 (Spring 1984), and Philip Brophy’s ‘A Face Without a Place: Identity in Australian Contemporary Art Since 1980’ in issue 16 (Summer 1984–5), it was obvious by the later 1980s that the attempt to convince international audiences that Australian art was authentically unauthentic had failed and was already being abandoned, although that same formulation was to dominate Australian art criticism through the writings of Rex Butler and a host of less significant, revisionist art historians through the 1990s; Butler was even to publish an anthology of such attempts at revisionist Australian art history based on white art’s inauthenticity and its relationship to black indigeneity.¹⁰⁹ By then, end-of-century globalization was overtaking the imperative to define art by

105. See Australia Council, *Art & Text* file, document 10, Paul Foss to Project Officers – Publications, Visual Arts Board.

106. See Australia Council, *Art & Text* file, document 29, Paul Taylor to Ross Wolfe, 1 April 1985. .

107. Australia Council, *Art & Text* file, document 40 (a postcard), Paul Taylor to Ross Wolfe, 9 January 1986.

108. Green, 1995, p. 6. ‘In early 1990, passing through New York, I met Paul Taylor, the founder of *Art & Text*, for the first time. By the end of the evening I had been convinced that the project I outlined to Paul – this book – could be realised, and I am indebted to him for his example of a generous participant in the world of contemporary art.’

109. Tillers, 1984; Brophy, 1984-85, pp. 68-80; Butler (ed), 2005.

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national categories, even those that were defined by absence or negatives. The end of the Cold War flattened even the national self-definitions of artists in new, post-Cold War nations such as Russia, so that late 1980s Soviet dissident art disappeared from the international art scene, or redefined itself as retro-kitsch, or was rapidly redefined by others, as with Sots Art by luminaries Ilya and Emilia Kabakov and others who relocated to New York, as international art. The 1990s seemed to proceed from postcolonial redefinitions — seen in David Elliott's shows at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford (UK) during the 1980s, to curator Jean-Hubert Martin's vast *Magiciens de la terre* (Paris, 1989)—that relativised both artistic postmodernism and modernism, criticising attitudes of the West. But seeking to understand the power relationships, manipulations and misunderstandings that occur when regional art enters a Western forum, this art and theory also defined its place in art history through negatives and the absence of affect.

The 1980s wave of globalisation had enabled *Art & Text* to successfully establish a world presence from its base in Melbourne. In the 'anything goes' and 'anything's possible' exuberance of early 1980s boom-time Melbourne, Taylor and the New Wavers were ready to tackle the centre/periphery problem in a new way, through a quasi-postcolonial theory of appropriation. A postcolonial impulse (surfacing in Taylor's *Art & Text* as much as in Burn's and friends' *Necessity of Australian Art*), explains, in retrospect, *Art & Text*'s 1980s attempt to appropriate American and European themes and styles, thus highlighting cultural hybridity, cross-fertilisation and transformation. By 1998, these critical tropes were no longer confined to the periphery. They had become part of a globalised cultural consciousness. And in Australia, indigenous painters managed what Tillers and Davila could not.

The attempt to reconstruct the world-view of Australian art had been overtaken by globalisation. Appropriation as an art practice and the concomitant argument that Australian art was uniquely unoriginal were predicated around a centre/periphery model that had shifted from a Europe/Antipodes dichotomy to a Cold War binary of Left and Right — complicated by the appropriation of cosmopolitanism by the Right and of nation by the Left, and by the assumption that the Right stood for the mainstream and the Left stood for subculture — that was fading during the 1980s and destroyed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. The public sentiment surrounding the 1988 Australian Bicentennial signalled a widespread resurgence of interest in mainstream Australian national identity precisely as this identity was validated by subcultural identity politics — both in terms of the appropriation of the images and icons of minority groups and their struggles, and by deviant, atavistic new nationalisms that did not attain any meaningful artistic expression.

For all this — and Paul Taylor's writing — was fatally compromised and weakened by the triumph of late capitalist globalisation, which was able to contract cultural production out to the periphery so long as distribution was still regulated at the centre. In this sense, 1988 was the end, not the beginning, of the definition of Australian art through nation. This was reflected first in the efflorescence of identity and postcolonial art criticism, especially around indigenous art in the years following the Bicentenary, and in the triumph of indigenous art. We have seen that *Art & Text*'s theory was as much postcolonial as subcultural. Both were then swept aside or suborned by the inclusive meta-culture of globalising biennales. From the end of the Cold War, locality was less and more of an issue than Australians thought: a few

hundred metres from one gallery to another in New York or London — the distance in Chelsea from Barbara Gladstone Gallery to Anina Nosei — equally described the distance between centre and periphery.

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