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## Picturing a Postcolonial Australia : Breaking the 'white' norm in contemporary creative practice

Rebekah Rousi  
*Edith Cowan University*

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# **Picturing a Postcolonial Australia:**

**Breaking the 'White' norm in contemporary creative practice**

by

**Rebekah Rousi**

**Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts).**

**A dissertation submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of**

**BA (Visual Arts) Honours**

**School of Contemporary Arts  
Faculty of Communication and Creative Industries  
Edith Cowan University**

**Date Submitted: November 2004**

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation is about addressing social issues relating to colonial encounters from the perspective of a 'White' colonial Australian artist. The discussion seeks to address representational imbalances which occur within image construction as the result of a history of Imperial investment in defining the 'civilised Self' against the non-European 'primitive Other' (Said, 1978).

The label 'White' is analysed in terms of its contradictions and generalisations, where it is linked to a culturally assumed 'Self' positioning of human centrality and neutrality. This centrality (humanity) was used by Imperialists to justify reasoning behind colonial expansion. The thriving mechanisms of Euro-centric perception are exposed through pictorial arrangement and content within the artworks of contemporary 'White' Australian artists. These artists were chosen as they themselves are also attempting to deconstruct the 'White norm' of systematic marginalisation.

Lastly, my own artistic positioning is subject to the same scrutiny as case studies Derek Kreckler and Linda Sproul, in an analysis of chosen representational subject matter – Perth's sculpted colonial landscape - versus the significance of the instrument that was used to *capture* it – the camera.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution or higher education;
- (ii) contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- (iii) contain any defamatory material.

Signature:  \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 10/12/04 \_\_\_\_\_

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## INTRODUCTION

The identity of an *Australian* colonial descendent is one fraught with irony and contractions. Imperialist perceptions of British convicts, who were amongst Australia's first European settlers, have been likened by writers such as Ian McLean to that of "physically the same figure" as African slaves (1998b, p. 151). These prisoners or slaves, along with the 'free' settlers – among many of whom were from lower socio-economic backgrounds – were seen as cast outs of British society. Further, as John Mitchel described in regards to the colonial subject "one which is deprived of place and subjecthood" (cited in McLean, 1998b, p. 152). It is this discourse which interests me in regards to the continual shifting of boundaries between the 'Self' and 'Other', from one context to the next. Theorists such as Edward Said (1978) - who uses the Orient as a basis for colonial analysis - explain how the non-European 'Other' has been strategically constructed, as a means to strengthen reason behind Imperial expansion. Thus, Jane Jacobs highlights John Westlake's view in *Chapters on the Principles of International Law* (1894) that " 'uncivilized' sections of the globe should be annexed and occupied by 'civilized' and advanced powers" (1996, p. 17).

However, over time, descendants of colonial generations have begun to realise that ideas of 'civilisation' and 'primitivism' are just that – ideas. The realisation of the fallacies constructed by conventions of binarism has not simply materialised within the minds of colonial descendants. This realisation has been the result of influences such as those from activists and artists like Gary Foley, Gordon Bennett, Rea Saunders, Brenda Croft and Fiona Foley to name some. These people have challenged the conventions of Euro-centric thinking within Australian society from the perspective of those who have been 'Othered'.

Parallel to the awareness of the violence, genocide and alienation resulting from colonial processes is the increasing realisation, that no matter what the intentions, the interactions between coloniser and colonised will always be tainted by imbalanced power relations (Bhabha, 1990). Within the introduction of her book *Edge of Empire – post colonialism and the city* Jacobs states:

Without doubt, my ability to discuss contemporary Aboriginal interests in land and Australian racism is constrained and directed by my own lineage as a daughter of the colonising generations.

(Jacobs, 1996, p. x)

Jacobs goes further to describe the position of being a descendant of the Australia's colonising generations, as one which is laden with cultural privilege in a world of thriving (post)colonial imperialism. Yet, Jacobs acknowledges that within her book she has made assumptions as to how the spatial politics of Australian cities may be perceived by the 'Othered' Indigenous communities. Whilst admitting that there are problems with such assumptions, particularly given the *non*-innocent cultural position she holds in regards to those 'Othered', Jacobs adds that: "to confine my attention to the workings of colonialist power, without consideration of how colonialism encounters and is transformed by those it seeks to dominate, I cannot possibly claim an anticolonial politics" (1996, p. 8).

It at this point I wish to launch my argument. As a sixth generation 'White'<sup>1</sup> Australian, the problematics that can be observed in regards to (post)colonial intercultural relations stem from the continual polarisation which occurs when the 'White' – the Eurocentric 'civilised' - 'Self' attempts to *deal* with issues of the 'Other'. In other words, through focusing on the injustices inflicted upon an almost primitive-like 'Other', the positioning of the 'White' artist is thrust into the realm of the invisible, the neutral, or the 'simply human' (Dyer, 1997). It is this position of 'normality' through 'humanity' that I seek to fragment in relation to the discussed examples within this dissertation. The fragmentation comes in relation to specific subject matter, subject-artist positioning and the historical significance of the visual technologies employed by the artists mentioned. It is my argument that by shifting the focus towards the 'White' artist's own positioning, thus increasing reflexive perceptions of the Euro-'Self' as a marginalising construct within a carefully fabricated imperial *reality*, that 'White' artists can come closer to exposing the mechanisms which maintain inequity within the colonial societal and spatial relationship.

With this, Chapter One takes an historic look at the construction of 'White' identity in relation to this formation of European 'Self' and non-European 'Other'. This discussion of 'White' develops into an analysis of the 'unmarked' (unraced) lack of self-consciousness, which is reinforced by mechanisms of aesthetic composition and representational technology. The so-called 'objective' eye of the camera and the authoritative license those under the assumed invisibility of a 'normalised' identity adopt when representing the 'Other' is used as an authoritative license to

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<sup>1</sup> I understand that the term 'Whiteness' / 'White' is both homogenous and contradictory, however as with the cases of Richard Dyer (1997) and Ruth Frankenburg (1997) I choose to disclose the word 'Whiteness' to describe an historically constructed identity, designed through colonial discourse, to be perceived as 'neutral' / European / 'human'. Within this I use the term to describe those, who within the realms of physical, cultural and linguistic characteristics are left 'unmarked' (un-categorised) within (post)colonial institutional frameworks.

represent the 'Other'. Juno Gemes is also discussed within this chapter as an example of a 'White' photographer who documents Indigenous social movements from the perspective of an insider – part of the community. However, the point of criticism occurs in relation to the moment that Gemes puts down her self-concealing camera and re-enters 'White' Australian society, and is physically absorbed by the *invisibility* of 'Whiteness'.

In chapter two I discuss examples of the adoption of social issues and representation of Indigenous Australian communities within the works of two 'White' Australian artists, Derek Kreckler and Linda Sproul. The artists have been selected through their conceptual choice of critiquing the colonial cultural framework through using the representation of 'Others'. These case studies are used to illustrate implications of power relations associated with the arrangement of models of Indigenous heritage from the perspective of 'White' Australian male (in Kreckler's case), as well as the appropriation of Indigenous positioning (in Sproul's case). The use of Indigenous cultural heritage and history is also discussed in terms of representational theft and fixity within sciences such as anthropology, and how this can be likened to material usage within the case studies' examples.

Finally, chapter three is a concluding discussion of my Honours studio project in relation to the issues which have arisen through the analyses of the previous two chapters. *Washed Blocks* is a multimedia investigation into the Australian national narrative of cultural privilege inscribed on the land and in the psyche of Australian inhabitants through architecture. The project is described in the context of a constant negotiation and re-evaluation of the way in which the illusion of the constructed Australian hegemonic colonial 'reality' could be addressed. That is, addressed without either appropriating the positioning of Indigenous communities, or dismissing their presence in relation to the intrusion of 'White'/colonial ideals, systems and objects onto their land<sup>2</sup>. The relationship between subject matter and artistic media (photography and digital video media) are emphasised as parallel in perceptual and historic nature.

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<sup>2</sup> This is discussed in greater detail within Jacobs' *Edge of Empire* (1996), where by quoting Roland Barthes (1981) Jacobs expresses the city as a 'place of our meeting the other'.

## CHAPTER 1

### Materialising the Invisible in Australian Art

The privilege of 'White' within Western cultural frameworks lies in the phenomenon that whilst 'White' ideologies and people are represented everywhere, reference to the cultural particularities of 'White' are presented almost nowhere. In other words, within the Western, in this case, Australian context, whilst artists from non-European backgrounds cannot escape some form of official reference to their culture or ethnicity, cultural and ethnic specifics of those from what are considered 'White' backgrounds, are often not mentioned (Dyer, 1997). As outlined at the beginning of the introduction, Australia's discourse of colonisation and identity is one of hierarchical complexities. Grades of 'Whiteness' in terms of Britishness are affected by Australia's settlement roots in convicts (slave labour) and poverty. Therefore, at an international-colonial level, the naming of an artist as Australian subsequently draws a host of 'Other' connotations (Willis, 1993). Yet, at a local level, within the Australian context, artists of particularly settler/invasor descent - *Australians* - can exhibit without details of cultural background, or a description of sub-colony from which they come.

