A Diasporic Painter: Negotiating the Racialised Terrains of Britain and Australia

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This paper utilises the first-person narrative to outline the development of my diasporic art practice across two racialised terrains. In so doing, this "thread" of lived experience situates the author as the principal actor in a story that weaves together, painting, aesthetics, art history, social movements, political figures and the construction and performance of cultural identity. Significantly, the narrative employs critical and self-reflexive methodologies in order to articulate the complexities of the creative process. This interrogative journey benefits the artist since she/he gains new awareness or meta-cognition concerning their own practice, which is both revealing and empowering. In addition, this new way of understanding aesthetics through research, reflection and writing in this instance the relationship between diasporic art and politics, allows for its wider dissemination as new knowledge.

The formation of my art practice in terms of diaspora aesthetics, which are wrought from exile and displacement, is examined. The diaspora view claims to present a multi-viewpoint perspective and its critique of an adopted country enables a "counter discourse to modernity" (Clifford, 1997: 255). My own awareness of having a "diasporic identity" was brought about by having lived through two historical junctures of heightened racism in my home countries of Britain and Australia. As a consequence, this paper presents material that relates to historical moments relevant to the author's lived experience: Powellism (the far-right British politician Enoch Powell's intervention in 1968 in the field of race relations) and Hansonism (the racialised terrain of Australia, and Queensland in particular, that surfaced following the creation of Pauline Hanson's One Nation party from the mid-1990s).

Furthermore, I propose that aside from artists belonging to a diaspora, a disaporic sensibility can be evidenced in "deliberately bad painting" (Danto, 2005: 135). I maintain that bad painting operates through the vernacular mode and is characterised by a certain "awkwardness" (Bird, 2000:17), manifest in its selection of subject as well as an ambiguity in the painting and, as humour and manifest in its selection of subject as well as an ambiguity in the painting process graphic style. In so doing, I will demonstrate that there is no single diasporic approach that affects displaced painters; rather, there is a diasporic sensibility.

I will firstly define diasporic cultures that "mediate, in a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place" (Clifford, 1997: 255). Secondly, I briefly outline the social and political climate of Britain from the 1950s and the impact of Enoch Powell's intervention in "race relations" and its impact for black immigrants. Thirdly, I move on to discuss the formation of my own diasporic aesthetic and involvement with what became the Black Art Movement. Fourthly, I map the discourse of Hansonism and my creative response. Lastly, I will demonstrate how this sensibility surfaces in these cases as bad painting: which entails an appropriation of elements of vernacular

culture, graphically sketched and containing a satirical bent. I thereby confirm my argument underpinning the significance of the diasporic sensibility as bad painting, and in so doing, explain the development of my personal trajectory.

Diaspora

The term "diaspora" derives from the Greek word *diaspeiran*; *dia* meaning "over" or "through", and *spieran* means "sow" or "scatter" (Proctor, 2004: 131). It originally referred to the Jewish experience of dispersal, but has since come to have wider applicability following the rupture and upheavals of modernity, such as post-war migration. The discourse of diaspora now refers to the displacement of nations, groups or individuals from one country to another. The treatment of diaspora peoples has often been negative; they are often treated as "excess" to a nation's needs, and in extreme cases, they may be expelled, or subject to extermination. Mirzoeff notes, "Diaspora was something that happened to 'them' not 'us'. That comforting division no longer holds good" (Mirzoeff, 2000: 2).

Many post-war immigrants experienced conflicting cultural experiences of living in a place, but not of it. This phenomenon of "double consciousness" (Gilroy, 1993: 1) is exacerbated if the individual or group of displaced people is subject to violence or other forms of social exclusion.

1950s Britain

Post-war migration to Britain from its black commonwealth was necessary to fill jobs in a rapidly growing British economy (Bowling, 1993: 186). It was appealing to migrants since there was a lack of opportunities at home. Black people were not initially considered a threat to Britain in the early 1950s, even though racial prejudice was widespread in the country after the war (Bowling, 1993: 186). There had been instances of racial attacks by white youth on immigrants in London and Birmingham against a background of widespread discrimination combined with a significant level of xenophobia. From the mid-1950s onwards, immigrants became cast in terms of criminality and deviant forms of behaviour, and they were resented for receiving special treatment such as housing and jobs (Solomos, 1989: 49).

