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What is the South?

THE IDEA of the South has a long history. In the recent past it has been revived as a possible frame for representing the cultural context of not just regions that are geographically located in the South, but also those that share a common post colonial heritage. In this essay I explore the affinities and tensions between the south and parallel terms such as third world, antipodes. I argue that the South can extend the existing debates on cross cultural exchange, and provide a useful perspective for representing what I call a “spherical consciousness” in contemporary art.

What is a “little public sphere”?¹ It is where strangers encounter each other and through dialogue produce some form of exchange and mutual understanding. The raw matter of this little public sphere is the democratic right to give voice to one’s belief and the cosmopolitan principles of curiosity and respect for the other. Today we are aware of the fragmentation and commercialization of public spaces. There has been a steady erosion of the available spaces for public debate. However, there has also been a proliferation in the media with which private views can be made public. Each time we find a place to meet, whether it is in the context of a journal, a website, an exhibition, or a conference there is the possibility of building a little public sphere. I am drawn to those events and sites that are not just as magnets for like-minded people, but assume the function of a platform for generating an understanding of the predicament we

share. These little public spheres tend to be temporary and transient. They rely on a combination of intimate and distant relationships, weak and strong ties. Increasingly, the participants in these little public spheres are of mixed origins and many have traveled vast distances. In this lecture I will argue that while the South is a big and spherical concept, it is nevertheless a useful heading for understanding a certain set of relationships in the global network of little public spheres.

Over the past decade the idea of the South has captured the interest of historians, activists, political scientists and cultural practitioners. It has been used to explore the legacies and links that shape the lives of people that are dispersed across a vast region. In geo-political terms the South is not confined to the southern hemisphere as it captures elements that are located on both sides of the equatorial divide. Environmental associations such as: the Vavilov group established in Chile; the Cairns group of agricultural ministers; South Centre at Oxford University that researches the inequities in economic global governance; and the INSouth intellectual network, have all used the Southern hemisphere as an analytical position to address the imbalances in the global system, to lobby for the priorities of the South in global fora, and develop a collaborative framework that promotes new forms of South-South, and South-North exchange. Considering the proliferation of such gatherings the idea of the South appears to be a murky heading – like the atmospherics of urban skies it flickers and looms with hope and humiliation. The only constant for those who identify with the concept of the South is a dual awareness that the euro-american hegemony in global affairs has concentrated power in the North, and that survival requires a coordinated transnational response.

The South is often associated with the debates on post colonial states and the third world. Contributors to the journal *Thesis 11* tend to prefer to discuss the formations of an Antipodean rather than a Southern cultural imaginary. While the journal has opened itself to new collaborations in the South, the term antipodes is retained in order to animate the contestatory nature of the conceptual terrain. Taking his cue from Bernard Smith's pioneering work on cultural innovation in the South, Peter Beilharz has often stressed that culture is never bound to any fixed notion of geography.² Hence, the term antipodes is utilized to underline that cultural innovation does not arise from the residence of people in a specific place,

but rather through the relationships that they form between places. Antipodes is thereby used as a term that stresses the dual movement of ideas between the north and south.

While these earlier political categories articulated identity through a conceptual framework of belatedness and subordination, I would argue that the concept of the South not only asserts a more affirmative tone for cultural identifications, but it helps to suggest that the movement of ideas can be multidirectional as well bi-polar. Even though the term South privileges regional location over socio-economic development and geo-political histories, it does not mark an absolute break from the historical conditions of inequality. I would prefer to situate the concept of the South along a jump/cut spectrum of conceptual elongations and mutations that extend these preceding categories. For instance, when Trinh T. Min Ha commented on the contemporary levels of global interpenetration, it led her to conclude that in “every third world there is a first world and vice versa”. She was also stressing the now rather obvious point that the centre and periphery are not polar opposites, but that elements from both are embedded in each other. More recently, Nestor Garcia Canclini has argued that while globalization has produced vast chasms within social spaces, with the upper tier connected to global networks, he also stressed that everyone is forced to translate the global into the local.³ The ever widening socio-economic differences have now been thoroughly documented by many political economists such as Jacques Attali who have found numerous ways of repeating the chilling fact that 90% of the global wealth is now concentrated in the hands of 1% of the world’s inhabitants.⁴ Of course, Latin American political economists had already stressed that uneven development was not just a product of the centre and periphery polarity but also a process that was played out within specific regions.⁵ However, in this current phase of globalization there is a further twist in the geo-political polarization – whereby the isolation of a region is not a consequence of its physical remoteness, but through a negative process of bifurcation – parts of cities, rural areas and significant parts of a region are increasingly bypassed or “splintered”⁶ from the emergent forms of exchange. Hence, it is crucial to stress that the South does not refer to a geo-political entity that possesses a singular territorial bloc with an attendant unified cultural and political identity.