It is within this localised sphere, that 'global' or Western implications of the label 'White' come into play. In order to analyse the properties of 'White' and thus illustrate its linkage to colonial descendents, this discussion must first at the context from which the identity was formed. Before and during the initiations of the British Empire, processes began towards the construction of scientific and legal theories which placed Europe and its cosmopolitan cities at the centre of humanity (Jacobs, 1996; Willis, 1993). Theories of social evolution stemming from sciences such as anthropology further reinforced the construction of the Euro-'Self' as the *heart* of humanity. Europeans considered themselves to be of the most 'evolved' state of human being. Coinciding with the view that Europeans were the most 'advanced' people, came theories of opposites possessed by those who were considered to be outside the European paradigm (Said, 1978). If the European, or British in this instance, were the 'advanced' peoples, then for example African communities or Australia's Indigenous communities - those who were *different* through geography, language and physicalities - were seen as 'backward'. Thus, if Britain was 'advanced' it had achieved this status through a series of events; an evolution, a *history*. Yet, in the case of Australia's colonised communities, the 'backward' peoples were an example of where human-kind had evolved from. The Indigenous peoples were seen to not have possessed a history, but instead to have *been* history. (McLean, 1998b; Jacobs, 1996)

The discourse of colonialism followed this theory in its justification of imperial<sup>1</sup> expansion. Imperialists saw colonisation as spreading 'civilisation', and ultimately culturally advancing the 'Others' of humanity. Through this expansion, and being used in conjunction with representation of the 'Other', came the term 'White', which was often used to refer to the identity of the European, particularly British coloniser. As Richard Dyer notes in his book *White*, the term 'White' is a "complicated interaction of elements, of which flesh tones within the pink to beige range are only one" (1997, p. 42). What Dyer goes further to explain is the 'colourlessness' of 'White', rather than being a strict set of physicalities<sup>2</sup> comes with Imperialised ideologies of centrism and behaviour. To outline the properties of such a label, the *Macquarie Dictionary* defines 'White' as lacking colour and that it is even "transparent" (1981, p. 1944). To once again elaborate even further of the properties of 'White', the transparency of 'White' as a reflection of light, (an unracialised mode in which it is interpreted) within Western representation is also associated with purity and higher spiritual powers ("Black angels: a widening vision", 1994; Dyer, 1997). This corresponds not only with a physical hierarchy amongst 'Whites' themselves, but also places those who are classified as 'White' within a 'Self' proclaimed position of superiority.

To see the representational elements of 'White' in operation the discussion will now move back a step, to the contemporary Australian setting. It is within this setting and under the guidelines of what is termed political correctness, that the mechanisms of advantage through 'White neutrality' can be observed within public institutional settings. The Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA) is an immediate example of the scope of representational access 'Whiteness', or culturally 'unmarkedness' ('White'), allows in an exhibition format. There is the Centenary Gallery which is located in the *old* Perth Police Court building; this houses a range of nineteenth century colonial artworks that were made in, or made to reference Western Australia. On the ground floor of the newer part of the gallery there are sections devoted to Special Exhibitions and Collections Display. On the main upper level of the gallery there are more areas devoted to the gallery's collection. Yet, also on the upper level is a section devoted to (put aside for) Indigenous artworks (Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2002). Of course, the Indigenous artworks are of vital significance in relation to tourist trade and visitor numbers, particularly in light of the success artworks by Indigenous artists have had on the international market (Myer, 2001). However, whilst in other sections the artworks are carefully dispersed in

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobs describes the difference between 'Imperial' and 'Colonial' as that of intent and effect. Imperialism is outlined as "'belonging' to the metropolitan core", whilst colonialism - European expansion - is at the *edge* of the imperial core, where the ideas meet materiality (1996, p. 16).

<sup>2</sup> Dyer (1997) goes further to mention the problematics of Caucasian physicalities when considering people from Jewish, Irish, Polish cultures etc. - although 'White' in appearance their ideologies are based outside the British Imperial paradigm.

order of age, movement, style or theme, the Indigenous section holds anything from a nineteenth century Arnhem Land bark paintings to pieces of late twentieth century socio-political commentary by artists such as Gordon Bennett and Ian Abdullah.

Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes this 'unmarked' position in regards to her own 'White' identity as an "unearned advantage and conferred dominance" within Western/Colonial countries (cited in Dyer, 1997, p. 9). Within this identity of "unearned advantage" lies the problematics of intercultural representation. As seen in works by artists such as early Australian nationalists Elizabeth Durack, Margaret Preston and Fred Williams, the appropriation of cultural designs and imagery belonging to Indigenous communities were seldom thought of as in terms of the unethical. Instead, groups of artists such as these advocated the use of 'primitive' native designs in order to develop an identity which was distinctly Australian, and *new*<sup>3</sup> (McLean, 1998). In other words, the extended arm of Imperialist 'humanism' could be seen to be reignited as those from 'advanced' cultures 'civilising' 'primitive' artefacts.

It is the combination of un-self-consciously appropriating intellectual property of 'Othered' cultures, with a lack of self-reflexivity in regards to the adoption of 'Othered' personas and cultural issues that makes 'White' interpretation of intercultural representation problematic. Artist Gordon Bennett often re-visits institutional mechanisms used to encourage lack self-reflexivity amongst colonising descendents. Bennett reflects this in regards to the inability of those who are considered 'White' see themselves within the same space as the 'Others'. In Bennett's analytical illustrations of the Eurocentric paradigm, the use of guidelines for European aesthetic perspective<sup>4</sup> are present as a demonstration of the frames within which those who are Euro-centred consume the landscape and perceive the 'Other'. Bennett describes the convention of perspective as being designed to place the artist and viewer within a position of centrality. In other words, whilst the viewer and artist are centred within a particular frame of reference, whatever lies within the frame is both exposed and isolated from the central position. (McLean & Bennett, 1996)

Ultimately whatever is caught within the frames of perspective, will always be represented dislocated from its social context, framed according to the perceptual ideals of the artist (McLean & Bennett, 1996). Bennett's painting *Terra nullius (Teaching aid), as far as the*

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<sup>3</sup> Aboriginalism is described in Ian McLean's *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australia* (1998) as the appropriation of elements of what was seen as "primitive" Indigenous cultures to create a "new" Australian identity.

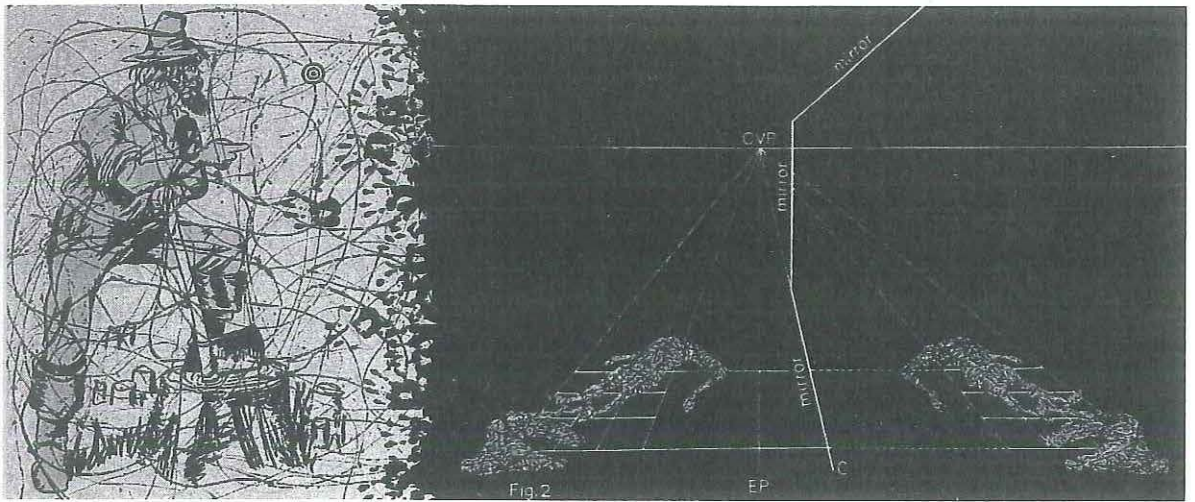
<sup>4</sup> Perspective is defined as the technique within European art of depicting distance, dimensions and special relationships on a two dimensional surface. It is also described as "the relation of parts to one another and to the whole, in a mental view or prospect" (The Macquarie Dictionary, 1987, p1271).

*eye can see* (1993 – Figure 1), depicts the Euro-centred ‘blind spots’ of perception through representing a ‘White’ man (farmer, artist, educator - coloniser) pointing towards a mirror where the only present reflection is that of two decapitated Indigenous corpses. The mirror, as well as the headless corpses, appear disjointed from one third of the painting – the ‘White’ man’s colonial ‘reality’. The lines of perspective and their continuation towards a central vanishing point on the constructed horizon serve to emphasise the on-going fixity within the relationship of established European conventions and the perception of intercultural context.