My Anglo-Indian parents arrived on a P&O liner from Lahore, Pakistan to Britain in the freezing winter of February 1955, with two young children and me on the way. By the time I started school the family had left London and we were living in a commission house in Hemel Hempstead, a new town built outside London in the Hertfordshire countryside to accommodate the growing workforce in a fast growing economy. The two largest employers in Hemel were Kodak, my father's employer and Dickersons, a paper mill, both now gone. There were few non-white people in our street and "coloured" people from the West Indies were not common in our suburb. For most who arrived in Britain in the 1950s, the process of displacement was ambivalent, "a violating force, an uprooting which rents and rips apart" (Maharaj, 1991: 80), and on the other hand, "it was a settling in, a sense of having arrived, of beginning to belong" (Maharaj, 1991: 80).

As children we felt different from our friends, who appeared to be connected to the neighbourhood, though not through extended families. Growing up, there was little or no discernible racism in our street, we just acted as white as possible. In order to compete with my best friend I even made up stories about having a grandfather in the war, not knowing that my grandfather on my mother's side was indeed a soldier who served in the Suffolk Regiment of the British army in India.

Race relations turned nasty when high Tory and far-right conservative politician, the Rt. Hon. Enoch Powell MP delivered his infamous "Rivers of blood" speech, on the 20th April 1968, at the annual meeting of the West Midlands Conservative Political Centre. He warned of the transformation of Britain that was being wrought by immigrants whom he viewed collectively as a threat. The speech resulted in his dismissal from the shadow cabinet because Edward Heath considered the tone to be racialist (1968). Through its coded rhetoric Powell's speech appealed to racist sentiments in the white community and he was swiftly adopted as a spokesman for white Britain. In this address and at other subsequent speaking engagements, Powell presented immigrants collectively as "the enemy within" and warned of race riots similar to those seen in the United States. When immigrant became a signifier for black, "they" were taking "our" jobs, houses and, women.

During this period I delivered morning newspapers and read the banner headlines that conveyed a clear message that we were not wanted, and so Powell's imagined community excluded me and other immigrants from the nation. The experience of growing up in a country fuelled by racial hatred and being labelled as an undesirable immigrant instilled a feeling of confusion in me. Powell did indeed connect with a "national collective unconscious and its darkest hopes and fears" (Hall, 1998). Racism played out in daily life and on the football terraces. "Go back to your own country" was literally the writing on the wall and particularly confronting for those like me who were born in Britain – the country was our home.

The violence at games compounded my general fear thereby affecting me all the more, since my fanatical support for my local team Watford F.C. formed my imagined community. Black players were routinely abused and there were very few black fans because of the threat of violence. That football clubs failed to address this thuggish behaviour until recently is evidence of how widespread racism was in the community. "No one likes us and we don't care" was, (and still sadly remains) an anthem of Millwall supporters, also known as "the meat hook boys", who have a reputation for violence and racist behaviour.

Like other boys I was obsessed with football, we played it in the playground and on the sports field at every opportunity and I attended games at my local club Watford. In so doing, I put myself in personal danger from attacks by skinheads, and this was the reason my parents were reluctant to let me attend games, (my father also thought football was a distraction from my studies). I was the only non-white child at my school, and strove to deny my difference, perhaps because of the influence of my parents (who maintained their privacy in a very British manner). Anglo-Indians were in many ways more British than the British, since their British-ness derived from the Victorian era. They were the in-between racial group, looked down on by both the British and Indian societies – both of which are intensely hierarchical in nature. In fact Anglo-Indians were strangers in their own country, which is the reason why they were attracted to the "mother country". The taunts of "paki" added insult to injury since for my parents, because having white blood positioned Anglo-Indians higher in status than native Pakistanis. My indeterminate status, (neither British, Indian nor Pakistani) was made all the more confusing as I grew up with the "immigrant" label. This perhaps explains my dependency on football and fandom, whereby I constructed my imagined community, and a sense of belonging, under the shadow of the dominant message that we were not wanted.