I understand the concept of the South as a loose hemispheric term that refers to a series of places that share similar patterns of colonization, migration and cultural mixture. For me the South is also expressive of a cultural imaginary that looks outward from its own national base and against the grain of its colonial past. This appeal to a more open-ended identity is, in one critic's eye, a betrayal of a deep imperial history.⁷ In other words, any use of the language that draws from metaphoric associations with the cardinal points of cartography risks being embedded in the naturalistic discourse of magnetic polarities.

In my mind the South is a more ambivalent concept. It oscillates between a clarion call for antipodean rebelliousness and the stigmatic expression of the cultural cringe. Throughout Australia's incomplete pursuit of republicanism the image of the Southern Cross has been a recurring symbol of resistance. It has been the trump card against the cultural imperialism of the North. Refusing to be defined by a measure that favours the North the Southern cultural chauvinist inverts this logic and declares that everything of value is already and always in the South. Peter Beilharz notes that the choices are not confined to the bad options of superior recognition according to metropolitan exclusivity or the provincial self-identification through splendid isolationism. He takes inspiration from the fact, and not just hollow boast, that distance from the North has enabled Australia to figure as the "world's social laboratory of policy experiment". Indeed throughout the twentieth century Australia has been at the forefront of reforms and innovations in the three pillars of social welfare – wage arbitration, women's right and multiculturalism. However, Beilharz's narrative of the emergence of Antipodean civilizational tropes is bittersweet. While he duly notes that earlier achievements were influential in the Fabian social democratic debates, he is also painfully aware that Paul Keating's realignment of the Labour Party with neo-liberalism paved the way for Tony Blair's 'third way'.⁸ Keating's own southern cultural imaginary that promised to take shape through a nascent republicanism and closer integration with Asia, was soon transformed into the target of populist scorn for the successive generations of political leaders.

In Central and Latin America a similar pattern of ambivalent identification is expressed in examples that stretch from Borges short story of the South as a frontier metaphor, Joaquim Torres Garcia's corrective claim that the

“North looks South”, to the analysis of cultural inferiority complexes in the writings of Octavio Paz, Gilberto Freyre and Eduardo Galeano, and more recently, the speech by Hugo Chavez in which he quoted Mario Benedetti’s poem “The South also Exists”.⁹ Such enduring pathos for regional solidarity alongside the persistent failure to build a common cultural framework prompts a number of questions. Is the concept of the South the best frame or point from which to start, once again, as if for the first time, the endless task of collective identification? Is there any point at which the path of identity splits from the imperial past? Can such a wide spherical concept inflect the debates on planetary and cosmopolitan identity with a different historical texture and geo-political valency?¹⁰

Mindful of Gerardo Mosquera’s trenchant critique of the way metropolitan curators mine the cultural content of the South in order to extend their imperial outreach, treating the South as mere data that can be added to the existing canons,¹¹ I will be picking up iterations of the South and taking them in a direction that is similar to Raewyn Connell’s definition of “Southern theory” as a perspective that sharpens relational thinking “between intellectuals and institutions in the metropole and those in the world periphery.”¹² In both cultural and political terms, the south is best utilized as an intermediary concept – neither embedded in a fixed territorial context, nor floating in the realm of “unmoored” globalization. Within the discourse of art theory and contemporary visual practice I will argue that the concept of the South can be used to redefine the context of art within a wider hemispheric frame, and address the complex operation of influences that criss-cross each other within this sphere. Hence I will draw a determinately idiosyncratic curve that links together a wide range of discursive sources, such as the journals *Thesis 11* and *Third Text*, as well as cultural events ranging from *Documenta XI*, *Asia-Pacific Triennial*, *The South Project*, and *South, South, South, South...* From this network I will suggest that the emergent formations of a spherical context has informed the visual imaginary of an artists such as Carlos Capelan and Phillip George.¹³

Thesis 11 and Third Text: Archives of the South

From the outset in 1987 the art theory and art historical journal *Third Text* contested the terms, questioned the structures and challenged the history of western art. The tone of writing has varied from the academic, poetic to the polemical. While the journal was founded to develop a third