It is in relation to these *laws* of perspective, and ultimately European aesthetic construction, that photographic media enters the *picture*. Photography, like perspective drawing, has been recognised within Western societies as ‘objectively’ and accurately representing the three dimensional world. When the portable camera emerged in Western culture it was seen as technological proof of the superiority of the European over ‘Other’ cultures. It was a device, used similarly to the gun, in that it armed the coloniser to aim and fire at will with the intent to capture, collect, label, and eventually archive that which was shot (Sontag, 1978). Whilst the camera was evidenced as directly capturing *reality*, aiding the sciences in processes of the “observation, recording and classification” of the *natural* world, the physicalities of ‘Whiteness’ in regard to the ‘White Self’, and in relation to the ‘Other’ were pushed further out of Euro-consciousness (Edwards, p. 6). As this mechanism, was witnessed to reproduce unfiltered two dimensional duplicates of the world, it was not until the technology was made more readily available to the mass public, enabling more people the capacity to experiment, that its credibility as ‘objective mechanical eye’ began to waver. Yet still, although the composition of photographs was being scrutinised, it was not until relatively recently that the cultural ideologies of the photographer and their relationship to the context of the photographs came into question. (Edwards, 1992)

Whilst there is the awareness that the choice and framing of subject matter is determined by the ideological framework of the artist, still problems can be observed in relation to the lack of self-reflexivity within the positioning of the artist in relation to their subject matter. The self-reflexivity that is being referred to is the consciousness of the social, cultural and physical placement of the artist with regard to contextual historical and social discourse. To look at the operation of the camera as a mechanism which reinforces the *invisibility* of the artist – absence of ‘White’ – contemporary examples of representation within Australian art that is created in reaction to political discourse can be used to gauge the unconscious characteristics of Euro-centricity.





**Figure 1** Gordon Bennett, *Terra nullius (Teaching aid), as far as the eye can see*, (1993). Acrylic on canvas.

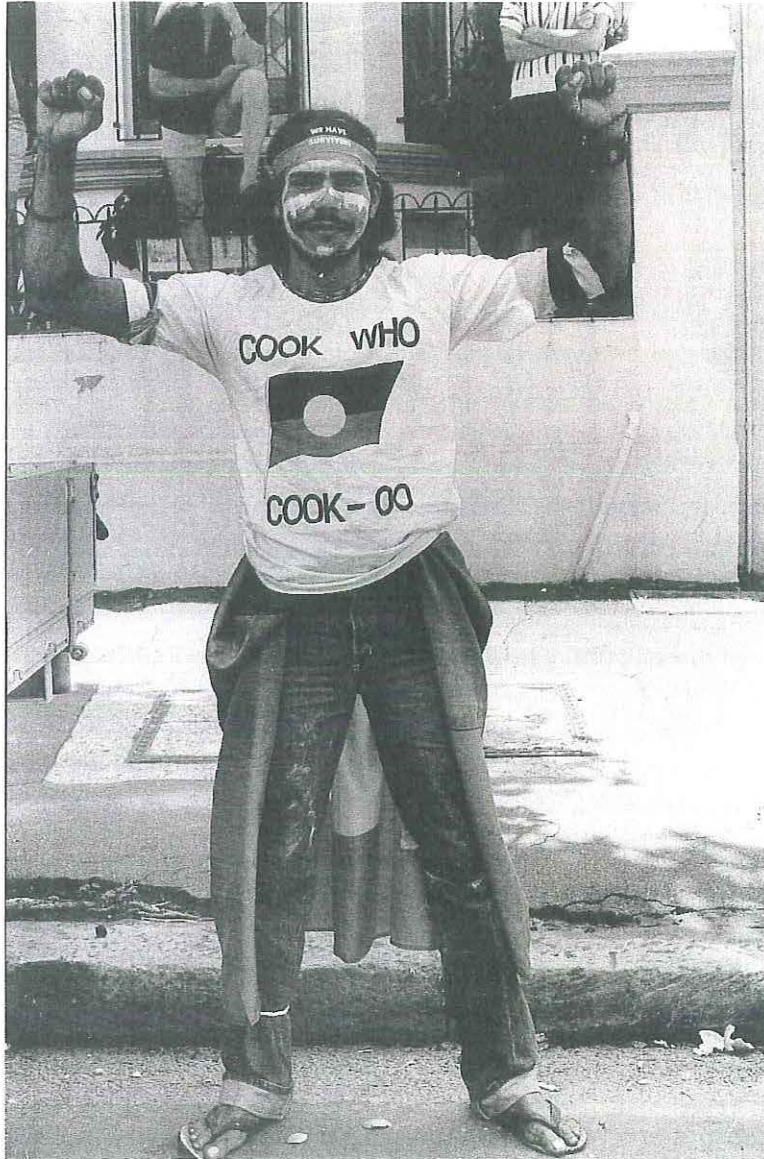
At a time when gradually more 'White' Australians are becoming aware of, and/or admitting that there are problems in Australia's intercultural relations, increasing numbers within the 'White' communities are attempting to counter the effects of marginalisation. 'White' photographers such as Juno Gemes have successfully managed to become involved in campaigning and documenting activism from within the Indigenous Rights Movement. Her images (Figure 2) can be likened to those by Brenda L Croft (Figure 3), where a sense of familiarity and mutual/equal respect is acknowledged through the comfort of gestures and facial expressions made by those represented (Fernandez, 2002). From the 1970s, where she began documenting the progress of the Tent Embassy onwards, and including events such as *Invasion Day* (1988), Gemes and her camera have maintained a close relationship with the people her photographs have represented (Isaacs, 2003).

Yet, whilst Gemes is "making the invisible visible" by creating representations of the activists from the Indigenous movements, Gemes herself is very seldom revealed. Although the intention behind the images is to expose, and individualise the people driving advancements in Indigenous Australian social movements – thus, generating greater awareness, and increased support within both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities – it can also be argued that Gemes' own 'White' identity is further displaced giving her the advantage of *invisibility* and adaptability. This advantage may be two-fold in that firstly, as the person controlling the camera Gemes may become physically/racially, through her *invisibility*, one of the community members she is representing. The familiarity with her subject matter, within the largely segregated context of Australian intercultural life, may let her *pass* for one of the community. Yet, at the same time, Gemes also has the advantage of being able to leave the politically charged environment of campaigning for human rights to return to the 'peaceful' existence of a suburban 'White' Australian. She can walk away from the camera to join a societal structure which will not automatically discriminate her on the basis of racial physical appearance. Peggy McIntosh (1988) describes this position of "unearned privilege" within her list of forty-six "special circumstances and conditions" whereby upon birth as a 'White' person she was endowed with the identity of 'normal' and law-abiding citizen (cited in Dyer, 1997, p.p. 8-9).

This is where a key characteristic of the privilege experienced by 'White' image makers and subject matter is apparent. There is no negation intended towards Gemes' work as her practice exemplifies a next to ideal intercultural working and social relationship of mutual cooperation. However, this ability to be 'everyone' or in other words, the 'universal' without being isolated as 'White' or 'raced' within the context of their operations, is described by critics such as Dyer (1997) and Frankenburg (1997) as a trait of the 'White' condition. In this case, the limits between being genetically 'White' and attempting to work against the



**Figure 2** Juno Gemes, *#1 Lively Kids at the Settlement Sydney, NSW* (1977), black and white photograph, dimensions unknown.



**Figure 3** Brenda L Croft, *Michael Watson, Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, Sydney, 26 January (1988)*, black and white photograph, dimensions unknown.



construction of Imperialist humanism<sup>1</sup> and of taking advantage of the 'White' positioning to further exploit Indigenous communities, yet in a more politically correct manner, remain difficult to identify and define. In Brenda L Croft's interview with Andrew Dewdney during 1989 she describes various members of the 'White' public as being "like parasites. It's just another step on from the ethnographic or anthropological..." (cited in Dewdney, 1994, p. 119).

Croft's observation is anticipated in regards to the similarities that can be drawn between the type of 'White' artist/author who documents and comments on every action within the Rights Movements and communities to that of anthropological study. This resemblance lay in the form of patronising treatment of 'Othered' communities which see them studied, dissected and fixed in relation to a monitoring of the 'advancement' and 'liberation' amongst the world's 'most ancient civilisation'. These types of 'White' artists may also be seen to want a piece of the lucrative share that Indigenous art has on the Australian export market. In light of Australia's historical discourse of invasion, genocide and exploitation, and the current conservative political climate provided by the Howard government, the use of Indigenous culture and representation within the works of 'White' artists will and should always be received with criticism. However, it can be argued that the "indelible stain" (Reynolds, 2001) of genocide and negative foundations of national identity established by the treatment of Indigenous peoples and convict settlement (McLean, 1998), have left a need within many colonising descendants to either forget, or act.

When Jacobs (1996) states that anti-colonialism cannot be contemplated without consideration for the 'Other', the guidelines between consideration for and appropriation of must be established. For example, Richard Bell describes in his paper 'Aboriginal Art – it's a white thing' that the "proliferation of white experts is belittling the people who own the culture. For example, the named white *expert* is far better known than the mostly unnamed Aboriginal artists from the famous Papunya School of painters" (Bell's *Theorum*, 2002). The imbalance of recognition, and distanced silence of the 'Othered' 'objects' of 'White' commercial and cultural desire, are just samples of the problematics involved when cultural re-territorialisation takes place. It is with this in mind and the advantage of 'White adaptivity' that forms the basis of discussion in Chapter Two. Select works by case studies Derek Kreckler and Linda Sproul will be observed in relation to their adoption and framing of 'Othered' perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Humanism is described by Jacobs (1996) as an instrument of British Empirical expansion, which saw European "civilization" as the pinnacle of humanity, and subsequently was obliged to annex and occupy the "uncivilized" sections of the globe (Said, cited in Jacobs, 1996).