Powell's Birmingham speech seemingly legitimised attacks on migrants by the National Front (NF), an extreme right wing party formed in 1967 (Fielding, 1981:19), as well as Paki-bashing in the 1970s, which was enough of a problem to warrant my avoiding certain parts of town.

A natural painter

I turn now to the formation of my own diasporic perspective as a painter to investigate my experiences as a student and the impact of these experiences on my development as an artist and my sense of identity and belonging. I was advised by Jewish expressionist painter and lecturer, Arnold Van Praag to study in Stoke after completing a foundation course in art in St Albans, since he viewed Stoke art school as largely untouched by changes the avant-garde had wrought on art schools in the south. Thus at the very moment of leaving home to attend art school, and at a point when presumably I was open to negotiating and intellectualising my positioning, I was essentialised as a "natural" painter as my painting fitted neatly into what was considered western painting, which was itself under threat in the mid-1970s. Natural painting according to Van Praag was about using paint sensuously and playfully, which surfaced as a quality in my work through mark making and as touch. Philosopher Richard Wollheim argued that the artist's handling of paint works metaphorically and provides an experience of the body. Wollheim observes that Willem De Kooning, an Abstract Expressionist painter who was part of the New York School in the 1940s and 1950s, "crams his pictures with the infantile experiences of sucking, touching, biting, excreting, retaining, smearing, sniffing, swallowing, gurgling, stroking, wetting" (Wollheim, 1987: 348).

> What initially attracted me (as an art student) to ceramics, and later to painting, was the pleasure derived from the physical and emotional act of painting and sculpting— the way art could express embodied experiences, and "the way in which the motifs and images of painting can stir remembered sensations of smell, taste, hearing" (Bird, 2000: 54).

The gestural mark, an intrinsic part of my aesthetic practice, is seen

> as the performative aspect of the gesture—functioning as the indexical trace of the body … overlaid with a psychological intensity, a traumatic negation of history, tradition, design, intention, which could only be resolved in the repetitive action of mark on surface (Bird, 2000: 19).

This mark making results in a tension demanding a poetic resolution for the painter and it is this process that invokes ambiguity in painting through its un-naturalism. By the time I arrived in Stoke to be taught by Arthur Berry and George Mallalieu, I was already primed with the brush of European modernism, a language I readily appropriated. Three years later, my degree show consisted of several large paintings that utilised huge quantities of cheap oil paint in the style of 1970s Frank Auerbach. Whilst the subject matter of these works came from the Potteries landscape, the predominance of paint failed to reveal much about people and place, as did Berry's work. The limitations of handling substantial quantities of paint precipitated a gradual shift in my practice that was informed by a rekindled interest in figurative painting. Studying under prominent abstract painter, Adrian Heath confirmed this shift and augmented my skills and knowledge regarding painting methods and materials. During this period of study, the level of planning in my work shifted from the intuitiveness of what Heath called *sludge* painting to a more sophisticated and planned approach.

Van Praag and Berry were equally insistent that so-called "authentic art" is art based on a response to the everyday. For Berry, the everyday experience became a form of cultural maintenance, or an expression of his working class cultural identity, whereas for Van Praag, a Jewish immigrant to Britain, the depiction of people and place emerged in a wholly different manner. While both artists adopted a European modernist approach, Van Praag's paintings

maintained a critical distance between artist and subject, as well as between subject and viewer. This approach was outward looking and as such contrasted markedly with Berry's parochialism, even though both painters had a strong affinity with European modernist painting. In other words, if Van Praag's work appeared to be a superficial pastiche of the work of the nineteenth century French artist, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec or Chaim Soutine, a painter working in the early twentieth-century, this very *distancing* could be interpreted as an expression of the sense of "unhomeliness" felt by a diasporic painter. It could be argued that Van Praag and Soutine shared a common aesthetic sensibility that derived from Jewishness, since Soutine was displaced in Paris. I was unable to enter the traditions of modernist painting on the same terms as a rooted artist such as Berry, or Van Praag's with his Jewishness and history of dispersion. Thus it is arguably the case that a prerequisite criterion for the diasporic approach is not contingent upon the displaced artist being an outsider, rather upon some degree of assimilation or incorporation into the dominant power's culture and institutions.