world perspective on contemporary art and give voice to artists who have worked in a postcolonial context, and despite the shift in editorial policy which is more sceptical of post-colonial theory,¹⁴ the journal continues to provide an invaluable documentary function that recovers and repositions the artistic practices that was either ignored or marginalised by the dominant art historical institutions. It also plays a leading role in presenting new methods for measuring the value and meaning of art. Art history is more than capable of discovering new entrants into its own canon, but the capacity to re-think the terms of entry and the field of relations that constitutes art is not generated from within, but through an interplay with different theoretical and cultural perspectives. The postcolonial critiques of Orientalism, hybridity and the subaltern that were first developed in literary and historical accounts provided vital stepping stones in this reconfiguration of art historical methodologies. A key challenge that confronted this discourse was to develop new ways of seeing and interpreting the differences between and within cultures. For instance, the introduction of the Derridean concept of supplementarity and Homi Bhabha's interpretation of the process of cultural translation provided new means for understanding both the tensions that arise from the interaction between different cultural practices, and the emergence of novel forms of expressions. In short, this approach not only provided more evidence of emergent practices and the historical legacies of art from the South, but it also prompted the invention of critical tools for overcoming the classification of the South as exotica, periphery and primitivism.

Zygmunt Bauman and Bernard Smith, two of the key thinkers that have inspired the cultural turn in *Thesis 11*, have approached the question of the South from opposite poles. Zygmunt Bauman has asked how will understand the dream of mobility, and other images of utopia, without more space? The world, he warns, has run out of space. There are no more other lands towards which the both the post and sub European fantasies can be projected. In the Northern imaginary the South previously figured as both the exalted place of salvation and the dreaded basin in which all refuse was deposited. Now, Bauman points out, there is no escape. Utopian thinking is no longer directional, teleological, but improvisational, contingent and vigilant. This modality, after many twists, finally turns around and finds the countenance of elder hunters that provide the starting point to Bernard Smith's visual analysis. Smith was the first Australian

art historian to notice that the art produced in the South did not correspond to other visual practices and it did not fit neatly into the available conceptual categories of the North. To interpret the cultural production of the South necessitated innovative and inter-disciplinary methodologies. Ian McLean has taken Smith's antipodean perspective a step further. By tracing the records of the encounters between Aboriginal communities, missionaries and anthropologists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and by reviewing the earliest references to Aboriginal art in anthropological writing and art criticism, McLean has been able to establish that both Aboriginal cultural production precedes the early modernist experiments in Europe, and the uses of the category of contemporary to refer to a conjunction of vigorous traditionalism and resistance to modernity in Aboriginal art anticipates the dominant tropes of contemporaneity that appeared late in the 20th century. McLean makes the bold claims, that if opposition to the antinomies of modernism and celebration of the hybrid knowledges, practices and identities are the hallmarks of contemporaneity, then aboriginal art has always been contemporary.¹⁵

Documenta XI: Platform for the South

As director of *Documenta XI*, Okwui Enwezor, was aware of his responsibility as a beneficiary of the debates that unfolded in the journal *Third Text*, as well as the danger of being the carrier of the "poisoned chalice" that



Carlos Capelán, *Painting on map*, 1990

delivered the South to the North. However, rather survey and chart the art historical achievements of the South, Enwezor intertwined his research process with a novel political intervention. He transported the *Documenta* curatorial team to key locations across the world to address the issues of creolization, justice and reconciliation in places like St Lucia, South Africa and India.¹⁶ The engagements with such specific historic contexts, not only brought an unprecedented focus on the South but also sharpened the interplay of two historical streams. It was not only a mapping of the cultural consequences of decolonization, but an inter-disciplinary and inter-textual tracking of the complex flows between diasporic communities, the perduring legacies of colonialism and a critique of dystopian ruins of post industrial spaces. Through the juxtaposition of these two narratives, postcolonial migration patterns and post-modern aporias, Enwezor offered a both a wider sphere and more nuanced set of pathways for tracing the complex entanglements between the North and the South.

Asia-Pacific Triennial: from Collaboration to Showcase

The Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT), inaugurated in 1993 at the Queensland Art Galley, was the first and continues to be the only major series of exhibitions in the world to focus exclusively on the contemporary art of Asia and the Pacific, including Australia. In its original format the APT initiated a pioneering curatorial methodology that required advisors and selectors from Australia to be partnered with experts across the region. In particular in 1996 each of the 15 curatorial teams comprised both Australian and international curators, and focused on the art of specific geographical areas according to their expertise. According to Victoria Lynn, one of the curators of APT2, the development of this project in Australia is not only a consequence of its geographic proximity, always “looking up to Asia” but also a result of longstanding “influence of these cultures on artists including Donald Friend, David Rankin, Tim Johnson, Janet Laurence, and the large number of Australian artists who have heritages located in this region, namely John Young, Simryn Gill, Savandary Vongpothorn.”¹⁷ The significance of these biographical links and the prevailing context of “wanting to be part of Asia”, meant that the APT proceeded with a curatorial attitude that was framed by the interests of dialogue. However, since APT 2002 the curatorial methodology shifted to a more conventional model of showcasing the work of a core group of influential and emerging artists. At a time when there was a proliferation

of new biennales throughout Asia, and artists from India and China were gaining a level of hyper-visibility in the global art system, this new approach prompted critics to suggest that Australia was slipping into the invisible imperious space that lies beneath the hyphen of the A-PT and resume the privileged vantage point of curating others.¹⁸

