

**At the Limits: Postcolonial and Hyperreal Translations of  
Australian Poetry**

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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**DEAKIN UNIVERSITY**  
**CANDIDATE DECLARATION**



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**At the Limits: Postcolonial & Hyperreal Translations of  
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is the result of my own work and that where reference is made to the work of  
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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS FOR EXAMINATION

**Submitted for the Degree of** Doctor of Philosophy

**Thesis Title:** At the Limits: Postcolonial and Hyperreal Translations of Australian Poetry.

This dissertation employs the methodologies of postcolonial theory and hyperreal theory (following Baudrillard), in order to investigate articulations of identity, nation and representation in contemporary Australian poetry. Informed by a comparative analysis of contemporary Latin American poetry and cultural theory (in translation), as a means of re-examining the Australian context, this dissertation develops a new transnational model of Australian poetics.

The central thesis of this dissertation is that contemporary Australian poetry engages with the postcolonial *at its limits*. That is, at those sites of postcoloniality that are already mapped by theory, but also at those that occur *beyond* postcolonial theory. The hyperreal is understood as one such limit, traceable within the poetry but silenced in conventional postcolonial theory. As *another limit* to the postcolonial, this dissertation reads Latin American poetry and theory, in whose texts postcolonial theory is actively resisted, but where postcolonial and hyperreal poetics nevertheless intersect.

The original critical context constructed by this dissertation enables a new set of readings of Australian identity through its poetry. Within this new interpretative context, the readings of contemporary Australian poetry articulate a psycho-social postcoloniality; offer a template for future transactions between national poetry and global politics; and develop a model of the postcolonial hyperreal.

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I appreciatively acknowledge the institutional and financial support facilitated by Deakin University, which has enabled me to complete this project. In addition, I am grateful to editors who have published my work, for helping me to imagine its reception.<sup>1</sup> Finally, my lasting thanks to Caroline Pearson—in the place of the dissertation you never wrote, here is the one you inspired. B.M.

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<sup>1</sup> All publications ensuing from this dissertation and its drafts are acknowledged fully in the Bibliography.



AT THE LIMITS

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## **Translator's Note**

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Unless otherwise acknowledged, all translations of Latin American poetry and theory in Spanish are the author's.

B.M

What kind of tropology could today replace the master tropology of the hermeneutic circle, with its corollary, which is the supplemental tropology of the outside as a savage space? What kind of thinking could think the abandonment of the hegemony as the master concept to think about culture in our own time, to think modernity alternatively, and to think postmodernity? A fundamental revision of critical reason must abandon its aestheticist or historicist horizon, a legacy of the modernist past, and seek the undoing of the inside/outside polarity on which all aesthetic historicisms and all culturalist theories of modernity rest. We could think then of the irruptive possibilities of the postaesthetic and posthistoricist language that the literary promise still withholds and could provide—but not without a certain effort.

—Alberto Moreiras (*Irruption* 719-20).

## (Un)mapping the Poetics of Postcoloniality & Hyperreality.

### Foreword: The Limits of Australia as text.

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To (un)map Australia as a “postcolonial geography” (Jacobs, *Edge* 163) is to reveal the continued legacy of coloniality endemic to its postcoloniality—to witness how the mechanisms of oppression, detention and surveillance *still* play themselves out as “the unsettled spatialities of power and identity in the present” (Jacobs, *Edge* 163). These national effects engender a pervasive *island consciousness* (which often feeds a larger national paranoid border fixation) and an attendant *psychosocial* coloniality experienced across a range of distinct postcolonial identity positions. As a limit to Australian national identity constructions, then, postcoloniality affects the ways in which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians negotiate geographical, psychic and political space.

This dissertation questions how Australia as “settled” territory is paradoxically experienced as unsettled and unsettling. Articulations of an *Australian unheimliche* are present in many discourses across cultural studies and the social sciences,<sup>1</sup> and this unease, according to Ross Gibson, is perhaps even the metanarrative of the (settler) nation, where a sense of strangeness underwrites any sense of home for Western settlers. Gibson structures this unhomeliness as an *antipodean* phenomenon, as he positions Australia pejoratively as “the great Southern land”:

Westerners can look South and feel “at home”, but, because the region has also served as a projective screen for European aspiration and anxiety, Australia also calls into question the assumptions and satisfactions by which any society or individual feels at home (x).

This endemic alienation effect, which for Gibson is constituted of a “cargo” of ideologies issuing from settler colonialism—“the mythologies of nationalism and colonialism, rural romanticism, hedonist modernism and wildstyle [sic] postmodernism” (xi)—sits alongside *another* alienation effect, which is the original nullification and subsequent dispossession and oppression of Indigenous Australia. This, of course, also implies a range of alternative ideologies, such as

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<sup>1</sup> See especially Gelder & Jacobs, Nourry, Gibson, Hodge & Mishra, and Fuery.

the mythologies of “Terra Nullius”, rhetorical and partial reconciliation and the denial of Other histories surrounding official History.

The coexistent alienation effects of, on the one hand, an unhomeliness experienced by Indigenous Australians *in their own country* and, on the other hand, an unhomeliness experienced by settler Australians *in their own nation*, speaks of both the underlying irony of “Australianness”, as well as the necessity of postcoloniality as a *psychosocial* characteristic. To this, unfortunately, is added the more recent complication of what we might call *potential* or *temporary* Australians in the form of asylum seekers and refugees,<sup>2</sup> for whom Australia presents markedly emphasised alienation effects in the form of incarceration, border control and detention. As the poetry in this dissertation will reveal, these legacies of Australian colonialism are carried heavily into the postcolonial era, as traced in Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5. In these chapters, contemporary Australian poetry is read for its articulations of coloniality and postcoloniality, as well as in terms of how Australian poets harness this postcolonial context in their readings and representations of global events.

In the context of this landscape of national ideologies and their attendant mythologies, practices and discourses, this dissertation reads Australia as *at the limits* of postcoloniality, which is to say, as a nation that is both *limited* by postcoloniality and that simultaneously *extends the theoretically mapped limits* of postcoloniality.<sup>3</sup> Australia can be read as a landscape of neo-colonialisms, particularly in its maintenance of a culture of oppression and detention. In this light, Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra’s 1991 text *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* is predictive in its readings of the coloniality of Australia. After Hodge and Mishra, the folkloric popular cultural lyric “we’re bound for Botany Bay” takes on a bleakly satirical edge, as it potentially refers to our repetitions of incarceration in Australia-as-penal-colony. As Hodge and Mishra argue:

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<sup>2</sup> I use these not as prescriptive terms—rather, to refer to the official (visa) classification of refugees and asylum seekers, whose livelihoods and quality of life are contingent on arbitrary but binding semantics such as these.