I was considered a suitable student for Arthur Berry, a "rooted" Potteries playwright and expressionist painter. Although I was able to participate in everyday working class politics and attended football matches, I remained an outsider in Stoke, as I was a southerner and non-white. The story of a sketching trip to Brown Edge, illustrates this displaced status. At a loose end with my work, Berry dispatched me to sketch a nearby rural community, perhaps believing that my approach to painting had an affinity with Flemish painter, Constant Permeke. I arrived in a small rural community, a bus ride from Burslem (one of Stoke's six towns), to be greeted by the stares and suspicion of a closed community, where an archaic form of Methodism is still practised. Since I was obviously a stranger, I felt out of place and soon bundled up my sketch-books and drawing equipment and left on the next bus. The English rural idyll, where Berry could feel at ease, was a place to which I did not belong. Whilst my brush with the English countryside may be viewed in terms of alienation, I produced many paintings of the industrial ruins—paintings so joyful that they had nothing to say about the grim reality of Stoke. However, works that included big colourful depictions of Burslem Town Hall where William Morris once argued for "a reasonable share in the beauty of the earth" (Wills, 2006:1) were produced perhaps *because* of my diasporic perspective.

That my painting language is decidedly British, and influenced by the cosmopolitan British painter, Walter Sickert (1860-1942), adds another layer to the complexity of my art practice and I soon became heavily influenced by Auerbach, another diasporic painter. Perhaps with a need to forge attachments to a particular location, but also perhaps because I was not *from* the Potteries, I continued to produce paintings of the Potteries landscape. My negotiation of identity at this stage involved the formation of class-consciousness. However, being from the "soft" south of Britain and not white, I nevertheless identified with the imagined community of white, working class Stoke.

By 1982 I had moved from Stoke to Reading University to study under Heath who taught me oil painting methods and materials, including the technical skills that he was taught at the Slade after serving in the Allied Forces. Having learned the craft and methods associated with figurative painting I then set about expressing myself politically. I painted *Thorn in the Crown* (Figure 1) in 1984 under Heath's close supervision; from squaring up a drawing, to the process of under-painting and, the use of a limited colour palette, in this instance Indian red, yellow ochre and black and white. Being taught to paint in the western tradition of figuration heralded a transition in my positioning as a black artist.

A brief aside is necessary here to highlight that my determination to learn western methods signalled that my Bombergian approach was inadequate to address ideas concerning the relationship between art and politics. Whilst my relationship with Heath was uneasy, since he was an arch Tory and I was struggling to understand Marxism, he nevertheless appeared to enjoy teaching me the arduous craft of painting during the period 1982-84. Whilst Heath's own philosophy was influenced by the potential for abstract form to produce emotion as developed by Susanne Langer (1953), I wanted to speak politically as an artist. However, I had not yet thought about how the vernacular could influence my high art practice, despite my participation in *Rock against Racism* (RAR), a social movement that challenged racism through a mixture of rock music and politics.

Like much other black art produced at that time in the UK, *Thorn in the Crown* depicted a racist attack in Reading. The title referred to a BBC drama *Jewel in the Crown* (1984), which was one of many Raj nostalgia movies and television series in vogue during the 1980s, such as *Gandhi* (1982) and *A Passage to India* (1984), which coincided with inner city riots in black areas of Britain. *Thorn in the Crown* represented my response to the racial tension that constituted a form of "strategic forgetting", which effaced the reality of xenophobic violence experienced by black migrants. In terms of technique, the painting is something of a *homage* to Honoré Daumier, the nineteenth-century century social satirist, printmaker and painter. However the painting depicts two skinheads setting about an Asian man on the ground. I used a hockey stick as a weapon to signal that the man is Asian. In other words, my political stance was to "use the master's tools to dismantle the house".