South Project

In 2003, inspired by the regional focus and the earlier collaborative models that were developed by the APT, Kevin Murray proposed that Melbourne should become the host city of an art festival that had the explicit aim of embracing cultural exchange across the South.¹⁹ Murray's main motivation was to remove the blinkers that directed attention to the metropolitan centers and blocked lateral vision. While he has not yet achieved his goal of establishing a structured platform and ongoing programme of events that are focused on the South, Murray has initiated a number of admirable and ambitious conferences in Melbourne, Wellington, Santiago, Johannesburg, residencies in Melbourne and exhibitions in Melbourne and Johannesburg. The aim of these events has been to initiate a dialogue between artists, critics and writers from the whole of the South. At the opening conference in Melbourne Mbuelo Mzamane concluded his talk with a vision of the south as a "rediscovery of the common". While attending a subsequent South conference in Santiago the Australian indigenous artist Brook Andrews acknowledged that while he was interviewing mothers / activists of the disappeared he felt an embodied connection to one who "looked like my mum", and found unexpected affinities with the Aboriginal women from the stolen generation.²⁰ These are brief examples of how events have begun to establish a network that encourages multilateral relationships and framework for re-thinking the social context of art beyond the concentric ring of neo-imperialism and even the petty narcissism of national republicanism.²¹

South-South-South

In 1998 I used the idea of the South as a heading for a conference, and developed it further in a follow up event held in 2004.²² The primary aim of both conferences was to rethink the context of art. We were particularly concerned with the myopia through which we regard a neighbour like New Zealand as if "it was Australia writ small",²³ and the dearth of comparative thinking that may have revealed the similarities and differences

with South Africa – another southern space that was also once part of the British empire, and with whom Australia shared many common settler myths.²⁴ It is easy to enjoy the wit of the Canadian artist Curnoe who redrew the *Map of North America* in a way that miraculously fused the boundaries of Canada and Mexico, and by a mutual process of expansion and contraction made that “something in the middle” disappear.²⁵ However, when artists from the three continents of the South share a stage there can also be some very awkward silences. The long histories of mutual indifference that resulted from northern bias and peripheral blindness cannot be corrected by mobility alone.²⁶ Reflecting on the challenges associated with the intensified patterns of global circulation of artists and the hybridization of cultures associated with globalization, the Cuban curator Gerardo Mosquera proposed that there was a need for a paradigm shift in the understanding of the circulation of artists working in the South. Mosquera stressed that in the absence of new South-South and North-South axial routes the cultural contours of globalization would continue to reproduce prevailing imperialist inequalities and primitivist stereotypes.²⁷

To unravel the cultural textures of the South I now turn towards a closer look at artistic practices. It is my contention that the spherical consciousness from the South—that is the cultural consciousness of the ways and means by which neo-liberalism jigsaws into the cuts made by colonialism, or the manner by which settler claims, diasporic aspirations and indigenous rights rub against each other—can be glimpsed in the aesthetic practices of two artists from the South.

Cape - Surf

In 2007 I observed Capelan working on a wall drawing for the Auckland Triennial. As I stood before the wall I wondered what horizons are lapping up against each other while Capelan is bending these anamorphic figures, inserting stellar-like messages, and twirling the space in a flow of eddies and cross-currents. I also recalled an experience we had a few years earlier. Staring out into the Pacific Ocean from a Sydney cliffside he remarked: “This is the Chilean horizon seen from the other side.”

The edges to these wall drawing installations are as elusive as the horizon. Capelan claims that no matter how intensively he immerses himself

into the space they are never finished. Reiterations have appeared in Montevideo and Johannesburg. In each instance, a foundational narrative provides a reference point: in Montevideo there is a response to 19th century landscape paintings of the birth of the Uruguyan nation by Juan Manuel de Blanes; in New Zealand and South Africa he made work that connected the peaceful protest marches organized by the Parihaka community in 1881 with Gandhi's decision to leave Durban in 1914 and initiate his philosophy of active disobedience. These references are not visible other than in the gesture of mark making. In an earlier correspondence he has noted: "For me, drawing a piece like I did in Auckland is both about mapping and being in a map." He adds further that in the act of representing there is also contradictory desire to erase the signs of representation. Unlike the heavy, monumental – let us say – colonizing acts of historical representation, Capelan's gestures are closer to indigenous practices of sand painting – the image appears in a materiality that admits its own ephemerality and its meaning is articulated through the medium of clustered hieroglyphs. Finally, I would like to suggest that the spherical images of horizons that provide the field upon which his aphoristic messages from his provocative cultural front, the *Post Colonial Liberation Army* (PCLA), are not representations of physical territories but a cultural horizon that is fleetingly composed in the intersections of belated arrivals and interrupted translations.