## CHAPTER 2

### In Light of the White

The process of representing and interpreting the 'Indigenous' within politically charged artwork of 'White' Australian artists is an area loaded with complications in terms of potential colonial exploitation and imbalance of cultural hierarchy. This means that, as a 'White' colonising artist, any attempt to deal with issues which have implications on colonised communities, needs to be considered in respect to the position of "unearned" (McIntosh, cited in Dyer, 1997, p. 9) power the artist holds within the colonial paradigm. This 'power' gives the 'White' artist, author or activist the presumed ability, as humans ('humanitarians') to speak on behalf of the marginalised. It is this characteristic of being 'on behalf of' that has prompted the need for further analysis in regards to the work of Derek Kreckler and Linda Sproul. For, whilst both artists have merit in deconstructing the mechanisms of marginalisation within Australian urban and institutional life, they also have used the Indigenous persona in some form, to communicate the deficiencies in the Eurocentric social framework.

Kreckler's *Looking and other outcomes* series (2001) is the starting point of this discussion as it demonstrates the colonial construction of the Indigenous 'Other' both conceptually and physically. The *Looking and other outcomes* series is a set of eight images depicting scenes which relate to the urban 'Western everyday' environment. These images can be viewed as either photographic prints which stand at approximately 950 millimetres high by 980 millimetres wide, or as digital images within Kreckler's virtual landscape at: [www.derekkreckler.com](http://www.derekkreckler.com). Kreckler has carefully constructed tableaux of social interactions within settings resembling those of Australian supermarkets, roadsides, hairdressing salons and liquor stores. But instead of positioning 'White' consumers as the cultural protagonists, it is people of Indigenous origins who are brought centre-stage to examine, scrutinise, and consume the Empire that has pushed them to the margins. (McLean, 1998; Woodburn, n.d.)

Although, not made readily known, there is a story which runs through the sequences of *Roadside 1* and *2* (Figures 4 and 5) and the *Freezer* (Figure 6). This story is of the search to find the body of a Nyoongar man whose preserved head had been returned to Perth after decades of scrutiny by the public and academic elite in Britain (Kreckler, 2004). The quest to find the body, and once again subject the man and his dismembered body to public scrutiny was established by Kreckler himself. This leads to the problematics of the artist's own positioning, both in regards to the physical arrangement of Indigenous characters and the authority he has adopted when using an intercultural history within his *own* practice. Ian McLean in his 2001



**Figure 4** Derek Kreckler, *Roadside 1* - diptych (2001), c-type photograph, 95 x 99.9 cm.



**Figure 5** Derek Kreckler, *Roadside 2* - diptych (2001), c-type photograph, 105 x 109.9 cm.



**Figure 6** Derek Kreckler, *Freezer* (2001), c-type photograph, 95 x 94.2 cm.



catalogue essay 'The Ethical Observer' describes Kreckler as "seeking the sacred in the secular". McLean also uses the words of Baudelaire's to describe Kreckler as a poet of the everyday – "in the crowd but not of the crowd" (McLean, 2001). This description both denies Kreckler's social advantage, yet possibly reinforces the 'invisibility' of positioning as being both 'White' and male, within Australia's patriarchal 'White Everyday'.

The images and sequences within this series illustrate marginalised groups regaining analytical control over their colonially constructed surrounds. Their placement is set to 'awaken' a curiosity towards reading the fine print of Australia's institutional and commercialised discourse. However, Kreckler's role in theatrically *re*-constructing the placement and narratives of Indigenous peoples remains questionable. Brenda L Croft (1989) mentions an accountability that she considers is necessary when photographing human subjects, particularly those who are from Indigenous communities. Both Croft and Rea Saunders (1993) describe the art making process as a communal activity, where all involved should have the right to contribute to their own positioning with regards to what should remain, be included or be excluded from the picture (cited in Dewdney, 1994). Clearly, Kreckler demonstrates the European mode of image construction. Once again referring to the artist/viewer conventions of perspective, Kreckler has positioned himself as the artist/director, central to the construction of representation whilst remaining hidden behind the camera's gaze.

Woodburn (n.d.) characterises Kreckler's arrangement as thorough and deliberate. If this is the case, then Kreckler's social-political measurements of Indigenous *visibility* within Australia's urban environment must also be viewed in light of the carefully calculated anthropological representations which sought to fix measurements of nature and *race* in conjunction with the ideologies of Western science. This is particularly important when considering that the "cultural circumscriptions included under the modern interpretive blanket 'Western perception of the 'Other'" are central to the creation and consumption of photography in the second half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries (Edwards, 1992, p. 5).

Anthropometric or anthropological photographic studies have been used to collect and record physical measurements of; in particular, Indigenous plants and peoples. These so-called objective scientific representations were seen as factual documents designed to establish racial characteristics and tendencies such as behaviour and intelligence in relation to the 'civilised' (human) colonisers (Edwards, 1992). In other words, they were used as a measure of reference in creating an inferior 'Other' – an 'Other' which would seek to benefit from the 'civilised human' influence as a result of the colonial process (Landau, 1999; Jacobs, 1996).

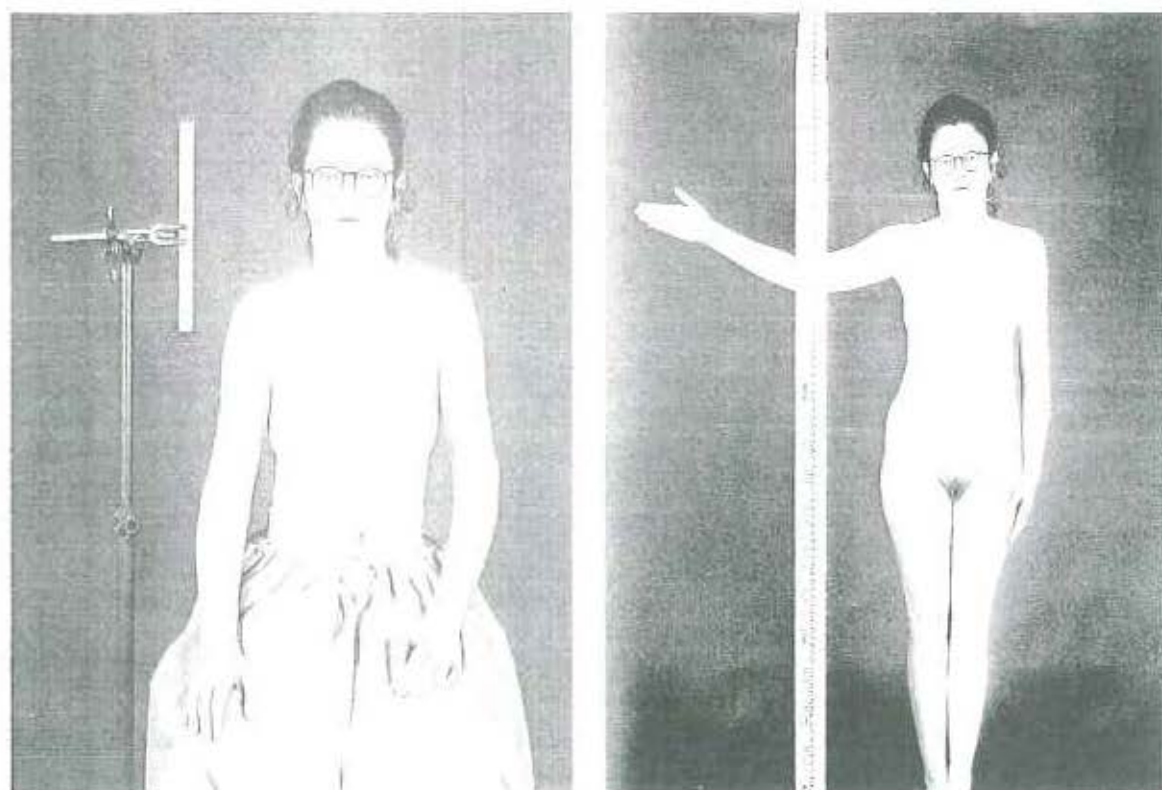
McLean (2001) discusses how the urban everyday has long been the platform for exploration of the opposite; this view is shared by Roland Barthes (1981) when he describes the city as “the very ‘place of our meeting with the other’” (cited in Jacobs, 1996, p. 4). McLean goes further to describe how rather than creating a form of anthropological art for Euro-colonial consumers, Kreckler merely makes “visible the invisible, but reflects its invisibility in our own performative space” (McLean, 2001). Here comparisons can be drawn to the works of Juno Gemes within the shared realm of ‘White’ experience. Both artists have the capacity, as ‘humanitarian’ auteurs to adopt Aboriginality from the hidden vantage point of behind the camera. Then, when *shooting* has ended both ‘Indigenised third walls’ can step out from behind the camera and into a world where both are ‘transparent’ in hue (of skin colour) and visible in representation as ‘*Australian artists*’. These artists, once again in reference to Peggy McIntosh’s ‘Forty-six special circumstances’ (1988), can swear, not answer letters and dress in second-hand clothes whilst shopping by credit without their physical characteristics working against them (McIntosh, cited in Dyer, 1997). And whilst the artists partake in their ‘unraced’ lives the dismembered Nyoongar man has gone from primitive artefact to political pawn, permanently captive in one form of museum or another.