In 1984 I exhibited at the Brixton Art Gallery as part of *Creation for Liberation,* curated by artist, curator, writer and activist Rasheed Araeen. My request for inclusion in this exhibition highlights the moment when I first identified as a black artist. I posed the question to Araeen, "could a second generation Anglo-Indian, born in Britain be black?" The response arrived in the form of exhibition details and an entry form, which I duly completed and returned. Although my blackness was validated through inclusion in this exhibition, this did not resolve my ambivalence concerning identity, nor the difficulty I faced in negotiating my position as an artist without a community. Anglo-Indian dances and international reunions are well attended by my parent's generation, but I had no links to that community, unlike the early black art that sought to speak for a collective experience. Since the term "black" was used for the purposes of political solidarity, most of the work shown in Brixton was predictably Afro-Caribbean, which possessed its own imagined community, but not mine. My difficulty was that I did not readily have a community, as I was out of place in Hertfordshire, Stoke, Reading and London, and subsequently in Australia. My diasporic approach and aesthetic is arguably informed by displacement and an ambivalent position of living in a country, but not culturally of it.

By the mid 1980s I was teaching part-time at Adult Education Institutes and colleges in London, and was invited to sit on a working party on Multi-Ethnic Education alongside Sarat Maharaj and Gavin Jantes, amongst others. The staff at British art schools in the 1980s was still largely white. As a beginning lecturer I soon recognised that a Western approach to art, curriculum and pedagogy was inadequate for a multi-ethnic Britain so, I began formulating my own inter-cultural approach, encouraged by Maharaj. It should be noted that despite my awareness of the hegemony of Western art practices, I nevertheless continued to paint in that very tradition.

Figure 1: *Thorn in the Crown*, 1984, oil on canvas.

Redneck ride-on

At the end of the 1980s I emigrated to Australia with my partner and two young children and after working in Far North Queensland and the Northern Territory we settled north of Brisbane in 1995. Having grown up in a racialised Britain, where skinheads associated with far right groups contributed to the climate of general unease and fear for those outside their imagined community, the advent of Hansonism in Queensland, Australia was an uncomfortable

reminder of past anxieties. It appeared to me that Hanson's anti-Asian sentiment (Hanson, 1996) was somewhat akin to the sentiments prevalent in Powell's Britain: immigrants were once again being blamed for diluting the values of the dominant imagined community. In many ways the emergence of Hansonism was a Queensland phenomenon: in regional areas racism surfaced as resentment and hostility was directed towards those not considered to be "ordinary Australians". Hanson thereby articulated the resentment that many in "her" community felt, and reiterated the point in her maiden speech in the Queensland Parliament and beyond. Her ubiquitous presence in the media ultimately rendered racism acceptable in some sectors in Queensland.

The aggrieved white community composed largely of self-employed and self-funded retirees, may not initially have considered the race issue but they were now inclined to concur with Hanson that there were too many Asian migrants and that Aborigines were about to take their land back. They became quietly confident that Hanson was defending the values of old Australia and their identity against the challenge of new Australia. Thus Hanson created a "moral panic" whereby race became a signifier of difference, and people like me were targeted. I was subject to a disapproving but controlling racism that constructed specific Australian values as normative. One such value, which was exalted as quintessentially Australian, was the linking of individualism to the land, for example, the freedom to chainsaw native trees including the black wattle—considered a "rubbish tree" by locals—the freedom to poison weeds, the freedom to dig dams and ditches, and the freedom to erect paddock fences. Fencing is important for those living on acreage since a fence line denotes a boundary between one block of land and another, and also between private and council land. A variety of fence posts are utilised from treated pine, to what are known as rural fence posts (trees that are roughly split). Barbed wire is often substituted for plain fencing wire to ensure safe paddocks, and electric fencing is also common for those with horses. These tasks were undertaken on an individual's land and were all executed with the aid of tractors and other large machinery.