In the first known map of the world Anaximander presented it in the shape of a cylinder. The earth was surrounded by the heavens. Suspended in the heavens, people lived on the upper surface. Anaximander was Greek but the centre of the world was the Aegean Sea. The shores of Europe and Asia frame the edges of the then known world, but the point from which they are seen is the flowing azure. It is timely to recall such a fluid perspective.

Phillip George is an artist who surfs on a daily basis. He has learnt to read the direction of the wind, he knows the tidal patterns, remembers where the hidden reefs lie, and the waves are formed through the interplay of these forces. While waiting at the mercy of the big ones, I imagine that his gaze rebounds between the rugged sandstone cliffs and the horizon, prompting tremulous thoughts about the secrets hidden in all directions. Judging by an earlier series of photographs, *Little Bay*, 1998, George regards both sea and shoreline with a heavy degree of apprehension

and wonderment. In these works, he created an imaginary reception of Byzantine icons amidst the cliffs and rockpools where the local indigenous people took sanctuary after contracting infectious diseases from the white settlers, long prior to Christo's famous wrapping of the site.

In this recent exhibition at Casula Powerhouse, *Borderlands*, 2008, a similar perspective is at play. The exhibition comprised of an interplay between two installations. As you entered the main turbine hall there stood thirty different seven foot tall Thruster surfboards, all facing east towards Mecca, and lined upright in a strict modernist grid. Each board was emblazoned with an intricate Islamic pattern and the collection is referred to as *Inshallah* (God Willing). Some of the designs were direct reproductions of traditional patterns of the tree of life and the Garden of Eden that George had photographed in Ottoman, Persian and Arabic mosques. A few, and apparently the ones most admired by the youths from Sydney's western suburbs, included new hybrid images that George manipulated to fit the mould of the board. Each board has an exquisite quality, as luminous as the Bursa tiles and ripping with aqueous grace.

Along the perimeter of the upper wall is a twenty-five meter long photograph called *Border Patrol*. It depicts a six kilometre stretch of the Sydney coastline. The image is heavily tinted in green and conveys the night vision goggle view that is emblematic of the paranoid perspective that has shaped both the war on terror and the war on refugees. Looking at Australian coastlines through the eyes of the American military industrial complex, the cliffs and beaches merge into a murky shadow-space of repulsion and menace.

The two parts of this exhibition articulate opposing aesthetic strategies. The first part of the exhibition *Inshallah* has now attracted the attention of the global media. By combining the Islamic design with the Australian surfboard George has not just brought together two cultural practices that are normally kept apart, but also initiated a gesture of welcome. This interest in the social activity of cross-cultural hospitality, accommodation and exchange is consistent with an enduring trajectory in the artistic imaginary that is motivated by a fundamental attraction to the signs of difference, and is constantly allowing a basic form of curiosity and wonderment to test the boundaries of communication and interaction.

George's surfboards have turned heads all around the world. This playful and affirmative gesture has not only offered an instance of possible cross-cultural reconciliation, but for me, it also prompted the question, why was this not already there. The fit between the surface of the boards and the visual designs seemed so "natural" that it made me think that they must have already been there, somewhere in our cultural unconscious.

The photographic installation *Border Patrol* has by contrast almost escaped the notice of the mainstream media, and it is, admittedly quite possible to enter the main Turbine Hall at Casula and remain in sun-dazzled awe of *Inshallah*. However, this would miss the critical counterpoint that sustains the exhibition as a whole. In *Border Patrol* George deploys the oppositional tendency that is also a crucial part of the artistic imaginary, with which the artist adopts the existing codes of representation and then seeks to re-route, disrupt, or in some way short-circuit the conventional patterns of signification. George's use of panoramic photography is expressive of the desire to confront the practices of domination and the regulative techniques of surveillance in everyday life. Like many artists that have opposed the policies on the war on terror and the racist strategies that have been deployed to repel the "invasion" of refugees, George has turned his eye onto the State's own repressive use of the visual apparatus of detection and depiction. In particular, he has adopted the use of night vision camera technique. By representing the Australian coastline in this monstrous scale and through the paranoid tint, he produces an effect that blurs any division between night and day, and the work also gives the suggestion that the very technologies, which have been mobilized to bolster border protection and convey a sense of security, have also punctured the sense of social innocence and cosmic balance that, at times, accompanies the ordinary moments of daydreaming by the beach.