<sup>3</sup> In this sense, this dissertation works in dialogue with similar strategies such as Bill Ashcroft’s “horizontality” (*Post-Colonial Transformation* 183-205) as well as the “border thinking” of Latin American theorists, to be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

It might seem fanciful to suggest that contemporary Australia is in some respects only a more complex and extensive disciplinary machine than Botany Bay was in 1800. But mechanisms for constructing deviance and maintaining surveillance still exist, in direct line of descent but more efficient and better resourced, with new objects of the disciplinary gaze to join the old (*Crimes* 335).

Arguments for a *progressive* postcoloniality—for agential hybridity, successful multiculturalism,<sup>4</sup> and unifiable national identity—are thus challenged by articulations such as this one, of a mechanically colonialist, “disciplinary” Australia. Following this, Australian texts are read here as sites where postcoloniality structures a number of the limits that mark Australian identities. In the work of Kevin Hart, Samuel Wagan Watson, Lionel Fogarty, Kim Scott and Michael Dransfield (in Chapters 1, 2 and 5), narratives of control, dispossession, surveillance and incarceration are tied to a reading of Australia as profoundly carceral and neurotically obsessed with patrolling its borders (both internally and externally)—mechanisms which are read as directly related to the history of colonisation in Australia.

Two limits of postcoloniality un-researched in Australia (in the sense of productive intertexts)—Jean Baudrillard’s theory of hyperreality and the poetry and cultural theory of Latin America—are introduced here as discursive and ideological counterpoints to Australian postcoloniality. Patrick Fuery, the only Australian postcolonial theorist who connects postcolonialism and hyperreality, reads hyperreal simulation as “essential” to Australian postcoloniality. His 1993 analysis, although predominantly concerned with film texts, suggests that an aesthetic of representation is foundational to Australian postcoloniality:

Simulacra, it would seem, are an essential part of the postcolonial condition because of the cultural referentiality involved. When a culture attempts to represent itself, its own “culturalness”, the images become crucial to the ideological and historical sense of the society. In Australia’s case (multicultural and postcolonial) simulacra operate in the interplay of absences and historical pastiche. This does not mean that in this postcolonial and postmodern condition the signifiers are necessarily emptied, rather that the representational quality is stressed (*Prisoners* 200).

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<sup>4</sup> Although an important part of the postcolonial fabric of contemporary Australia, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to engage in detail in the large range of issues presented under the rubric of “multiculturalism”. As this requires a comprehensive study *in its own right*, and is not central to the models of national identity mapped by the poetry analysed in this dissertation, multiculturalism represents another postcolonial arena outside of those discussed here, but nevertheless an area in which identity politics are often negotiated on analogous ground. See Gunew, D. Bennett and Ang & Stratton for useful debates of multicultural politics.

As he argues, Australian simulations of postcoloniality exist in a representational field of “absences and historical pastiche”, where the historicity of “the real” contends with the newness of the nation. As another theoretical configuration of the “European aspiration and anxiety” that Gibson cites (x), Fuery’s “absences and pastiche” are pertinent to the settlement of Australia as the terrain of such interplay. Furthermore, Fuery’s analysis also outlines the indebtedness of Australian postcoloniality to vigorous representations of the “real”.

Given that political and social representations of Australian postcoloniality often rely on denial and repression (particularly *vis-à-vis* Indigenous and refugee Australians), it seems to me that hyperrealist simulations of Australia (and of its postcoloniality) are a crucial area of representational politics that require much more critical attention—particularly for their ability to deconstruct historicist and political representations of a “real” that is hungered after and simulated in direct relation to its *absence* (to follow Baudrillardian logic). As such, this dissertation brings together the discourses and methodologies of postcoloniality and hyperreality, in order to test their applicability to each other. More than a decade after Fuery’s insistence on the convergence of these areas of theory, this project can now be informed by Baudrillard’s recent philosophical texts, in which he extends his thesis on hyperreality well beyond its 1993 scope. Although all poets are read here for their employment of hyperreal aesthetics and ideologies, John Forbes’ work (covered in chapters 1 and 3) presents the most entrenched poetics of hyperreality, in that his poetry both thematises and embraces the hyperreal. In regard to my formulation of the “postcolonial hyperreal”, the analyses in Chapter 2 of Dransfield’s and Wagan Watson’s poetry present extensive case studies of the efficacy of this conceptual amalgam.

Further, as I will argue, Australia’s engagements with the “New World Order” and its relationship to contemporary neo-imperialisms provide even more urgent reasons for the integration of postcolonial and hyperreal theory. The poetry of Robert Adamson, Forbes and Jennifer Maiden is hence included in Chapter 3, particularly for its media-attuned, personal and poetic interpretations of the hyperrealism of the Gulf War and the War on Terror, viewed from the vantage point of Australia.

Adhering to the theoretical dictates of a Commonwealth model of postcolonial theory,<sup>5</sup> postcolonial studies in Australia predominantly relies on the history of the English Empire (as well as the French Empire) and thus occludes discourses of the Spanish and Portuguese Empires. The reluctance to engage with the work of these Empires (and also with the creative and theoretical literatures of their colonies) represents a *limit* to Australian postcoloniality, in the sense of a failure to access the scope of its transnational relations.<sup>6</sup> So, in marginalising the Latin American context<sup>7</sup> the theory that has been used to inform Australian postcoloniality can be seen to be based on deficient models of coloniality and imperialism. It is for this reason (to question and extend the limits of Australian postcoloniality) that the Latin American context is included here.

Thus, Chapter 4 presents detailed theoretical engagements with Latin American texts in its comparisons of postcolonial, hyperreal and Latin American theory in the work of Homi K Bhabha, Néstor García Canclini, Enrique Dussel, and Baudrillard. In Chapter 5, a direct comparison of Latin American and Australian poetry, in relation to narratives of Eurocentricity, imperialism and oppression is plotted across these postcolonial contexts, alongside an employment of Dipesh Chakrabarty's "minority histories". This analysis is informed by a variety of Latin American cultural theorists, most notably Aníbal Quijano's work on Eurocentricity. Although these texts are more and more frequently available in English (mostly in electronic media or from foreign publishers), there has been little or no Australian critical engagement to date with what are *canonical* Latin American contemporary theorists. Moreover, in line with the predominantly monolingual character of Australian cultural studies, there is an absence of

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<sup>5</sup> As I will discuss further below, Uruguayan critic Hugo Achugar uses the distinction of the "Commonwealth *teórico poscolonialista*" [*Commonwealth* postcolonial theorist] to personify what he sees as a body of work that is informed chiefly by Anglophone and Francophone postcolonialisms rather than other (Latin American) models of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and postcoloniality (*Teorías*, par. 6)

<sup>6</sup> In relation to other national and global contexts, see Paranjape and Fanon (*National*) who deal with this form of postcolonial imperialism.