An angry and resentful neighbour lived a few (acreage) blocks away from my family's land; he was a self-employed builder who had restored his Queenslander home in a "heritage" style. Whilst on walking trips around the block, I noticed him leave his vantage point in an upstairs room and make his way towards his gate in time to abuse me as I walked past. Although his remarks were not openly racist, they revealed an underlying resentment about my invasion of his space, even though I kept my distance and attempted to tactically ignore him. My daughter on horseback and I playing fetch with my dog—using *his* pinecones as we walked past his block—evidently posed a threat. This neighbour kept a tidy yard and raked the pinecones that fell onto the nature strip into piles, forming small gardens on each side of his gate. He was upset that my dog regularly took a cone from *his* pile to play. This minor infraction became the trigger that unleashed his fears and anxieties concerning the threat to his Australian identity from other cultures.

My neighbour was a small businessman, and was one of those "White Australians who [thought] they [had] a monopoly over 'worrying' about the shape and the future of Australia" (Hage, 1998:10). It is this type of "worrying" that constructs a panic, concerning the number of immigrants, handouts to Aborigines, and so on, and which made the politics of One Nation popular with its aggrieved lower-middle class supporters. Hage argues that it is this very worrying that elevates them as "the most worthy Australians" (Hage, 1998: 10). Arguably,

my neighbour's "worry" resulted from his obsessive behaviour concerning pinecones and this in turn triggered his resentment. Our visibility and the way we used the neighbourhood was interpreted by my neighbour as "disrespectful" to his sense of Australian identity and the protection of individual rights.

Figure 2 *Neighbours*, 1995, oil on canvas.

The title of my painting *Neighbours* (Figure 2), subverts the assimilatory tone of the television series, *Neighbours*. The program depicts cosy suburban life in Australia, where neighbours become "best friends". This painting addressed my concerns at my neighbour's aggressive behaviour, and as such constitutes my response to the "siege-like" conditions I encountered. In this way the act of painting itself was for me an act of resistance. In *Neighbours* my head is bowed in a submissive gesture that contrasts with the neighbour's overtly masculine, outdoor physique. My neighbour is astride his perfectly maintained ride-on that displays a One Nation bumper sticker. His dog sits on the bonnet of his mower like a hood emblem signifying loyalty to his master who will shoot anyone that strays onto his property. My neighbour takes care of his mower, his land, fence, dog, and wife. The nature strip between his fence line and the road is council property, however he concreted this area as an extension of his driveway, which means he effectively extended his border and area of control. As a consequence, unless I walked on the other side of the narrow road it was difficult to avoid him. My very presence was a threat as I invaded his constructed space.

I was "tolerated" as long as I was not too visible. In being visible, I became a racial other to "mainstream" or *real* Australians like my neighbour, and invaded the "psycho-geography of Australian Whiteness" (Ang, 1999: 189). The spatial nature of my neighbour's paranoia extended to a distrust of all levels of government: he had a massive concrete water tank as he refused to use town water, and would burn and bury his rubbish rather than pay rates to the council for garbage collection. My neighbour looked back fondly to the Bjelke-Petersen years, which were characterised by the words "don't you worry about that"; it was an era when corruption in the state's police force and government actually benefited *his* community. The ABC *Four Corners* episode, "The Moonlight State" (1987) detailed this corruption, thereby prompting the establishment of the Fitzgerald commission to investigate these claims. In that era of National Party dominance, white Australian values referred back to "a once stable and unified population, unified by its homogeneity" (Leach, 2000: 50).