Referring back to anthropology, the next example of re-colonised Indigenous content is seen in Linda Sproul’s *White Woman Variation #2 – Difficult to Light* series (1996). This series is a sequel to *White Woman* (1995), which saw Sproul produce a series of installations/performances based on the character of a young ‘White’ woman in Tom Robert’s *A Summer Morning Tiff* (1886). *White Woman Variation #2* continues from its predecessor as an examination of the roles and representation of ‘White’ women within Australia’s aesthetic colonial discourse. As the name suggests, ‘White’ woman is an articulation of the racial specifics of the marginalised within the dominant ‘unmarked’ colonial race. As seen in the tradition of labelling the artist of Indigenous heritage as an Aboriginal artist, or the gay activist of African heritage as a black gay activist, Sproul addresses the construction of ‘Feminist’ art with the tag of a ‘White’ woman (Astbury, 1997). In this respect Richard Dyer observes “that the recent writings by white people about whiteness arise predominantly out of feminism” (Frye, McIntosh, Ware, Frankenberg, cited in Dyer, 1997, p. 8). With that, the adoption of photographic lighting technology as a focal point for racial discussion offers key points of debate both in terms of racial/cultural superiority through technology and its advancement (Sontag, 1978) as well as in terms of who the technology is designed to represent, and for whom (Astbury, 1997).

The problematics of Sproul's choice of representation lie in the re-colonisation of the anthropometric positioning of a woman of Indigenous heritage (Figure 7). In a series of eight panels, Sproul juxtaposes the use of the camera to anthropologically objectify, dissect and categorise the female body with four panels which demonstrate the sexual objectification of the female body within pop-culture (Figure 8). The images which were displayed at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art were suspended in two parallel lines of four, where the *raced* 'Other' faced the *eroticised* 'Other'. Sproul, in the role of 'Ellen' the anthropologically dissected twenty-two year old South Australian Indigenous woman *hung* facing the images of mass-produced celebrities Marilyn Monroe, Betty Grable, Christine Keeler and Madonna (Bolton, 1996; Astbury, 1997). The viewers were invited to walk between the panels, amongst the pop icons and the scientifically dislocated specimen of nature. This is where the relationship between 'Ellen's' fixed nude gaze and Marilyn Monroe's flyaway dress should be flagged, as both have been exploited as products of eroticism (Landau, 1999).

Geoffrey Batchen in 'After postmodernism', an article about the evolution of photographic magazine *Photofile*, discusses the practical complexities involved in intercultural representation. This discussion happens in relation to the problems that the magazine's Editorial Committee had in regards to reviewing its first exhibition of "Aboriginal photographers" (1994, p. 23). An investigation into the authority of who should have the right to speak for who was seen as the most appropriate course of action. Whilst, this was a new phenomenon within the realms of 1986 colonial Australia, the area of literarily and pictorially representing Indigenous peoples and issues is still fraught with nuances. Batchen criticises Leigh Astbury (1997) as being one of the individualist essayists who are "guided by the art work they discuss" (Batchen, 1999, p. 24). In other words, rather than bring critical of the devices and framing employed by Sproul, Batchen summarises Astbury's article 'Constructing the Other' as outlining the intentions of the artist irrespective of the outcomes and implications expressed by the *Difficult to Light* series itself. Here Batchen describes Astbury as suggesting "that whiteness should be an historical category of its own right, replete as it is with an often-overlooked representational power (most notably, the power of normalcy and thus of invisibility)" (1994, p. 24). What Batchen is suggesting is that where efforts by artists/authors should be taken towards actively negotiating the use of intercultural material, Astbury remains uncritical of the assumed representational authority of race/culture evidenced in Sproul's work.

Sproul has re-territorialised these feminine representations with her 'White' body and her dominating trademark brown-rimmed glasses. She has chosen to denote the male subjugation of the 'raced' female body by fixing the Indigenous representation to images taken over one hundred years ago. The binary imposed by the placement and appropriation of a colonised



**Figure 7** Linda Sproul *Ellen*, sitting, front-on, and *Ellen* standing, front-on (1996), black and white photographs, photography by Colin Bogaars.



**Figure 8** Linda Sproul *Christine Keeler*, sitting, front-on and Betty Grable, standing, front-on (1996), black and white photographs, photography by Colin Bogaars.

'Primitive Other' versus the twentieth century 'White Pop-icons' seems difficult to ignore. Whilst attempting to deconstruct the relationship between the objectified female body, the male gaze, technological cultural superiority and *ab-normalising* the 'White' in relation to the 'Other', Sproul has forgotten her own obligations as a member of the colonising community towards not re-fixing those who have already been colonised. Sproul appears to have dismissed and/or abused her own power of being 'White' to adopt the positioning of a deceased Indigenous woman, and to localise the racialised gender representation of Australia's colonised to that of the 1800s.

The human(itarian)ism within Kreckler's and Sproul's practices seems to resonate with a "set of assumptions concerning the superiority of the white man and the duties and rights this superiority bestowed" (Edwards, 1992, p. 6). This humanism, as described by Jacobs (1996) in regards to the Imperialist ideology of expanding 'civilisation' and 'humanising' the 'Other', seems to parallel the acts of 'White' people attempting to *raise* the conditions of marginalised communities to those of *human* beings<sup>1</sup>. The appalling conditions Australia's original owners are exposed to cannot be disputed, but what needs to be identified is the relationship, and perception 'White' creative artists have towards these communities, and their ability to *possess* their *own* positioning. The reaction of 'White' artists to speak *for* Indigenous communities may be based on a number of assumptions i.e. that they will not be 'heard' at an institutional and public level otherwise, or that they do not believe that those who have been marginalised are capable (whether intellectually or socially) of putting *their* case forward. Chapter Three continues this discussion by refocusing back towards the linguistic and representational structures that influence the 'White' colonial's perception of hierarchy and 'Other'. The conclusion interweaves reflections of the processes and stages that the project went through with analyses of links between media and subject matter.

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<sup>1</sup> Much has been written in regards to the 'Fourth World' conditions of Australia's Indigenous peoples in relation to the relatively 'high' living standard of the majority of the countries citizens. For more information please refer to books such as Elspeth Young's *Third world in the first: development and indigenous peoples* (1995).

## CHAPTER 3

### Conclusion: Mirror Mirror on the Block...

In photography, events are constituted as such only through this space, time and light-fixing medium: there need be 'nothing happening' out there but once a visual field is framed, an object is constituted (claimed, 'taken').

Coventry, 1986, p. 9

Similarities can be drawn between photographic composition and the colonial cultivation of landscape. Imperial authorities, like the photographer who has not yet *taken* an image, or the painter who has not yet set a brush to the canvas, described the Australian continent to be empty - 'nothing happening' in terms of identified European modes of culture or progress. The land was what imperialists saw as a blank sheet of paper, ready to be sectioned into grids in preparation for the deliverance of 'meaning'. This 'meaning' would be endowed upon the land's surface through the application of European structures of 'civilised' order – buildings mirroring the institutional structure of the Imperial metropolitan centre, London (Jacobs, 1996). Like *taking* a photograph, where the composition is structured to influence an audience regarding elements of an artist/photographer's ideological agenda, Australia's urban landscape, has been composed to convince its inhabitants of a societal hierarchy of cultural, political and spiritual power. Jane Jacobs describes imperial expansion as establishing "specific spatial arrangements in which the imaginative geographies of desire [are] hardened into material spatialities of political connection, economic dependency, architectural imposition and landscape transformation" (1996, p. 19)

Exposing the realm of social and environmental illusion in colonial construction is a task layered with ambivalence from the perspective of colonial centrality. To acknowledge flaws in a system formed on marginalisation is one thing. But to attempt to address or change the very structures which have informed the 'White' basis for perspective is another. Whilst idealistically many 'White' individuals and artists desire equality and freedom, the ideas of this phenomenon are based on definitions supplied by Euro-centred framework. Again, it can be argued that whilst the 'White' artist/individual desires the freedom and equality of 'Othered' communities, these outcomes are envisaged in terms of a 'humanistic' perspective, where the 'Other' is *adopted* into a framework, still prescribed by imperial ideologies. In this respect, it can only be speculated in regards to how willing the 'White' artist would be to relinquish their

own 'unmarked' privilege for the sake of deconstructing Western foundations – if it were ever made possible.

As seen in the previous case studies, limits between highlighting the inequality within coloniser-colonised relations and re-colonising the social territory of these 'Othered' communities needs to be carefully examined. Through a weariness to avoid re-colonising Indigenous social and representational territory, I have deliberately focused on visually and physically reducing the restrictive dimensions of perspective that the colonial *illusion* has provided. The illusion that is being referred to is that of an historic<sup>1</sup> 'White' settlement which claims proof of its civility through cultural branches such as legislation, education, architecture and the arts. This illusion presents the colonising descendent with a set of apparently concrete foundations, which, when observing heritage listed buildings such as The Royal Perth Hospital or St Mary's Cathedral, appear to be capable of lasting forever. However, in light of the arrangement at TransPerth's underground railway construction site, the sight of the Wellington and Mitchell Buildings, standing amongst piles of rubble, belonging to younger, non-empirically fixed buildings, brings home the *reality* of a cultural landscape deliberately constructed on the basis of ideological hierarchy.

Several attempts at this institutional reduction were made during the course of this project<sup>2</sup>. These attempts have ranged from live performances to websites, yet each when subjected to further scrutiny yielded significant conceptual flaws. These flaws many times included possibilities for misconstrued interpretations based on my own position of 'White' colonial privilege. The practices of Derek Kreckler and Linda Sproul consist of numerous media such as performance, photography and installation, expanding possibilities for the interrogation of the subject-artist relationship. Particularly in Sproul's case what can be seen is that through framing her 'White' female body within her images she is exposed to a certain public and academic vulnerability through part *visibility*. The artist/performer within an artistic construction is referred to by Helen Grehan (2001) as the 'nomadic subject'. The term 'nomadic subject' is used to describe the way in which the embodied performer has the capacity to inscribe upon, and be inscribed by the contexts within which they are placed. This inscription carries interchangeable layers which react against and in conjunction with factors such as cultural positioning, gender, age and environmental spatialities.