<sup>7</sup> In this dissertation, the term "Latin American" is used to refer to the cultural context of South and Central America—the common appellation in cultural discourses of this kind. However, due to language restrictions, only Hispanic Latin American poetry and theory are read *in the original Spanish*. Whilst some Brazilian theorists have been read in English, this dissertation predominantly represents "Latin America" through its Hispanic poetry and theory. My readings of contemporary poetry (predominantly that of the Southern Cone and Colombia) and theory from Hispanic Latin America stand as representative of the region as a whole. In this sense, this work operates only as a *starting point* to Australian postcolonial and cultural analyses that are conscientiously inclusive of the Latin American context.

Australian scholarly engagement with these texts *in Spanish*, or in translation. Hence, as a move away from the English hegemony that continues to structure and limit postcolonial theory in Australia, these texts are translated and analysed in this dissertation.

## **i. The Limits of Postcolonial Studies.**

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Postcolonial studies can be understood as circumscribed by two contingent restrictions: firstly, the antagonisms produced between its potential as a Marxist/materialist project on the one hand, or a poststructuralist/discursive project on the other; and secondly, its potentially retrogressive interests in colonialism and victimhood, at the expense of urgent analyses of neo-imperialisms and postcolonial agency.<sup>8</sup> The (de)constructions of liberal humanist subjectivity contained in postcolonial studies<sup>9</sup>—which oddly both *inspire* critiques of liberalist individuality and sovereignty and in many cases *inform* the structuring of the “postcolonial subject”<sup>10</sup>—are clearly important to Marxist/materialist *and* poststructuralist/discursive schools of thought. Hence, for discourse analysts as for Marxist critics, the potential for postcolonial studies to *transgress* its own limits ironically attends the demarcation of these confines. In fact, it is the very urgency of such *potential* self-referentiality that fires the active debate between postcolonial theorists about the scope of this field, as well as its limits.

In many ways, the practice of postcolonial studies presents itself as unresolved and unresolvable. In engaging with the multifarious effects of colonialisms and imperialisms, this field is predicated on the disjunctures that its internal debates disclose. As such, postcoloniality (as it is inscribed within this body of theory) becomes an aporia and an ontological problematic. Around the differentiated positions of Marxist and poststructuralist scholarship, it is possible to separate postcolonial theory into its two predominant practices: materialist and discursive critique. As polarised practices, these theoretical trajectories also represent limits that border postcolonial studies.

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<sup>8</sup> These, as well as other limits, are explored by Childs & Williams, Slemon (*Post-Colonial*), Griffiths, Young (*Postcolonialism* 1-11), M. Mukherjee and San Juan.

<sup>9</sup> See especially Ivison & Hardt and Negri.

<sup>10</sup> This is discussed in detail in 4.2, in relation to Bhabha’s theorisation of hybridity.



### **i.i Historical Materialism versus Discursive Deconstruction.**

As the basis for materialist critique, historical research gives postcolonial studies a claim to “truth” with which it often seeks to expose past injustices (and on which it often predicates its objection to neo-colonialisms). In that history represents a limit to postcolonial studies in its bordering of the demarcation of postcoloniality, the ways in which theoretical and creative texts engage with history are of importance to the (un)mapping of limits in this dissertation. As limit, “history” becomes a hinge on which contemporary postcoloniality swings, as it seeks material, semiotic and symbolic explanations of the past, as much as the postmodern ability to present these explanations as both *determining* and *contingent*.<sup>11</sup> In its ambivalence (its deconstructed authority) “history” is thus a central problematic of postcoloniality. In Chapter 3, the Baudrillardian “death of history” and “beyond of history” are applied to the poetry of Bobbi Sykes and Tony Birch, in order to test the limits of official and hyperreal models of history for Indigenous Australian poetry and its subjects. Also, in Chapter 5, histories of dispossession, disappearance and torture across Australia and Chile are read through the poetry of these countries, and are analysed within the framework of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s formulation of “subaltern pasts”. The poetry in this section is also presented as an alternative historical archive—loaded with the enabling potential of the record as well as the limits of the artefact.

As an equally influential arm of postcolonial studies (particularly after Said, Bhabha and Spivak), poststructuralist theory such as Bhabha’s and Spivak’s concentrates on the performative and the enunciative as important sites of postcolonial agency and critique. Bhabha invokes the “performative” as both the internal necessity and the remainder of nationalism (which, although seemingly an obvious conclusion, presents a blatant challenge to purely nationalist and cultural stereotyping):

In the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative. It is through this process of splitting that the conceptual ambivalence of modern society becomes the site of *writing the nation* (*Nation* 297).

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<sup>11</sup> This is to interpret “history” in Linda Hutcheon’s sense of the term (*Poetics* 89).

As an agential locus for the negotiation of the nation as limit-space (as the site of splitting), the performative thereby initiates the possibility of Bhabha's "nation as narration". The two temporalities isolated here by Bhabha—that of the "continuist" pedagogical and the "repetitious" performative—are used as emblems of official and non-official history in the discussion of Bobbi Sykes' and Tony Birch's poetry in Chapter 3. This dynamic is also traced in the postcolonial politics of Lionel Fogarty's work in Chapter 1, specifically in terms of its project of "writing the nation" through a performative and poetic re-historicising.

Enunciation, after Fanon and Spivak, has become a *leitmotif* of postcolonial literary critiques. Like Bhabha, Fanon mobilises enunciation as an act that is emblematic of postcolonial nationalisms, where "To speak...means above all to support the weight of a civilisation" (*Black* 13). As an adjunct to historical and materialist analyses therefore, critiques of enunciation investigate how postcolonial national identities are *articulated*. Dransfield's poetry presents investigations of the dynamics of speech and silence in postcolonial Australia, and is analysed in terms of these dynamics in Chapter 2. Moreover, the limits of Australian poetry in its ability to speak to national and international politics are tested in Chapter 3, where the question of the readership of this poetry (and its being heard) is posed in the manner of an investigation into its enunciative capacities. Rather than functioning only as a trope or a linguistic moment then, enunciation is approached in this dissertation as a politicised postcolonial problematic.