The anger and apprehension that I felt, both personally and politically, as I encountered a resurgence of racism in Queensland provided the impetus, resistance and ideas for the creation of new work. The intervening years, spent living and working in far north Queensland and the Northern Territory prior to residing north of Brisbane, involved a renegotiation of my artistic identity, but I did not produce work that was explicitly political. In terms of studio methods, I wanted to produce images that could be easily read, and this necessitated the development of a painting style that was more direct and economical than had been previously employed. Thus my practice shifted from using the high art methods (an under-painting and a limited colour palette), adopted in *Thorn in the Crown* to the bad painting of *Neighbours*: it is painted in an almost deadpan manner, like a cartoon, and bereft of painterly marks characteristic of my earlier work. *Neighbours* demonstrates how my diasporic perspective surfaces in the staging of a significant moment based on lived experience and preceded by the interrogation of its possible meanings. Furthermore, it would appear the very depiction of "the message" or content engages in a dialogical tussle with the methods or form. In other words, *Neighbours* utilised the vernacular mode, both as method (graphic style) and subject (the everyday) to represent my experience of racism, thereby highlighting a development in my diasporic sensibility.

My displacement in Australia predicated a re-assessment, rethinking and prioritisation of my aesthetic concerns. My identification with the Western tradition is signalled by the use of its methods and appropriation of its art history. However this tradition is simultaneously revoked through satire and a French modernist painterly style in a somewhat incongruous manner, which decidedly is out of synch—characteristic of a diasporic sensibility. For displaced artists, such as myself, bad painting can provide a space to explore different models and political strategies and to use the vernacular mode to protest in a non-confrontational way.

Bad painting

I have made extensive iconographic use of Klansmen in the paintings during the period 1995–2001. They appear as shadowy figures, sometimes contained within trees at other times they appear on the tips of a white picket fence, or even as part of the landscape. Representations of the Klan are not merely figurative, however, since they are alleged to be active in regional Australia (Rogers, 2006).

Figure 3: *Own Goal*, 1995, oil on canvas.

Klan iconography first appeared in my practice in *Own Goal* (Figure 3), a self-portrait of as a twelve-year-old goalkeeper. To score an "own goal" is to let your side down by scoring for the opposition, and thereby give advantage to them. The stress of the everyday life for a migrant can lead to such "own goals". As a boy, football constructed a world or imagined community within which I could feel at ease; however the fragility of my situation, both outside school and home, is reflected in the painting's title. I depicted Klansmen peeping through the net watching me keep goal, as I inadvertently let the ball brush my legs on its way into the back of the net to score an own-goal. Thus my diasporic perspective facilitates an engagement with political dialogue, which derived from personal experience of Queensland.

My work owes a debt to Sickert through its use of a painted "collage" technique that allows the gaps of under-painting to "grin" through (he often used a warm pink and cool green under-painting and darker paint scrubbed over a lighter ground to achieve a "dry" glaze). Whilst this technique emerged in my work as a by-product of learning how to produce an under-painting, it now occurs by less laboured means. If collage was a means of decentring for European modernists, for "postcolonial artists collage is a means of 'constructing meaning' from within loss" (McLean, 1998: 147). The tension between the layers of paint and the gaps, enables the image to split and coalesce during the act of viewing, but simultaneously facilitates the opening up of meaning, as well as taking the form of bad painting. In other words, by subverting the codes of representation through my utilisation of vernacular mode I am able to enter into a dialogue with the viewer.

This manipulation of paint is facilitated by humour: many of the painted snapshots look like anyone's collection of photographs and are only meaningful in their own specific context. Humour is thus employed as a dialogical tool to enable critique and engagement with my audience. With reference to American painter Leon Golub's work, British cultural theorist Jon Bird argues that awkwardness is a signifier of modernism's anti-pre-modern art stance, it "lets in the beguiling moment of sensuousness by transfiguring it into its antithesis, pain [furthermore it] carries associations of the contingent, the fragmentary and the grotesque" (Bird, 2000: 17).