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<sup>1</sup> Historic referring to the European idea of history through architecture and institutional culture and policies – Jane Jacobs describes "Nineteenth-century Perth was a mimetic reproduction of imperial London" (1996, p. 115).

<sup>2</sup> These attempts included two planned one night performances, one live - *The Audition* and one pre-recorded - *The Lecture*, which were followed the beginnings of a website called *The Institute for National Research*. For a brief description of these works please see Appendix 1.

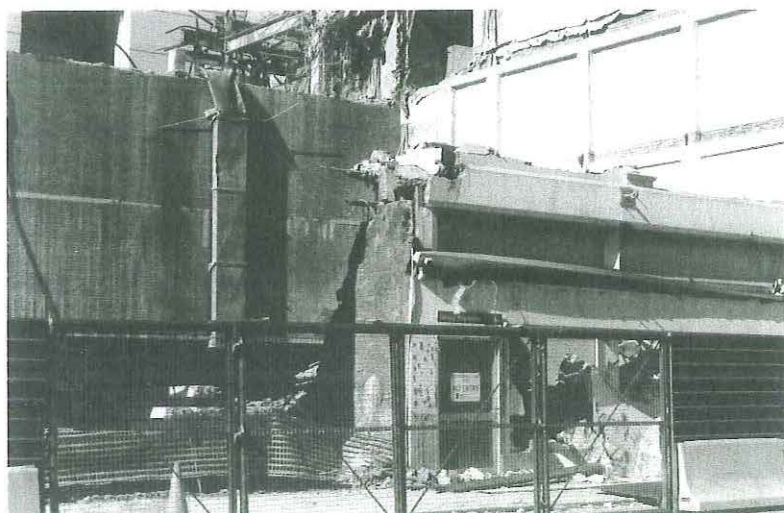


The decision to somehow reference portions of my own identity, either through physical representation of my body or text, addition to traces of less than perfect European aesthetic delivery, I attempt to bring the construction of the colonial *reality* to a personal level. I want the audience to be aware that my images and video is constructed by a 'White' person and that through framing the environment, and filtering its physicalities, that I am only letting them see *part* of the story. The studio project *Washed Blocks* was developed through attempt to create a self-portrait of mechanisms which influence the perception of national narrative, identity, and block recognition of the 'Other'.

Electronic media, used in conjunction with photography and film, was seen to allow for the most direct form of visual materialisation when considering the representation of perception of an environmental illusion. Since the introduction of digital imaging software, less credibility has been placed in the content within photographic media. It can be argued that this awareness of visual manipulation increases the *visibility* of the artist/photographer as image constructor, rather than simply a mechanical operator. Ephemerality is embodied within electronic pieces; where subject matter may exist only within a realm of coloured pixels - i.e. on the internet, television and as projections - (Marchese & Marchese, 1995). Material space is alluded to but can never actually be touched by the viewer. The ability to seamlessly add, delete and change of supposed visual recordings of the environment in a virtual space maintains resonance with the colonial treatment of *actual* space. Pat HOFFIE uses the example of Queensland in her article 'Always remember, there is no past' (2003) where she explains the forever changing nature of national 'Self' as a result of a continuous systematic process of erasing and altering history - within documents and urban space.

Observation of the editorial process within Perth's urban environment led to the current format of my project, *Washed Blocks*. The title *Washed Blocks* was developed in relation to a process of dissolving paper with water to expose photocopied transfers on small white plaster and pine blocks. This title worked two-fold in relation to the connotation of land clearing for urban planning "the mechanism by which colonial adjudications of cleanliness, civility and modernity were realised quite literally on the ground" (Jacobs, 1996). The series which will be exhibited as a series of short video sequences and photographic prints originated from a collection of black and white photographic images of Perth's urban landscape (Figure 9).

The intention within this exercise was to photographically *re-capture* several buildings of colonial and personal significance in regards to: form - intricately decorated concrete facades, large in scale, which physically exert a hierarchical authority through spatial intimidation; era -



**Figure 9** Rebekah Rousi, *Washed Blocks* – original images (2004), black and white photographs.

the late nineteenth early twentieth century (the height of the White Australia Policy)<sup>1</sup>; function – three elements of imperial control which are still within the most dominant of mechanisms of the ideological framework, the hospital (health/science), the church (religion), the commercial office block (bureaucracy/capital gain). Overriding the need to *collect* imperial artefacts was also the need to reduce and restructure the buildings in order of emotional recall from my own colonial conditioning of growing up in Adelaide. In a sense, by collecting the Wellington and Mitchell Buildings, St Mary's Cathedral and Royal Perth Hospital (administration wing) I had material intentions of reconstructing their positioning within my non-spatial psychic arrangement of Rundle Mall, St Peter's Cathedral and the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

Once the photographic images of Perth's buildings had been reproduced on the plaster blocks, they were placed back into the images' original contexts (Figure 10). They were both directly places in relation to the structures as well as held in the hands of a combination of my own and an-other's 'White' hands. Perspective was used to manipulate scale as the hands holding the blocks in the foregrounds appear larger in proportion to the so-called original buildings in the background.

By simultaneously collecting video footage I had the intention of challenging the words of Susan Sontag when she states that:

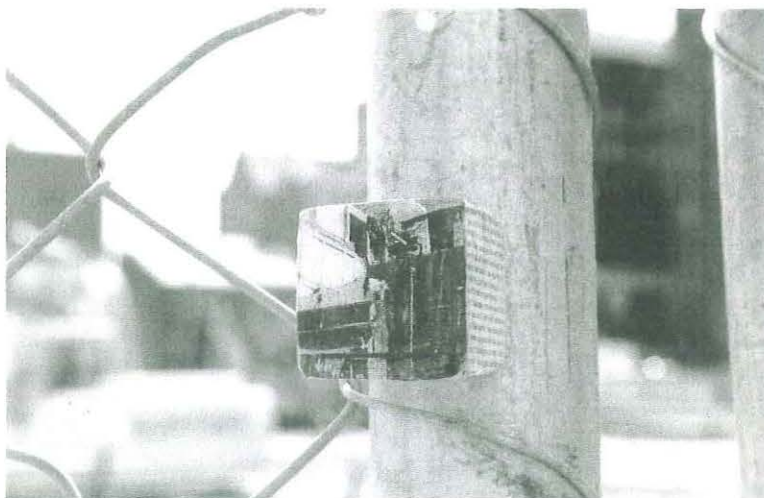
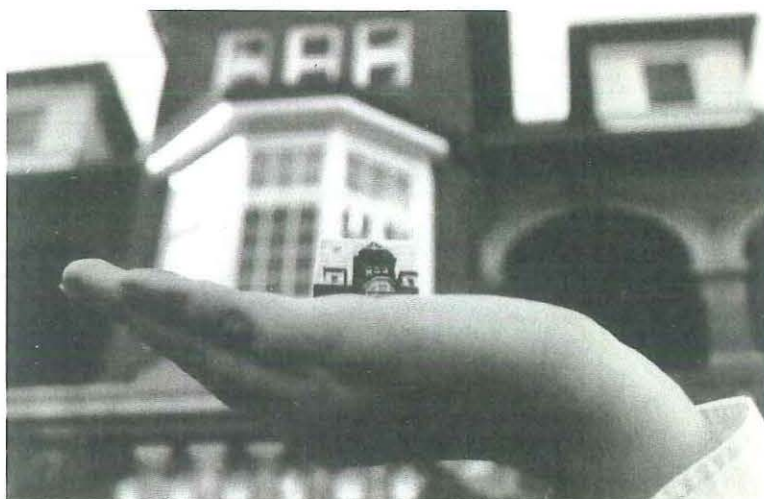
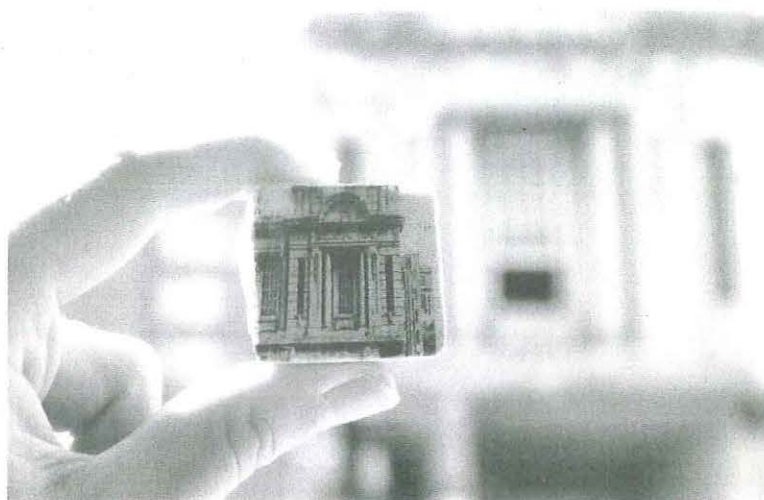
a still, which allows one to linger over a single moment as long as one likes, contradicts the very form of film, as a set of photographs that freezes moments in life or a society contradicts their form, which is a process, a flow in time.