It is thus from between the claims to a strong politics, equally asserted by materialist and poststructuralist critics, that the fierce opposition between materialist and discursive critique arises in postcolonial studies.<sup>12</sup> Ato Quayson finds this opposition to be a critical impasse in the postcolonial field:

Thus postcolonial theory and criticism have increasingly become riven by a contradiction: the social referents in the postcolonial world call for urgent and clear solutions, but because speaking positions in a postmodernist world are thought to be always already immanently contaminated by being part of a compromised world, postcolonial critics often resort to a sophisticated form of rhetoric whose main aim seems to be to rivet attention permanently on the warps and loops of discourse (8).

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<sup>12</sup> See also Chun (380), Moore-Gilbert (49-65), Hallward (20-61), A. Mukherjee, Appiah (137-157), Moore-Gilbert, *During (Postmodernism)* and Parry (*Problems* 714-747) for discussions of this debate.

Quayson therefore subscribes to a view that has been given volume by many Marxist postcolonial theorists – that discourse (unavoidably postmodernised as he prescribes it) is ultimately an inherently *transcendent* mode of communicating postcoloniality and, moreover, that it very rarely descends to the “ground level” lived experience of postcolonial subjects.<sup>13</sup> As much as Quayson’s comments helpfully diagnose the most significant current aporia in postcolonial theory, such resolute reliance on binary logic seriously threatens the possible trajectories of postcolonial agency that involve a *complex*, dialogical and pluralistic relation between the material and the discursive.

A theory of postcolonialism that privileges the material as more “real” or “truthful” than the discursive risks ignoring the problematically loaded nature of historical discourse.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, such a position, by its design, negates the efficacy of all forms of cultural expression, for without the discursive, how is the material to be translated and communicated? Where is there political agency without enunciation? It is precisely these kinds of negotiations with the discursive and materialist—these deconstructions of the oppositional limits within postcolonial studies—that this dissertation undertakes. In engaging with the desire for, and simulations of, the “real” in a variety of current social and political climates, hyperreal theory also facilitates such a deconstruction.

Additionally, poetry (and more broadly, literature) provides the opportunity for close examinations of the “enunciative moment” in postcolonial subject-formation—a moment in which the tension between the historical and the discursive is negotiated. Like Fanon’s model of enunciation, postcolonial poetry primarily represents the discontinuity and difficulty between self and nation *in language*. Bhabha prescribes this reliance on language in postcolonial criticism:

To provide a social imaginary that is based on the articulation of differential, even disjunctive, moments of history and culture, contemporary critics resort to the peculiar temporality of the language metaphor” (*Postcolonial* 441-2).

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<sup>13</sup> See Adelman, Parry (*Directions*), Venn (*Narrating*), Dirlik, Young (*White*) and Ahmad (*Politics*) for example.

<sup>14</sup> The difficulties of negotiating historical discourses are canvassed in detail in Chapter 5, which traces anti-imperial and post-dictatorship poetic archives as parts of these discourses. The work of Chakrabarty and Spivak (*Subaltern*) is also particularly attenuated to this issue.

As Bhabha hints here, the “language metaphor” gives critics the opportunity to momentarily arrest a linear teleological model in their engagement with postcolonial politics. For this reason, translation emerges here as a metaphor and strategy for the continued evolution of postcolonial theory.<sup>15</sup> This dissertation presents an evaluation of the potential for Australian postcolonial poetry to “interpret and redefine” Australian and global politics (to use Parker and Starkey’s terms). Its politics, however, are dependant on the readership of this poetry. The question of readership is therefore a crucial limit visited here, in that the postcolonial relations between enunciation and political activism, historicism and discourse, are (un)mapped. Chapters 3 and 4 undertake this (un)mapping most specifically. In Chapter 3, Australian poetry is read for its discursive analyses of neo-imperialism and in Chapter 4 the hybridity theories of Bhabha and Argentinean anthropologist Néstor García Canclini are evaluated for their tense negotiations of historical and discursive practices.

### **i.ii Postcolonial Futures and the “Ethics of Becoming”.**

The intellectual challenge for post-colonial critical theory is to attempt to come to know the story of colonial and neo-colonial engagements in all their complexity, and to find ways to represent those engagements in a language that can build cross-disciplinary, cross-community, cross-cultural alliances for the historical production of genuine social change.

—Stephen Slemon (*Post-colonial* 197)

In order to avoid the retrograde trajectory of postcolonial studies (where the eminence of the past and the proliferation of victimhoods supersedes a future-looking praxis) it is necessary to offer new terminologies for the postcolonial, in which its victimised subjects can be transformed into politically active agents.<sup>16</sup> However, as a response to victimised postcoloniality, theories of conceptual or ideological agency (which are often overlaid with the capitalist and liberal rhetoric of choice and freedom) risk ironically resituating postcoloniality within liberal humanist doctrines of individualist identity. As Benita Parry and Duncan Ivison have pointed out,<sup>17</sup> the construction of the “postcolonial subject” has relied upon

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<sup>15</sup> This idea of the postcolonial as actively translating is alluded to by Michael Parker & Roger Starkey, in their evaluation of postcolonial literatures as “redefining” and “interpretive” (22-3).

<sup>16</sup> It is this kind of project that is overtly claimed by Bill Ashcroft in his *Post-Colonial Transformation*.

<sup>17</sup> See Parry (*Overlapping*) and Ivison.

the tenets of liberal humanism for its inspiration, prompting dangerous alignments of coloniality and postcoloniality. Ivison exposes the irony of this situation, arguing that:

The simultaneous invocation of the inadequacy and yet the indispensability of liberal values and concepts such as justice, equality and freedom seems to lie at the heart of the postcolonial project (30).

Junctures such as this one expose the instability of the postcolonial condition and of postcolonial theory. Borrowing from and critiquing liberalism simultaneously, postcolonial studies hence require a constant negotiation of their position on the edge of such concepts.<sup>18</sup> The comparison of the hybridity theories of Bhabha and García Canclini in Chapter 4 extends this discussion by tracing the ways in which liberalism (as a function of modernity) is both denied and co-opted in these discourses.

