

## Aesthetics in Action *preface and acknowledgements*

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This issue of *ACCESS* addresses questions and issues of aesthetics: aesthetic ways of knowing; aesthetics and innovation in the global economies of creative industries; aesthetic interventions in the public sphere; aestheticisation of urban space; the relationship of aesthetics to cultural difference; aesthetics in policy and practice; and relational pedagogy as a form of aesthetic knowing. The idea for this issue arose out of a recent symposium, *Art & Globalisation: Urban Futures and Aesthetic Relations* (see [www.rmit.edu.au/art/artandglobalizationsymposium](http://www.rmit.edu.au/art/artandglobalizationsymposium)), held in August 2009 at RMIT University, Melbourne. The symposium was organised by the School of Art, RMIT University, in association with the RMIT Global Cities Research Institute Globalization and Culture program. The symposium drew together researchers working in the Globalization and Culture program who are exploring the transformation of cultural experiences and productions in urban spaces, as part of contemporary processes of globalisation. Through a range of case studies, focussing on philosophy, literature, art, photography, arts festivals, artist exchange programs, identity, ethics of production, technologies of culture building and political contexts of public monuments, the intention was to identify and map how cultural production contributes to the re-imagining of identity and place through art events, artefacts and attitudes.

The writers in this issue were drawn out of that symposium. While all the papers in this issue focus on urban contexts for their case studies and broadly contextualise these in relation to processes of globalisation, the emphasis is on aesthetic forms and aesthetic ways of being and knowing those spaces. The aim is to explore the shaping powers of aesthetic knowing as a mode of being in the world, and to see how such knowing can be incorporated into official strategies for economic advancement via cultural exchange and culture building. The term *aesthetics* draws attention to the value of knowing ourselves and the world through perceptual relations. It brings specific responses in the present into close relations with historical precedents and possible futures. Thus to know aesthetically is to perceive and understand, through the senses, the shaping contexts of our experiences of self and the world. Taking the concept of aesthetics into proximity with domains of cultural practice in the social sphere is a way of considering the kinds of experience, attitudes, ideas and products that are considered politically to be connected with the arts, creativity and innovation as drivers of contemporary global economies.

The collection begins with an article by Chris Hudson, *The Singapore Arts Festival and the Aestheticisation of the Urban Landscape*, which examines the way new forms of global cosmopolitanism and cultural consumption can be identified as a leading force for creative innovation in post-industrial Singapore with its claiming of global city status. Positioning

the 2009 Singapore Arts Festival as an example of consumer culture-building, Hudson examines ways in which the aestheticisation of the urban landscape provides a space where economics, culture and politics intertwine. The core argument of the paper addresses the way that the Arts Festival becomes a spectacle of aestheticised consumption used strategically by the government to position Singapore as a “Global City for the Arts”. Hudson identifies the role of the arts as a key vehicle in the transformation of urban spaces based on a symbolic economy of cultural goods. She considers the implications of aesthetic repositioning in social spaces to achieve the control of place, culture and consumer preferences for the sake of economic investment in the nation’s global brand image. In analysing the material and social spaces created by the Arts Festival, she identifies how the arts event embeds aesthetics into conventional performance spaces, such as concert halls, and also spaces of retail consumption. This, Hudson argues, creates the potential for an immersive aestheticisation of life, in which boundaries between forms of cultural consumption can be effaced. The conflation of aesthetics and commodification is ultimately, for Hudson, a crucial signifier of Singapore’s postmodern economy and its claim to “globalness”.

The second paper continues the theme of place-making, but this time through visual images of urban environments. In *Destination Anywhere: Experiences of place in the work of Ed Ruscha and Andreas Gursky* Kristen Sharp explores the relationship between site-specificity and placelessness in the photographic images of Ed Ruscha and Andreas Gursky. By reading their work through Marc Augé’s definition of “non-place”, an ambivalence to place can be identified in these site-specific images of urban environments. Yet at the same time, Ruscha and Gursky’s process and presentation of the photographs actively performs an experience of place, which heightens a sense of identity and place. As their images order and make sense of place, so they also transform the built environments giving them visibility and enhancing our modes of perception. This form of aesthetic production offers a complex and mobile approach to knowing and reading the spaces of the contemporary city.