For George, bobbing up and down on his surfboard, the beach is a scene that is filled with joy and dread. At one level the promise of the new surfboards is bound within a hospitable gesture. The rhythmic patterns of the Islamic tiles and the gentle tapered curls of the board's design both induce an enchanted serenity. However, at the other level, the effect of the panoramic photograph with their pallid coloration and haunted landscape, provide a stark contrast. The effect of this image suggests that the silent way in which surfers stared endlessly towards the horizon, and

mutated meditative pose of sunbathers has now been interfered with by the noise of foreign bodies and the nationalized vigilance against invaders. The exhibition oscillates within the disturbing tension of these conflicting signs. However, there is another perspective that is implicit in this exhibition. Unlike the polemical discourse that rebounds within the parameters of the “clash of civilization” thesis, this exhibition also recalls a more classical way of seeing the world.

In Herodotus’s account of history we must remember that his account of events is informed by the principle that everything is in eternal motion. The centre of the world is the sea. He sees things not from vantage point of specific point within terra firma, but as if he was also a traveler, a sailor, a mere passer-by. His approach towards other people and cultures is not as adversarial enemies or monstrous sub-humans, but rather as equals who have developed different values and traditions. To comprehend these differences Herodotus recommends that we observe, enquire, and relate them one’s own values and traditions. Looking out towards the horizon Herodotus had no idea of what lay beyond. He did not have the vantage of an aerial perspective. There were no real maps which defined the way things were - just a simple awareness that we all have neighbours, and that our neighbours have, in turn, their own neighbours. To find out about what lay beyond he had to cross the borderlands. His only guide was the word of his neighbour’s neighbour and so on. Hence, in the absence of a fixed mapping of the world, Herodotus set out on his journeys with a faith that knowledge accrues through the interaction with that which exists elsewhere. He was prepared to step out of his own place and verify the stories that had circulated like rumors. I would describe this horizontal method of inquiry, verification and narration as a form of spherical consciousness.

Conclusion

Despite the profound legacies and links that criss-cross the South, that create a common texture in both historical consciousness and everyday experience, the capacity to stimulate dialogue and arrive at a position where people from different parts can feel a sense of ease and openness towards each other, is not something that can be automatically acquired. In the South many people may share many common negative sentiments and political ideologies. It may start with feeling the same sardonic pains

of cultural belatedness, and may escalate into a conjoined stance against the political humiliations of the North. However, beyond this kindred untimeliness and shared oppositionality what are the subtle bonds that affirm a sense of community?

At the beginning of this essay I noted how the idea of the South in geo-political terms has been articulated as a kind of defensive reaction to the hegemony of the North. As a way of concluding I am going to argue that my idiosyncratic tour of the archive, platforms and collaborative models is neither a biographical narrative, nor a hierarchy of exemplars, but a deliberate act of rapprochement. By linking together different interdisciplinary discourses and intertextual events my aim has been to expose a clinamen—a path that both “swerves away from the influence of predecessors”, and heads towards a “third space”.²⁸ I have followed the bias of this movement, in order to show that the relational energy, which connects personal and historical claims, not only curves away from the compulsive trajectories that head North, but also draws force from the swirling gestures of rapport with other like minded aspirants of the South.

From the outset of this essay I have stressed that the concept of South is not only useful for the purpose of classifying the context and form of contemporary artistic practices in a broader geo-political category, but that it can also serve as a cluster concept that gains meaning through the relational thinking of scale and texture. More than two decades ago the Australian political scientists Alan Davies suggested that “we should spend less time in awed upward contemplation of the great metropolitan centres and a good deal more looking sideways at the experience of like small nations, whose solutions should be better scaled to our problems, and whose definition of their problems are more likely to help us understand our own”²⁹. He imagined a form of cultural exchange that would reveal insights and develop skills that would be more worthy of emulation because their fit would be closer to our own experiences. The transferability of knowledge would not be a form of adopting and applying models, but in the grasping of what Davies called the “nuances of likeness”.

What blocks this potential for this relational understanding of geo-political scale and socio-cultural texture? Is it due to our fears of facing the insecurities and horrors within, as well a failure to define a measure

of our own worth and common bonds? The models of explanation that have been prominent in the humanities and social sciences tend to reinforce a view that privileges defensive psychic reactions and imbalances in the global system. For instance, Freud's insight into the "narcissism of minor differences" as an account of the disproportionate violence that is exerted upon proximate rivals, or even Paz's exegesis of the self-hatred in the "Malinche complex", are reliant on a paradigm that underlines the potency of negative cultural identifications. Despite the emergence of new intellectual and political networks that have provided a framework for the articulation and validation of not just voices from but also new modes of knowledge of the South, there has been insufficient attention to the articulation of an affirmative conceptualization of the South.