If, as Ashis Nandy contends, colonialism was fuelled by modern individualism and the “insane search for absolute autonomy” (*Towards* 1769), then this counterpoised formulation of a neo-liberal *postcolonial* subject appears as an attempt to theoretically re-colonise subjectivity by ironically repeating a recognisably colonialist legacy. In order to attempt to balance the use of such problematic subjectivity, there is a call for a critical awareness, in the form of a constant surveillance of the ethics involved in the formulation and endorsement of postcolonial subjectivities. This enterprise is close to what Quayson and Goldberg call an “ethics of becoming”, which is:

[considering] what forces in the real world the *informing* ethical impulse of Postcolonial Studies is designed to strengthen. This entails in effect the definition through both theory and practice of an ethics of becoming. An ethics of becoming would require a rigorous attention to the details of the object under scrutiny to discern the aspects within it that speak to an imagined freer future (xiii).

This dissertation engages with this ethical postulate, scrutinising postcolonial theory for its limitations, as well as attempting to extend its limits via the introduction of hyperreal and Latin American theory.

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<sup>18</sup> Iain Chambers tackles precisely this kind of project (*History*).

## ii. The Limits of Hyperreal Studies.

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It is only by historically contextualising Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum that we can understand its form and effects—its historical effects, its nihilistic ungrounding [sic] of certain epistemological foundations, its subsequent demonisation of the West, and the latter's attempt to domesticate its power.

—William Merrin (*Play* 85)

As William Merrin signals above, Baudrillard's work can be understood most fruitfully as occupying a space *between* historicity and philosophy. As an ideological site for the negotiation of postcoloniality, hyperreality allows postcolonial subjects to move beyond merely identifying with the past (with a retrograde voyeurism) to a deconstructive identification with unfixable and positional identities within the simulacrum. Theories of hyperreality thus facilitate interrogations of models of the “real” in postcolonialism. According to Baudrillard, hyperreality:

is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real, that is to say of an operation of deterring every real process via its operational double, a programmatic, metastable, perfectly descriptive machine that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all of its vicissitudes (*Simulacra* 2).

Like postcolonial studies, therefore, hyperreal studies negotiate materialism and discursivity and as such, share a mutual limit-space. As a response to a contemporary system that has far surpassed any access to the “real”, Baudrillard situates his hyperreal theories in semiotic analyses. For Baudrillard, in the capitalist West, the object is replaced by the sign, which, in its fickle simulation, can only *gesture towards* the real:

The modern sign dreams of its predecessor, and would dearly love to rediscover an *obligation* in its reference to the real. It finds only a *reason*, a referential reason, a real and a “natural” on which it will feed. [...] nothing proceeds in accordance with its end anymore, but issues instead from the model, the “signifier of reference”, functioning as a foregone, and the only credible, conclusion (*Symbolic* 51; 56).

So, in their artifice and substitutive role, signs can only refer to their *loss of referentiality* and hence replace the absent real. For Baudrillard, this “era of simulation”—postmodernity—is hence characterised by a “liquidation of all referentials” and “their artificial resurrection in the systems of signs” (*Simulacra* 2). Following Baudrillard, effects such as colonialism and neo-imperialisms are read in this dissertation as functions of a broader Western “civilisational” strategy of obfuscating the hidden absence of the “real” by simulating “reality” as normative,

natural and material. For Baudrillard, rather than pledging allegiance to the “reality contract” (which, in his construction, is overlaid with a dangerous character of illusion), the only viable position for the subjects of this Western system is that of hyperreal critic. In this role, as Baudrillard prescribes: “Against the moral contract of that binds us to reality we must set a pact of intelligence and lucidity” (*Intelligence* 45-6). His “lucidity pact” thus provides a solution to critiques of his work which read Baudrillard as a dystopian theorist. Although much of his sociology presumes a *passive socius*—numbed by artifice, saturated by media, bound to the “reality contract”—Baudrillard also makes room for a *critical* response to what we could call the “society *after* the spectacle”.

### ii.i The Hyperreal at the Limits of the “Real”.

As a repository of descriptions of how the Western world *manufactures and masquerades* its reality, Baudrillard’s work can be of use to the deconstructive impulse within postcolonial studies, particularly in unveiling the simulatory nature of imperialism. As Fuery asserts for example, his concept of “seduction” can also be employed to read postcoloniality as it intrinsically relates to coloniality:

I would like to add to Baudrillard’s list by saying that the postcolonial is not that which is opposed to colonialism but, rather, that which seduces colonialism, and the gaze is not that which opposes a set of discourses but, instead, that which seduces discourse, all discourse. The postcolonial gaze in Australia is seductive because it represents an attempt to engage in the difficulties of a missing—or, at the very least, unspoken—cultural identity (205).

Fuery’s isolation of the seductive co-option of coloniality into postcoloniality, as well as the attendant repression of other national models of identity, is echoed in poetry such as Dransfield’s, which narrates the coloniality of contemporary Australia; and that of Bobbi Sykes and Tony Birch, which exposes the simulacrum of Australian postcolonial national identity, as discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 5. Baudrillardian seduction is also engaged with via the poetry of Forbes in Chapters 1 and 3, which persuasively represents the allure of the virtual as it informs the Australian “real”.

As Forbes’ poetry arguably embraces, the most iconic feature of Baudrillard’s work—and a useful theoretical tool for postcolonial studies—is simulation. As the chief mechanism with which he reveals the fictitiousness of “reality”, simulation represents a form of (un)mapping in Baudrillard’s philosophy, a

metaphysical and semiotic deconstruction of materialism. Hence, as Nick Perry outlines:

what has now disappeared is the very notion that maps and territories, representation and reality, might be ontologically discrete. Both have been displaced by simulacra (69).

Where colonial discourses assume the control of material geographies (arguably for symbolic as much as material reasons), this hyperreal deconstruction allows for a critique of colonialism based on its reliance on the “reality contract”. If we accept the new hegemony of simulacra (as Perry suggests), along with the impossibility of access to the “real”, it follows that the necessary power of Empire is destabilised. As much as hyperreality can discursively and ideologically combat colonial discourses, however, its scope is of course limited in that postcolonial subjects cannot simply redress all forms of subjugation or oppression by hyperreal means. However, in its applicability to new forms of imperialism (such as contemporary U.S. imperialism) which often rely on representational politics and virtualised modes of domination, Baudrillard’s work on simulation and hyperreality provides a workable vocabulary for the critique of the New World Order.