(Sontag, 1978, p. 81)

As especially in light of digital editing technology, time can be represented as equally as frozen as a still image through the manipulation of speed, duplication of form, and repetition of action. I also wanted to use the 'real time' quality of video to capture these static landmarks in relation to the movement of human beings (in this case the colonising descendent). Despite Sontag's (1978) differentiation between the nature of painting, and that of 'documentary' photography and film, digital applications can be seen as re-generating the process of painting within the medium(s) which used to hold 'objective' authority (Batchen, 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> During this time emphasis of a 'White' Australian identity was drawn to the point of schizophrenia, on the one hand nationalists were appropriating Indigenous culture to create a distinctly Australian identity, yet on the other Imperialists were expanding urban landscape to imitate the British Imperial centre (McLean, 1998b).



**Figure 10** Rebekah Rousi, *Washed Blocks – back at the sites* (2004), black and white photographs.

To re-contextualise these architectural spaces as creations of cultural significance in the formulation of Australian social order I have used Sproul's and Kreckler's examples to reposition the 'nomadic subject' in relation to the urban constructions. It is my hands which are *captured* within a position of narrative control, revealing/creating the 'block(ed)' representations of the architecture. The footage of the reveal is removed and overlapped with footage of the 'actual' sites (Figure 11). Coloured filters are used to further visually separate the notions of the *real* (the on-site footage) versus the constructed (the blocks), yet as the filters are interchangeable throughout the layers, both spectacles of reference are rendered as intercepted illusions. Areas are masked throughout the pictorial narrative to reinforce the realisation that neither viewer nor artist will ever observe the entire picture.

Postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak comment that the problem with critics such as Derrida, Lyotard and Deleuze is that through their Eurocentric positioning, any attempt to discuss the 'Other' has resulted in self-absorbed analyses – i.e. "if we are not what official history and history say we are, who then are we (not), how are we (not)?" (cited in McLean, 1998, p133). Yet, without these questions, particularly within the Australian (or any *post*-colonial) context, it can be argued that the 'White' remains a generic 'White', un-self-reflexive and oblivious to the cause and effect relationship that their contextual existence. This is an existence of 'Self' which is defined by the representational marginalisation of the existence of 'Other'.





**Figure 11** Rebekah Rousi, *Washed Block #3* (top); *Washed Block #4* (bottom) [video stills], digital video, duration 2.45 min; 4.12 min

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## Appendix a

### *The Audition, The Lecture and the Institute for National Research*

With Vernon Ah Kee's *ausracism* (2003) as my influence in its textual commentary on verbally linguistic racism within everyday 'White' Australia conversation – "I'm not racist but..." – the aim of my project was to fracture the framework of colonial perceptive construction of 'norm'. What was planned to be a public performative backlash against stereotyping and essentialism within the colonial Australian contemporary and Imperialist programming,<sup>1</sup> turned into an uncomfortable, extended, introverted performance where idea after idea would be formulated, researched and debated until it was no longer acceptable to introduce to the public.

In the case of *The Audition*, The Director - in *Australian Idol* fashion - would audition willing audience members, then group them based on physical and linguistic characteristics and explain to them why they didn't get "the part". As the result of a practice live performance entitled *David: from where I stand* (Appendix 3), *The Audition* was to see the presence of The Researcher in mediated form – a video projection. In *David* I experienced a lack of control in regards to positioning the audience and delivering narrative content. The fact that within the project my desire was to deliver a set of incongruent ideas and racist generalisations delivered through the mass media, institutional structure and 'everyday' language, meant that audience movement and external distractions needed to be limited, and the performance itself needed to be presented as an *idea*. The Researcher's upper body was to be projected as if delivering *The Lecture* via a live video conference.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne-Marie Willis in her book *Illusions of Identity* (1993) – *the art of nation* describes the use of both strategic essentialist and racist stereotyping to achieve the means of imperial expansion and economic gain.



*Great Aussie Battler Competition – The Lecture* (advertising campaign, 2004)  
[video still], digital video, duration 5.42 min.

The fact that this enlarged, debased, pixellated illusion was delivering plans for an Archaic nationhood based on the idea that the original inhabitants had sprouted out of the ground, was supposed to emphasise the absurdity of colonial generalisation, and mysticism of the Indigenous 'Other'. Self-reflexion in regards to my positioning as a 'White' colonising descendant and the relationship these have generalisations have in regards to perceived *realities* of 'Other' amongst 'White' peoples, caused me to reconsider both the subject matter and artistic format. The reinforced degradation that this labelling would have had on members of the colonised communities was not the intention of this exercise.

**QUARTERED  
ESSAY**

**WHITEFELLA  
SPROUT UP**  
THE QUICKEST WAY  
TO PLANTHOOD

**The  
Researcher**

Correspondence  
'BAD COMPANY' The Critic, The Reader,  
The Academic, The Fonic, The Observer,  
The Debater, The Supporter  
'PERFECT LIES' The Commentator, The Human

In this latest Quartered Essay of 2003, The Researcher suggests that embracing Planthood is the only way that this community can begin to see itself as a nation. In an extremely broad and generalised essay she looks at the way humans depend on Plants to establish a sense of authority and defined identity. She explains that the question of Planthood might never be settled but that we can adopt and use it to save our souls. In a sweeping and non-referenced essay, mentioning everything from sub-cultural poets to medium-sized foodcarts, The Researcher claims that Australia must be seen as an over-sized flower pot.

"Whitefella Sprout Up forces me to think of who is actually sitting down and writing this kind of rubbish and what kind of society would actually give authority to rubbish like this for so long?"

KNOWLEDGE CHAOS, INTRODUCTION

"I'm offering a solution to the oxygen pollution emitted from plants each day. This is a convenient way of eliminating Plants whilst still maintaining the status of a Greenie. If Plants were the solution, we certainly have never been able to use it."

THE RESEARCHER: WHITEFELLA SPROUT UP

The Researcher is a renowned academic, writer and media personality. Her books include *Popular Issue*, *1. Current Concern*, *Whitefella's Going to Get Attention*, *I'm Starving and Let's Play Man* (recent flop). She is Professor of Creative Writing and Compromisable Studies at the Useless of Southern Area. Born in Somewhere and educated by certificate through Post and Confabesque, she currently has the fortune of getting paid to cruise between Fiji and her oversized property on the Salisbury Drama Lodge border.

Quartered Essay significantly contributes to the book storage problem in Australia. Every issue contains more reasons for why our government should abolish the teaching of literacy altogether. At lengths of about 20,000 words there surely must be better ways to spend time than reading these under-researched and uniliterary political and cultural opinions.

Author Photo: The Photographer

**CU2**

www.quarteredessay.com

*Quartered Essay – The Lecture* (advertising campaign, 2004), colour digital print, dimensions variable.

*The Institution for National Research* was designed to be a website devoted to “creating an object that would express the frustration of a ‘White’ person attempting to deal with issues of racism”. Initially the internet seemed an ideal medium to allow for broader public access and a multi-layered, self-directed reading of colonial visual influences such as paintings of the Queen and military on children’s playgrounds. It would also contain detailed descriptions of the previously planned performances as if they had actually happened. The problem not only lay in the art piece materialising as a school project, but within the medium of the internet itself. The internet as an instrument of assumed yet limited access - acting as an instrument for neo-US colonialism (Drury, 2001) – in a much larger project than I had anticipated. It is a project which requires extensive investigation in order to maximise its potential as a tool for subversion of modern day imperialism.



## Appendix b

### Transcript - Interview with Derek Kreckler: 26/03/2004

*Rebekah: I'm deconstructing the white self in post-colonial Australia, and the way in which Euro-Australians can approach issues dealing with indigenous people within their artworks, and I chose your artwork, I responded to your artwork because you'd actually been attempting to deal with the problematics of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations within your work. I also liked the way you actively, I mean, within your works there's a sense of activity instead of say for instance a one-sided victimisation, I like the way there are two sides present at all times and in regards to the Looking and Other Outcomes the picture particularly where the workmen were trying to dig up the rest of the pickled head man's body. I liked that activity 'this has been done and now let's try to do something more.' I'd just like to start with asking you about your cultural background and positioning.*

Derek: Well my cultural background is Sydney. My family is seventh generation Australians. We came here in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. I don't see myself as European, I have no connection to Europe whatsoever. I'm genetically, Irish, Scottish, German and English. And the Irish merchant was the very early arrival and the Germans came about, the German-Scottish came about I think it was about 48, 1848.

*Rebekah: What made you interested in pursuing a career in art?*

Derek: I think I was always very lonely. And family, I don't know, I mean I really don't know I honestly just, I can only just sort of describe myself. Do you know what I mean? Whether it applies to art is a huge question, but so you know I sort come from quite a broken family, an old family. Pretty much caused by the war. My father was deeply effected by it and the family "in that state" [in-audible] that sort of didn't give me a rosy view, and also you know I guess some of the inconsistencies you see in culture, you want to change them and things, you know I mean, I guess also like for instance my grandfather was incarcerated during the World War Two, and sorry during World War One and then, he was then also when my father was in Chenev on the Burma Railway the house was attacked by people you know, so Australians, obviously, probably not very long in the country Australians because they had no, I mean the house had been there for thirty years, and it just had a German name on it. So, that was pretty cool, I still believe it might be something like he just rang up the military police and they surrounded the house and stopped people so, it's kind of, it's like much about Australia, it's also quite odd.