It is important to use the "little public spheres" of symposia, exhibitions, journals and books not just as judicious theatres for speaking about the faults in the politics of recognition, and the weakness of horizontal institutional networks, but as spaces in which we put this corrective sentiment to the side, and extend the practices of fabulation. Avoiding the bad options of metropolitan superiority and provincial indifference necessitates a finer appreciation of the interstitial practices that push cultural production to its most exquisite form. The little public spheres have a crucial role in the delivery of this third option. They require participants to position themselves as interlocutors of the contemporary. As noted in the examples of the contributors to the journals *Third Text* and *Thesis 11* this entails a methodology that can track the complex traffic of ideas along the North-South and South-South axes. What counts is not whether you are based in New York or Melbourne, but how you follow the flows.

The South is, as Michael Taussig would say, a "murky" concept.³⁰ It embodies the "nightmarish medium of domination", but as it verges from its intended axis, invents new relations, and sweeps up the missing, it impugns the prison-house of its own language. From this perspective of haunted montages I would respond to Cuauhtemoc Medina exhortation for the speakers of the *Sur, Sur, Sur, Sur* conference to evaluate the "explosion of the metropolitan historical narrative", and the effects of "two decades of post-colonial emergence", by proposing that the South does not always arrive after the North.³¹ Our sense of becoming, just as the view of a horizon from its other side, is not doomed by a primal loss, because as

Borges promised in *El Sur*, “reality favours symmetries and slight anachronisms”. The South, as he said in his favourite story, exists, “on the other side of Avenida Rivadavia”. Borges gives us the phantasmagoric hint that the South is found in the roughride recovery of memories. To find such a place we are usually told to choose between a specific place, unique voice or permanent exile. However, I place greater faith in the sparkling intelligence of the antipodean intellectual who, according to Peter Beilharz, not only leaves home in order to return, transmits messages from across the horizon, and maintains an open line with the past, but also “lives out all three modes of activity”.³²

Notes

¹ I am borrowing Peter Beilharz’s description of Thesis 11 as a “little public sphere”. See his “Rewriting Australia”, *Journal of Sociology*, 40, 2004.

² Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1962. Peter Beilharz, *Imagining the Antipodes, Culture, Theory and the Visual in the Work of Bernard Smith*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997.

³ Nestor Garcia Cancilini, *Hybrid Cultures*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1995.

⁴ Jacques Attali, *La Voie Humaine*, Fayard, 2004, cited in Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty*, Polity, Cambridge, 2007, p 6.

⁵ Fernando Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979.

⁶ Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin, *Splintering Urbanism*, Routledge, London, 2001

⁷ Margaret Jolly, “The South in Southern Theory: Antipodean Reflections on the Pacific”, *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 44, 2008, 79.

⁸ Peter Beilharz, “Rewriting Australia”, *Journal of Sociology*, 40, 2004.

⁹ Kevin Murray, “Uruguay also Exists”, <http://ideaofsouth.net/idea/idea-zero/uruguay-also-exists>

¹⁰ See Paul Gilroy, *After Empire*, London, Routledge, 2004, and Ulrich Beck, “The Cosmopolitan Manifesto”, *World Risk Society*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1999.

¹¹ Gerardo Mosquera, “Alien-own / own Alien”, in N. Papastergiadis, (ed.) *Complex Entanglements, Art, Globalization and Cultural Difference*, Rivers oram Press, London, 2003, p 19-29.

¹² Raewyn Connell, *Southern Theory*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2007, p ix.

¹³ This path is by no means to be interpreted as a survey. It excludes numerous key influences and reference points such as the work of Kendell Geers, Colin Richardson, Juan Davila, Guy Brett, Nelly Richard, Virginia Perez Ratton and Ticio Escobar.

¹⁴ Rasheed Araeen, 'Re-thinking History and some other things', *Third Text*, Spring 2001, No 54, p 93.

¹⁵ Ian McLean has been a regular contributor to both *Third Text* and *Thesis 11*. He is a rare example of cultural theorist who is able to address both sociological and art historical debate. His analysis of the concept of the antipodes appeared in his seminal book *White Aborigines, Identity Politics in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1998, and is currently compiling an anthology of Aboriginal art criticism.

¹⁶ Platform 1, *Democracy Unrealized*, took place in Vienna from March 15 to April 20, 2001 and continued in Berlin from October 9 to 20, 2001. Platform 2, *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation*, took place in New Dehli from May 7 to 21 and consisted of five days of public panel discussions, lectures, and debates and a video program that included over 30 documentaries and films. Platform 3, *Créolité and Creolization*, was held on the West Indian Island of St. Lucia in the Caribbean between January 12 and 16, 2002. Platform 4, *Under Seige: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos*, was held in Lagos from March 15 to 21, 2002, and comprised public symposium and a workshop 'Urban Processes in Africa'. See <http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/d11/english/index.html>.