As Chapters 1, 2 and 3 demonstrate, Australian poets engage with hyperreal simulation in their depictions and analyses of the representational politics that inform mythologies of national and global identity. For example, Kevin Hart’s work reveals the simulatory basis of Australian identity in its denial of incarceration as an *Australian* problematic, and the subsequent mythologies of liberty and security that obfuscate this denial. In Chapter 3, Maiden’s analysis of the Gulf War and the War on Terror presents an astute reading of the simulatory basis of New World Order logic, as it manifests in U.S imperialism.

As a boundary to postcolonial politics and discourses, therefore, hyperreal simulation is both restricted and productive in navigating contemporary engagements with the “real”. Hence, as Rex Butler argues, simulation is not just a decorative description of a mode of representation, but an extension *and* deconstruction of realist logic:

The aim of simulation is not to do away with reality, but on the contrary to realise it, make it real. Simulation in this sense is not a form of illusion, but opposed to illusion, a way of getting rid of the fundamental illusionality [sic] of the world (24).



This sense in which Baudrillard's deconstructive critique of reality operates simultaneously as a *desire* for reality—an obvious but vital inconsistency in his work—is also apparent in his recent formulation of “Integral Reality” as the excessive *internalisation* of the reality principle at the level of the social. In Baudrillard's analysis of the “real”, it is possible to perceive a theoretical trajectory from “objective reality”, to “virtual reality”, to this most recent Integral Reality as the constituent elements of his “hyperreality” (*Intelligence* 45). Characterised by the impossibility of a realist or historicist imaginary, Baudrillard's Integral Reality plots the social at “zero degrees”—at an axis where the hyperreal hypothesis has reached its final ideological completion:

Let us be clear about this: when we say reality has disappeared, the point is not that it has disappeared physically, but that it has disappeared metaphysically. Reality continues to exist; it is its principle that is dead (*Intelligence* 18).

As an antagonistic counterpoint to postcolonial theory, Integral Reality is engaged with in this dissertation in relation to the reliance on the history principle implicit in postcolonial studies. The absence of an historical imaginary under an Australian Integral Reality is thus tested against the poetry of Sykes and Birch in Chapter 3. This investigation seeks to establish how the dictates of linear progress (as a modernist inheritance) are central to colonialism and to much contemporary postcolonialism, just as this linearity influences notions of “official” History.

As well as utilising hyperreality as a discursive and ideological framework, this dissertation also reads Baudrillard as a *political theorist* whose philosophy presents pertinent analyses of the New World Order, particularly regarding neo-imperialisms. Baudrillard's analyses of the West, in relation to globalisation and universality, are thus posited as a theoretical context that sits in dialogue with Australian and Latin American poetics, as well as with Latin American and postcolonial theory. According to Baudrillard, the West's simulation of universality is fundamental to a reduction to a “degree zero” social plateau:

Imperialism has changed. What the West now wishes to foist on the whole world, in the guise of universality, is not its—completely unhinged—values, but its absence of values...We generously distribute the right to difference, but secretly, and on this occasion unyieldingly, we are working to produce a bloodless, undifferentiated world (*Screened* 65).

As an analysis of neo-imperialism, Baudrillard's work thus becomes an important supplement and limit-marker to postcolonial theory. For this reason, and as an

extrapolation of Baudrillard's structuring of universality, Enrique Dussel's "*transmodernidad*" [transmodernity] is read alongside Baudrillard's formulation of "the perfect crime" in Chapter 4. Here, Dussel's analysis of modernity, Eurocentrism and imperialism and his subsequent formulation of "*transmodernidad*" as an anti-colonial project for the "peripheries", are proposed as examples of how Baudrillard's "perfect crime" can be utilised as a critique of imperialism. In this theoretical comparison, therefore, this dissertation seeks not only to identify Latin American and hyperreal theories as *at the limits* of Australian postcoloniality, but also to trace how these theoretical frontiers—postcolonial, hyperreal and Latin American theory—might interact.

### **ii.ii Baudrillardian Discourse as a Limit to Postcolonial Studies.**

Like postcolonial theory, Baudrillard's hyperreal theory also exhibits a tension between discursive and historical practices. Although often useful in its analyses of contemporary politics and sociology, Baudrillard's work has been fiercely criticised for its polemical rhetoric and abstract vocabulary. As Paul Hegarty demonstrates, Baudrillard represents an enigma for many critics, in that his work moves between "hard" political analysis and "soft" philosophy:

For someone who seeks not to be a critic, but a hyperbolic theorist of extremes, Baudrillard's writings betray a continual interest in politics, and often provide a critical perspective, even if it is not critique in the sense of exposing a hidden ideological truth (91).

As Hegarty's lexicon betrays here, it is difficult for critics to resolve the *poetics* of Baudrillard's work—the effects of the "hyperbolic theorist of extremes"—from his political analyses, which are registered as serious *even though they don't conform to traditional rationalism*.

The viability of Baudrillard's work is thus highly dependent upon whether or not his vocabulary and ideological platform are accepted as legitimate "rational" logic (regardless of whether or not the results of this logic are agreed upon or opposed). For Hegarty, the problem of Baudrillard's reception arises from his deconstruction of "the reality principle", which results in his being read as "politically apathetic" (2). In this sense, Baudrillard shares a communal limit-space with both poetry and postcolonial theory. In other words, a sympathetic aporia arises within these fields in the irresolution of their praxes as either poetic/discursive/rhetorical or political/historical/analytical. The divide between

these poles is treated in this dissertation as the most productive mutual border crossed by postcoloniality, hyperreality and poetry.

*At the limits* of postcolonial studies therefore, hyperreality—in its refusal of the “reality contract” and in its unmasking of the seductive and simulatory interplay between coloniality and postcoloniality, the material and the discursive, the lost real and the sign—provides a means by which to negotiate the impasses within postcolonial theory. However, as many theorists point out, Baudrillard’s work is both obtuse in its idiosyncratic vocabulary and abstract in the ways in which it applies itself to “real” politics.<sup>19</sup> His prose presupposes the reader’s familiarity with a Baudrillardian vocabulary that is not only particular to his *oeuvre*, but is subject to change between his texts, as Hegarty outlines:

Since the 1980s, his texts have become increasingly aphoristic, speculative, and often free of argument as such. Instead there is a wall of assertions, claims, twists of logic, fictions, spews of metaphors losing their representative value, as they become something both more or less (1).