*Rebekah: So, what role do you see your art, I mean what role do you see it playing in either the gallery or societal context?*

Derek: Well it's not like I can contain, or mark out those contexts. That's up to the audience. I don't, I mean I understand that art has a space, and that's a gallery often I mean there's more ways or doing it than that but you know, without the gallery system we wouldn't have any space. And the gallery system's important. But I still support you know temporal work, public art and all sorts of stuff. I mean art therapy to me is important as well. But, the gallery space is important it's like the, I mean I understand it's power structure and stuff but if you can use it use it, I mean who cares, really, it's not like it's hurting or destroying things. I mean, like you can see for instance that you know like Hitler controlled or tried to control the type of art people made. John Howard's doing something quite similar at the moment, I'm not comparing the two men but they are I mean Keating for that matter tried to sort of shape art as well. But they all see it as important and their, you know like it's politics and society that can affect it much more than you know the state owned gallery that tends mostly to be sort of arms length, or sort of

dominated by particular curators' or directors' perception, and they come and go so, you know it's just people for that matter.

***Rebekah: What made you actually delve into Indigenous issues within your art?***

Derek: You know it's pretty, I suppose I relate I mean I relate to their plight. My life's been full of smashed, not that I want to compare it because I'm also in a very privileged. But part of that privilege as well is because I'm tall, white and male. And, but you know that's just by accident, you know, and as a kid I grew up with a lot of Indigenous people. I have Indigenous friends now. I know some you know, very valuable friends who are Indigenous. I learnt a lot as a kid about stuff, you know how to fish and so on, but not just that, I'm just, it's not like they taught me anything really it's more like I couldn't understand the gap. And that taught me something if you know what I mean. You know they taught me things, you know the parents taught me things too, you know people teach things all the time, no matter what colour they are or where they come from. But, it was just I suppose what I was taught, or what sort of set me off on some sort of path was the gap with many of us was just so stupid. I mean it was just the inconsistencies. So, as an Australian it's just outrageous that our country is so shadowed by this kind of, you know the ethno-centrism of the English in Australia is really racist. And, I mean you know to a point, and the colonials I mean it's like the people blame the English for this that and the other I mean, it's a lot of the blame should be really sheeted at people who were in the sort of second, around about, from about the 1920s to World War Two it was really problematic. And, I mean it was problematic all the way through, but some really bad things happened then. And also, in say between 1860 and also, you know, I think the big massacres started before history was recorded, really was to frontier. A lot of the stuff was recorded around 1845 and so on as well. That it, I mean yes in the early centuries it was probably the British because they were all new arrivals, Scottish, but by the time you get into the 20<sup>th</sup> century you have the colonials and Australia isn't post-colonial, I disagree with that premise, I don't think it's post-colonial, I think it's still something else.

***Rebekah: Would you agree with some kind of neo-colonialism, at the moment, especially with the mass-media?***

Derek: That's a different subject. Yeah sure it is like a big colonial course, but in terms of Australia, I mean that's everywhere. In terms of Australia, I suppose if you're saying post-colonial you want to position yourself away from whatever colonialism is, you've left that.

***Rebekah: Do you see some kind of power relations happening with, in your images containing Indigenous people, and you being a non-Indigenous artist?***

Derek: I mean only if the images are good. And if the images are good that's great. It's not, no, I mean I can't you know, like for instance if I was making a lot of money making images, on the basis of that sort of stuff then I'd have to think about what I was saying a bit more closely. But, you know it seems that it's the obvious stuff, like I had to talk a bit about *The Looking* because people, like I did a talk at the University of Western Australia and a lot of people, particularly that come from the uni said, well what's wrong, what's the difference? And I just, an American woman in the audience said "I don't understand either", and then I said "well the images you're looking at, like for instance the Indigenous lady in the, Jenny, Jenny in the hairdressing salon, or Jenny in the supermarket, or, you know it isn't a common image, but it is, it's in the media, but it's American media and you don't see it much in Australia". And these ladies were saying "Oh you haven't been to the hairdressing salon" and I go "Well where do you go? Where do you sit?" And quite frankly I just said I didn't believe them. And I don't. I mean if you're in Kununurra or Broome or somewhere it's not, I mean even in Nowra in New South Wales, or down anywhere south of Perth. In the kind of major cities you don't see it unless it's a very sophisticated city. And there aren't many in Australia. Anyway, even if it is common, which it's not, but if it were to be it's still a valuable thing, a common thing. It's a



state of, I think your question's sort of complex and difficult to completely deny but I think that, you know if you're doing something in good faith and you believe that what you're saying is right, then I don't think there's anything negative. I mean I'm not dealing, I mean I've had this out with some people, mostly white people. I'm not talking from the Aboriginal perspective; I'm talking from a white perspective. And I've never done anything else. And it's about what I miss than what they miss, I mean although I miss a lot, but that would be an assumption. But I can make that assumption.

**Rebekah:** *Taking it from there I mean I want to read a statement that I read on the Australia Council website really interesting and that, mean it's about the Looking and Other Outcomes series and how they describe "a wondrous other found in the every day suburban road works, supermarkets, hair salons and book stores". So basically that's taking off from where that American lady was talking about. How would you describe that comment about your work?*

Derek: Sorry, that it's everyday?

**Rebekah:** *Well, finding the wondrous other within the everyday.*

Derek: Well that's hopefully a compliment, that's all. I don't think about it too much. I mean that's nice, I think that's from Ian [McLean]. I think, just generally speaking not about my work, but I suppose it's like a part from sort of clichés about the wonder that we should be finding in everyday life anyway, we can find it in a more difficult thing to capture. That everything's open for interpretation, and you know use.

**Rebekah:** *Well basically you've already started describing about the fact that you're coming at it from the white perspective, and is there some way of showing yourself within the works or is it the way that you've kind of presented them?*

Derek: I think I do often show myself I mean I've only been working with pictures, I mean I've worked with images all my life, but what I mean by pictures is of actually taking photographs and presenting them. Previously I've shown, I've created images that last a minute, or I've got an installation that deploys a photo within it, rather than just a picture for a picture's sake. So it's only been about, well actually *The Looking* is the first series since 1977 which is when I did my first photographic series, which was a study of buildings in Adelaide, where I went to art school. And they are kind of cute photos, I look at them every now and again, they're sort of are walls of buildings with graffiti on them, or something but you know, I think some of them work better than other because I used a 22mm lens on a 35mm camera and there's a bit of distortion. I sort of, knowing more now, I think because of all the installation and performance work I've done, you know like the attitude of the real, which is what I'm most concerned with, is that I want it to be, you know you don't, there's distortion occurring all around us but we don't notice it. So I don't want that in my photos, do you know what I mean? So you know there's little differences like that, but they're still quite similar, it's still me looking at stuff that's in front of me like, I suppose to quote Ian you know, some sort of wonder, whatever it might be you know the billboard.

**Rebekah:** *Well, just imagine that you're at the end of your life looking back on both your artistic career and social involvement what do you hope to have achieved?*

Derek: That was your last question.

**Rebekah:** *It was because I think that...*



Derek: Well, understanding more than I do now and I hope I've not wasted my time. That's what I wrote because I actually wrote down responses to all of the questions. They're a bit different now.

***Rebekah: Did you have one for the contextualisation of the artist? I thought you'd kind of covered that within what you've been talking about but that was the second to last question...do you think the cultural positioning and contextualisation of the artist in regards to their work is important?***

Derek: Well, I've got no. Some of the most contentious views can be held by people that influence us, only later we discover the person's real motive. I stress later, you need to be incurred stumbling on my position, stumbling along believing in my position like, I didn't realise that the guy was Hitler or something. You know what I mean? It's like, you could be doing positive acts but not realise the source has got an absolute other intention, and the society might have another intention. So in that context, no you can't, positioning and contextualisation, I mean even if you don't like Leena Richtenschal (Look up), you look at *Olympia* and there are stunning images, and then you go up. So you know it's really hard to. I think a lot of people don't like it, but I just think, I deliberately keep art separate to text. I just don't think you can produce art from text or you. So, therefore, what you see it's about, I mean graphically, I mean from context. You know like developing a content, can be like a canvas if you like, and then applying it to the painting. It doesn't work. I mean I put "In the intervening period I can stumble along believing my position that the renaissance was in part a mistake, then find out that the same view is also held by someone who is a murderer. It need not dampen my belief but may cause me to want to adjust my expression of the perspective because I don't want to be associated with murder but still support my angle on the renaissance 'problem' (Krecker, 2004 [interview notes])."

I'll print this out for you anyway.

***Rebekah: Oh thank you so much, because I was just about to ask you "would you like a transcript of the interview as well?"***

Derek: Oh, sure, what's it for anyway?

***Rebekah: Well basically, it's for both my theory and my studio practice. Basically, my writing goes hand in hand with my practice, but I more or less just want to look at the ways in which Anglo-Australian or Euro-Australian artists can actually deal with the problems surrounding non-Indigenous and Indigenous interactions. And what's happened within history and...***

Derek: Yeah, I sort of answered that differently to your...

***Rebekah: Because, you know I mean I'm afraid of appropriating their issues but then at the same time I see a big problem in not addressing these issues.***

Derek: It's not about appropriating, at all. It's your culture. It's a part of our culture, and therefore worthy of discussion. Many white people wish they could do something for the "poor black fella" but they don't know what to do. I have here that:

The racism today is no different to 1825. If you read newspapers from the early 1800's early 1900's the comments are not too different to today, paternalistic, helpful, stupid and so on. Knowledge and media fail because everyone concludes either;

A. The problem is being attended to by those in the know.

B. How can I help, where can I begin? eg stasis.

My work will not fix any problems nor will it help indigenous people, it is just my way of dealing with some of the history, as I know best, through my images.

***Rebekah: Well thank you so much for this, this is great.***