¹⁷ Victoria Lynn, et.al., "The Asia_Pacific Triennial: A Roundtable", *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Art*, special guest editor, Rex Butler, forthcoming.

¹⁸ Francis Maravillas, *Shifting Cartographies of the South in Austral / Asian Art Exchanges*, PhD Dissertation, Australian National University, 2006.

¹⁹ The inaugural meeting for the proposition of a South Project was held at the Australia Center, University of Melbourne in 2003, including Kevin Murray, Alison Carroll, John Mateer, Amanda Browne, Alison Fraser and Nikos Papastergiadis. Kevin Murray is an independent writer and curator. The South Project, is a program of cultural exchange across the south that involved international gatherings in Melbourne, Wellington, Santiago and Johannesburg. Articles by Kevin Murray on south themes include, the introduction to an issue of *Artlink* on South (<http://kitezh.com/texts/south-southway.htm>), Key's to the South issue of *Australian Humanities Review* (<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-March-2008/murray.html>). and *Flightless South* for *Empires and Ruins* publication (<http://kitezh.com/texts/flightless.htm>). He is currently developing a network of Australian academics interested in broadening their disciplines to include a south-south approach. This includes a book on the Idea of South - www.ideaofsouth.net. He is also developing a Code of Practice for Craft-Design Collaborations, whose purpose is to develop opportunities for small-scale artisanal businesses across the South.

²⁰ See "Indigenous Cosmopolitan, an interview between Brook Andrews, Marianne Riphagen and Nikos Papastergiadis", *Brook Andrews*, catalogue essay, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2007.

²¹ In his most recent essays Murray has identified a number of 'lost threads' that could strengthen the bonds across the South. Most significantly this includes a revitalization of the experiments in curating exhibitions that explore the contact zone between traditional and modern cultures, as well as linking the philosophy of the African Renaissance and the earlier writings from South America such as the "Antropophagic Manifesto" in order to move towards a new form of critical humanism. See Kevin Murray, "The South Project: A Conference of Flightless Birds", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, Volume 7, No 1, 2006, p 6-16.

²² The conference was called Art + Globalization + Cultural Difference held at Artspace, Sydney in 2001, it was co-organised with Nick Tsoutas and lead to the publication, Nikos Papastergiadis (ed.), *Complex Entanglements*, Rivers Oram Press, London. The follow up conference was held at Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne in 2004 and organised in collaboration with Scott McQuire and Geert Lovink, and lead to the publication Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis, (eds.), *Empires, Ruins and Networks*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2005.

²³ Judith Brett, 'Editorial: Australia and New Zealand', *Meanjin*, Volume 44, Number 3, 1985, p 328.

²⁴ For an edited collection of essays with similar aims, see Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner, Sophie Hall, *Text, Theory, Space*, Routledge, London, 1996, p 1.

²⁵ Greg Curnoe, *Mapa de Norteamerica*, originally created in 1972, a limited edition poster in Spanish of this map was printed in 1988 and used as the poster in Havana for the exchange exhibition between the Casas de Las Américas, Havana, Cuba and the artist-run centre, Forest City Gallery, London, Canada.

²⁶ Peter Beilharz, "The Antipodes: Another Civilization Between Manhattan and the Rhine?", *New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 1/2, 2002.

²⁷ Mosquera, G., "Alien-own / own alien", In: Papastergiadis, N (ed.) *Complex Entanglements Art, Globalization and Cultural Difference*. Rivers Oram Press, London, 2003, 19-29.

²⁸ Apologies for this fusion of Harold Bloom and Homi Bhabha.

²⁹ Alan Davies, 'Small Country Blues', *Meanjin*, Volume 44, Number 2, 1985, p 248.

³⁰ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986. Fabulation is a "listening method which hears not only the words but the discursive frameworks which are the practices for putting words together as knowledge". Stephen Muecke, "Cultural Studies' Networking Strategies in the South", *Australian Humanities Review*, Issue 44, March 2008, p 40. For an account of the practice of fabulation in the Maori artist Lisa Reihana, see Victoria Lynn and Nikos Papastergiadis, "The Double", *Lisa Reihana*, cat. essay, Govett Brewster Gallery, Plymouth 2009.

³¹ *Sur, sur, sur, sur...* Sitac VII, Director Cuauhtémoc Medina, 7th International Symposium on Contemporary Art Theory, Mexico City, 2009.

³² Peter Beilharz, "The Antipodes: Another Civilization Between Manhattan and the Rhine?", *New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 1/2, 2002.