In so doing, Bird views awkwardness, not as a signifier of a diasporic aesthetic, but as something pre-modern, or atavistic. He suggests that awkwardness "always signifies something" in its invoking of the vernacular as aesthetic resistance to high art (Bird, 2000: 46), to art history (11), and a social and political connectedness (45), as well as painting's affectivity (54), and an ethical position of the artist concerning "the gaze" (85). However, whilst Bird goes some way towards addressing the aspect of awkwardness (17), he does not give any credence to, or make a link between, Golub's tendencies to an awkwardness and the signalling of a diasporic sensibility. Critic, Arthur Danto makes a similar omission to Bird in failing to recognise the significance of a diasporic sensibility in Philip Guston's work; he admits to being unable to comprehend the significance of "deliberately bad painting" (2005: 135).

As an artist fascinated by the social and political world, I am aware of the limitations of my practice concerning social agency and my methods entail a certain ambiguity, which runs counter to a literal reading of what is represented. My art training has its roots in European figurative expressionism and I negotiate through this form. Oil paint is a tactile medium, and it is through the manipulation of this particular matter that representation and meaning is wrought. Thus my studio practice has never been concerned with merely depicting a scene or portrait that can only be read in a literal way; I seek to engage with the poetics of painting and politics simultaneously. In so doing my diasporic sensibility surfaces as figurative, painterly and political.

Conclusion

This discussion has excavated briefly the social, political and cultural backdrop of growing up in Britain, a child of immigrant parents, and migration to Australia, and how these experiences were formative for my practice as a diasporic bad painter. Utilising the first-person narrative has enabled me to outline the development of my diasporic art practice across two racialised terrains.

I have demonstrated that Enoch Powell's incendiary Birmingham speech, described as "a torpedo aimed at the boiler room of concensus" (Hall, 1998) fuelled a climate of racial hostility that was hurtful and confusing. It put us on notice: we were unwanted since we could never become English. Consequently, we became fair game to be discriminated against at school and in the workplace and liable to be attacked by skinheads. Two decades later in Queensland, Australia, Hanson reiterated Powell's "moral panic" in a way that expressed a "racial and spatial anxiety" (Ang, 1999), with its message that Asians and Aborigines were "getting something for nothing", and furthermore, they were diluting Australian values. In so doing, Hanson scratched the surface of Australian multiculturalism to reveal the festering sores of racism and resentment harboured by her imagined community.

This particularly Queensland brand of racism was manifest as "othering", racial abuse and paternalism of those considered not ordinary Australians. It put us on notice that we were under scrutiny and created an environment where we felt that we did not belong to the community. The diasporic or migrant perspective is thus constructed from being both inside and outside a community and it is from this position, from a form of double consciousness, that new critical insights and in my case aesthetic practices, were adopted as a form of protest to counter the deeply entrenched racism experienced in Queensland.

I have shown how the diasporic sensibility is signalled by the use of Western methods and appropriation of art history, which constitutes a form of "insiderism", an affinity with the host culture. It is simultaneously revoked through the destabilisation of subject and method through "outsiderism", which is an identification with a culture other than the culture of the host. It operates as the tension between what Kitaj (1989: 75-77) terms "host" and "pariah" art that produces the diasporic aesthetic. I have argued that the vernacular mode is manifest not only in my choice of subject, but also through the performative act of painting itself. The mark-making and seeming carelessness mocks high art's tendentiousness. Paradoxically, however, bad painting does not derive from an untutored hand or a naïve perspective, rather from a sound knowledge of the craft of painting.

This paper will shed new light on the seemingly exhausted debate concerning art and protest, by positioning the disaporic sensibility as thinking "in the interval" (Hall, 1996: 1) and forging new ways of signifying belonging wrought from lived experience in diverse realms as aesthetics, art history, social movements, political figures and the construction and performance of cultural identity. The inbetween-ness of this diasporic sensibility is positioned between the supposedly universalist claims of modernism and the particularist politics of postmodernism. More significantly perhaps, I have shown the pedagogical significance of utilising the first-person narrative to explore the creative process. For an artist, the degree of self-reflexivity demanded in writing about lived-experience can reveal hitherto hidden stories, new knowledge and new learning, as well as providing an alternative entry into the artwork and in-depth textural analysis for new audiences.

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