As a simulatory machine itself, Baudrillard’s work can pervert its own reception. However, as probably the most significant limit to postcolonial hyperreal studies, Baudrillard’s idiom and textual composition are also enabling, in that his texts provide original ways of (re)negotiating the discourses and representational strategies of world orders. In other words, in their “speculative” tendencies, these texts work against modern rationalism. In their “aphoristic”, assertive and metaphorical language and “twists of logic”, they also both deconstruct and mirror the clichéd and formulaic rhetoric of the global systems of representation and political hegemony that they analyse.

### **iii. *Los limites de los estudios latinoamericanos* [The Limits of Latin American Studies].**

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Who put the Latin in Latin America?  
 Who interred invention in intervention?  
 Who put the post- in postcolonial?  
 Who put the late in translate?  
 Who patrols the borderlines?  
 —Bernard McGuirk (*Border* 393).

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<sup>19</sup> See especially Sim (*Beyond* 118-133), Best & Kellner (111-145), Jarvis (30-41) and Butler.

With reference to the international division of intellectual labour, how does the growing Anglo-Saxonisation [sic] of reflection about Latin America correlate with the local epistemologies? How do local histories, as producers of knowledge and of a “rhetoric of the colony”, impact global epistemologies and the “rhetoric of empire”?

—Hugo Achugar (*Local* 125)

As a largely unmapped limit to Australian understandings of postcoloniality, Latin America provides the opportunity for a rewriting of postcolonial theory (or at least an assessment of its boundaries) as well as *another* colonial periphery with which Australia can engage in postcolonial dialogue. As part of a study of limits, Latin America is a pertinent object for analysis, in that it is often characterised in its regionalist theoretical discourses as frontier, border and periphery.<sup>20</sup> McGuirk’s and Achugar’s concentrations on the interstitial and marginalised position of Latin America (above) thus outline what has become a typical position in relation to global cultural politics.

Beginning with Fernando Ortiz’s influential formulation of *transculturación* [transculturation], and extending into contemporary discourse, Latin American theory exhibits a proclivity for a deconstructive vocabulary which privileges its interstitial, transcultural and hybridised character. Current Latin American theorists such as Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, Néstor García Canclini, Aníbal Quijano and others, have continued to extend this vocabulary.<sup>21</sup> For Dignolo, the frameworks of “border thinking”, “post-occidentalism” (which he derives from Roberto Fernández Retamar)<sup>22</sup> and “pluri-languaging” are points of departure from which to understand contemporary Latin America (*Local* 250-3). For Dussel, as discussed in Chapter 4, “*transmodernidad*” [transmodernity] represents the paradigm with which marginalised and colonised subjects can navigate identity *around* modernity, chiefly by rejecting its hegemony. For García Canclini, also discussed in Chapter 4, his “*culturas híbridas*” [hybrid cultures] characterize contemporary borderland experiences (principally in Tijuana) where language, art

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<sup>20</sup> Although Moreiras, Dignolo, Ortiz and García Canclini are well-known exponents of “border thinking”, this practice is in by means limited to Latin American theorists. In fact, as can be appreciated in the work of Hall (*When*), Ashcroft (*Post-Colonial Transformation*) and Ramazani (*Transnational*), amongst others, this position is one that has also been taken up in other postcolonial studies.

<sup>21</sup> See Dussel (*Europa*), García Canclini (*Hybrid Cultures*) and Quijano (*Coloniality*).

<sup>22</sup> See Hulme (*Beyond* 53) for a discussion of the history of critiques of Occidentalism (including “post-occidentalism”) in Latin America.

and identity engage with cross-cultural codes. For Quijano, as discussed in Chapter 5, Latin American postcoloniality amounts to a necessary distortion of the Eurocentric image in which the “New World” was created.<sup>23</sup>

Aside from providing a regionalist and divergent postcolonial vocabulary (complete with distinct theoretical methodologies such as revolutionary discourse, post-dictatorship thought and liberation theology), Latin America also represents an uncharted literary frontier for Australian scholars. As Roberto González Echevarría argues, Western scholarship demonstrates “only the vaguest of notions” about the Latin American literary canon (*Latin* 90). For González Echevarría, this is also understood as a function of Latin America’s peripheral status, particularly in relation to the cultural hegemony of the metropolitan academy:

They do not know our literatures for the very same reasons that we know theirs. Theirs are important, canonical, the core of the core curriculum; ours are marginal, exotic, frilly, not part of anyone’s cultural literacy program (*Latin* 98).

Given that Australian Literature established itself nationally and internationally as recently as the 1950s, and continues to negotiate the difficulties of recognition by multinational publishers and international audiences, a comparative study informed by the “peripheral” context of the Latin American canon is an appropriate and complementary endeavour. As a postcolonial project, the comparative analyses of Latin American and Australian poetry and theory in this dissertation also work towards Quayson and Goldberg’s “ethics of becoming” (xiii), or, as Mark Millington recommends, an attempt “to achieve a position in which metropolitan critical practice can be brought into ethical engagement with postcolonial Latin American cultures” (28).

### **iii.i *América Latina como frontera al poscolonialismo* [Latin America as Border<sup>24</sup> to Postcolonialism].**

*En mucho del pensamiento originado en el marco del Commonwealth teórico poscolonialista se ignora la producción latinoamericana o, en el mejor de los casos, se procede a analizar a América Latina como un conjunto homogéneo derivado de un*

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<sup>23</sup> Florencia E Mallon synthesises Quijano’s project as “antinationalist versions of postcolonial theory [that] argue that for 200 years, Latin Americans have been chasing a mirage in their attempts to build autonomous nation-states” (*Pathways* 278).

<sup>24</sup> The term *frontera* can also be translated into English as “barrier”.

*pasado histórico supuestamente común en lo esencial con India, África y otras regiones del planeta.*

[Much of the thought that originates in the framework of *Commonwealth* postcolonial theory ignores Latin American production or, at best, proceeds to analyse Latin America as an homogeneous whole derived from an historical past supposedly analogous to that which is essential to India, Africa and other regions of the planet.]

—Hugo Achugar (*Teorías*, par. 6)

Often either ignored completely or conveniently relativised, Latin America presents an absent context in postcolonial theory, which is resisted both from *within* the postcolonial field (as Achugar points out) and from within Latin American studies (as Colás demonstrates; *Creole* 382). Largely achieving its independence in 1826 (with the exceptions of Cuba and Puerto Rico), Latin America was “post-colonial” long before colonies of the British and French Empires.<sup>25</sup> The absurdity of this region’s exclusion from postcolonial theory thus configures Latin America as a site of extreme difference from Anglophone and Francophone colonies.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the Latin American context presents an *extreme* limit to the Australian context.