In *Building Dwelling Thinking and Aesthetic Relations in Urban Spaces: A Heideggerian perspective on relational pedagogy as a form of disclosure*, Elizabeth Grierson works through key texts by Martin Heidegger to perform a Heideggerian analysis of aesthetic relations in urban spaces. She brings Heidegger’s notion of building, dwelling and thinking into close proximity with his work on the essence of technology to undertake a revealing of place making in two key cities, Newcastle and Gateshead in Northeastern England. The figure of the Millennium Bridge provides her with the strategy to find the way Heidegger calls forth a locale for Being. In exploring ontological difference she activates a critical consciousness in and of urban spaces as a way of being in the world. She shows how Heidegger uses language to excavate temporal and spatial conditions, and how his attention to aesthetic relations in the world offers us a pedagogical way of being beyond the labouring subject through which value has traditionally been inscribed. Heidegger’s lesson for pedagogy is to perform a place where the truth of Being as “disclosedness” can happen.

In the next paper, *Fair Trade and Creative Practice: A participatory framework for the globalised world* Kevin Murray presents the polemics of trade relations between what he calls the Global North and Global South. His analysis focuses on aesthetic or cultural production of artistic goods and the modes of exchange instigated through the artworld’s practices of transnational production, transfer, exhibition and display. His aim is to show how the economies of art, craft and design can be grounded in a new ethical sensibility reflecting

a grounded political and social context that can draw attention to the power relations of the labouring subject. Issues of collaboration, power and control figure in the examples Murray presents as he seeks to bring the participatory frameworks of creative practice into relationship with the moves and motivations of Fair Trade. Seeking some sort of restorative social justice in the economic relations between rich and poor, user and producer, Murray situates his discussion in a creative subject demarcated by the global forces of neoliberal economic structures and the possibility of participatory frameworks for cultural production and exchange.

*Death in Borneo: Australian national identity, war and the transnational imagination*, by SueAnne Ware and Chris Hudson, examines the semiotics of war memorial sites as examples of deterritorialised national space. In their examination of two sites in Sabah, Malaysia, Sandakan and Kundasang, Ware and Hudson investigate the material and symbolic meanings of these sites. Their intention is to articulate how these memorials are located in a globalised network of spaces, both material and imagined. As sites located outside of Australian geographic territory, they demonstrate how narratives of history, memory and national identity operate at transnational levels. In particular, Ware and Hudson examine the Sandakan and Kundasang memorials as sites of contestation between Australian national identity and Asian modernity. They demonstrate the confluence of tensions between the intentions of memorialisation and national memory, and local beliefs and uses of the sites. By comparing the two sites it becomes evident how they activate complex and overlapping struggles for meaning, which continually shift between the sacred and the vernacular. Ultimately we are left with the recognition that a nation's quest for identity is manifested in the formations, usages and comprehensions of memorialisation as an aesthetic, cultural, social and political terrain.

The issue concludes with a personal narrative that gives a voice to issues of racism and diasporic identity through lived experience—in Britain and in Australia. Les Morgan's *A Diasporic Painter: Negotiating the racialised terrains of Britain and Australia* offers an example of a relational way of being, which is activated through aesthetic expression. Morgan's art practice becomes the framework through which he is able to uncover the complex web of meanings in the formation of his diasporic identity through aesthetic production, exchange and understandings. The racialised terrain that is uncovered through this narrative draws together art practice, art education, social movements and political figures as key forces in the construction and performance of power and identity. The paper offers critical consideration of the ways in which lived experience contributes to the formation and articulation of an aesthetic identity as a diasporic sensibility.

What emerges in these papers is a realisation that the realm of aesthetics is as much about politics and power as it is about perceptions. The writers have selected subjects to do with place making, or site specific identities, or the economies of cultural production, and in so doing they have activated the aesthetic domain as a way of knowing the world. Collectively the papers bring aesthetic knowing into alignment with a form of pedagogy in public spaces as a way of understanding and relating to our environment and each other in terms of space, place and belonging.

We thank the writers for their scholarship and insights, and also thank the generosity of international reviewers whose responses provided much food for thought and sound

recommendations for reworking the papers to quality publication standard. The protocols of anonymity prevent us from naming the referees but we are extremely grateful to them all. The six papers in this issue work together to continue the consistently high standard of *ACCESS* journal in its critical and philosophical engagements with the terrain of knowledge in cultural and educational spheres. As editors we thank all those who continue to support the specific approaches of *ACCESS*, and welcome new readers, contributors and subscribers to this issue, *Aesthetics in Action*.

In 2010 *ACCESS* journal reaches its 28<sup>th</sup> year of publication continuing its track record of attracting high quality submissions on cultural and policy studies, communication and knowledge politics, and philosophy of educational practices. *ACCESS* has received an A ranking in the ERA journal lists in two Field of Research codes in Australia: Cultural Studies, and Media and Communications, in acknowledgment of the journal's international standing in the field of communications, cultural and policy studies. This is a quality rating and we believe it is well deserved for a journal that has been at the leading edge of its field for almost three decades.

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ACCESS

May 2010

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