While Latin American criticism presents a wealth of anti-imperial and anti-colonial discourses and methodologies—as well as discourses of regionalist independence such as José Martí’s famous essay “*Nuestra América*” [“Our America”]—it acts as a limit-point to conventional postcolonial theory in its Spanish language inscription and alternative tradition of theory. Whilst a cross-disciplinary dialogue is underway between these fields in their literary and cultural disciplines<sup>27</sup>—a dialogue that started with the formation of a Latin American Subaltern Studies collective and now sees the inclusion of Latin American theorists in postcolonial anthologies—this project is only in its infancy and still contends with resistances from both fields.

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<sup>25</sup> As Mallon establishes, “by the time Europe’s second colonialism was in bloom, toward the end of the twentieth century, most of Latin America, with the exception of the Caribbean, had already been independent from the Iberian powers for nearly a century” (*Pathways* 274-5).

<sup>26</sup> See Colás (*Creole* 382-3) for a discussion of the omission of Latin America from Anglophone and Francophone scholarship.

<sup>27</sup> In a much more overt way, Latin America has been engaged with (chiefly as an object for analysis) by political scholars from the metropole, particularly those working in the discipline of International Relations.

Despite “at least 50 years” of the “work of unthinking Eurocentrism” in Latin America (Hulme *Beyond* 48), Latin American critiques of imperialism and colonialism occupy a demarcated space strategically distanced from that of postcolonial studies. For the most part, resistance to postcolonial theory by Latin American scholars derives from their evaluation of this field as hegemonic in its association with the metropolitan academy. For theorists such as Chilean cultural critic Nelly Richard, postcolonial studies, rather than representing a field concerned with its own ethics, dangerously repeats the marginalisation of Latin America. Richard asks:

what is the scenario in which *the* Latin American is debated nowadays? It is a scenario marked by the insidious complexity of this new postcolonial articulation made out of intermediary powers which move *between* the de-centred centrality of the metropolis, on the one hand, and, on the other, the cultural re-signification of the periphery, conflictively [sic] carried out by the metropolitan theory of the subaltern (*Intersecting* 690).

The contradictions inherent to the metropolitan postcolonial project (which, as discussed earlier, also prompt its self-reflexiveness) thus dissuade critics such as Richard from engaging with the methodologies of this field. It is at these sites of difficulty and disjuncture that the comparative analyses in this dissertation are positioned.

The inclusion of the Latin American context as a productive dialogical limit to Australian postcoloniality is also intended as an initiative that resituates Latin America in terms of its particular regional interactions with postcolonial theory and politics. Rather than simply including Latin American poetry, therefore, Latin American theory is also included in this dissertation as a way of approaching the postcolonial history of *el pensamiento latinoamericano* [Latin American thought]. As such, my intention is to begin to redress the obfuscation of this intellectual history, which Achugar attributes to postcolonial theory. Referring to the “Commonwealth” school of postcolonial theory, Achugar argues that:

*No tuvieron en cuenta que América Latina—o, a los efectos, Ibero América—funciona como categoría del conocimiento, por lo menos, desde hace más de un siglo, y que tanto la revisión como la crítica de dicha noción ha sido y es constante...No tuvieron en cuenta, por último, que la conciencia latinoamericana ha sido desde hace siglos un espacio heterogéneo donde los distintos sujetos sociales, étnicos y culturales han venido batallando por construir sus respectivos proyectos sociales y culturales.*

[They didn’t take into account that Latin America—or, for that matter, Iberian America—has functioned as a category of knowledge, at least for more than a century, and that the revision, like the critique of the said notion, has been and is constant...They didn’t take into account, finally,

that Latin American consciousness has for centuries been a heterogeneous space where distinct social, ethnic and cultural subjects have fought to construct their respective social and cultural projects] (*Teorías*, par. 10).

To read this theory alongside postcolonial theory is therefore to (un)map the limits of postcolonial studies as a renegotiation of the postcolonial canon.

### **iii.ii *Del discurso latinoamericano* [On Latin American Discourse].**

In other words, while the imaginary of the modern world system focused on frontiers, structures, and the nation-state as a space within frontiers with a national language, languaging and bilanguaging, as a condition of border thinking from the colonial difference, open up to a postnational imaginary. Consequently, border thinking is post-occidental in the larger picture of the modern world system and postcolonial in the history of the politics of the language of modernity/coloniality.

—Walter D. Mignolo (*Local* 253)

The benefits of Achugar’s “heterogeneous Latin American conscience” to the project of this dissertation are the ways in which Latin American intellectual production *already* inhabits the limit-space in relation to nationalism, regionalism and postcoloniality. Concepts such as Mignolo’s “border thinking” claim the spatial theorisation of Latin America as limit. Furthermore, in critiquing the metropole, as well as foregrounding global linguistic politics, Latin American theorists such as Mignolo also sustain an anti-imperialist project, commensurate with that of postcolonialism. In this sense, Mignolo’s “post-occidental” and “postnational imaginary” offer Australian postcoloniality ways of renegotiating its own nation space, as well as its continuing relationships to imperial powers.

As a productive response to globalisation (Ramos *Hemispheric* 246), border ideologies both refer to territories (national, geographic and literary) and investigate the deconstructive site of “*glocalisation*”, particularly in their emphasis on an interstitial politics of belonging. In its regionalist emphasis, contemporary Latin American theory presents frequent critiques of globalisation and universality—arguably due to the economic and political threats imbued in these trends for the region—and, as such, broadens the theoretical mapping of intersections such as the “*glocal*”. These frontier ideologies operate in hyperreal manners, by exhibiting a distrust of material and historical claims to the “reality” of the doctrine of nationhood and the illusory totality of nationalist mythologies.



#### iv. At the Limits of Transnationalism.

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The post-colonial era is one of displacement and migration, of multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism, of split subjects and divided loyalties. Post-colonial culture exposes the impossibility of *any* national identity incorporating into a unified totality the diverse and diffuse elements that make up a nation...post-colonial art also exposes the inadequacy of national “imagined communities” to monitor, regulate, and remedy the explosive contradictions of global structures of economic, political and cultural power.

—George Lipsitz (*Diasporic* 1961)

Trends towards cosmopolitanism (although keenly interrogated) penetrate the interstices of recent postcolonial theory<sup>28</sup> and are symptomatic of one growing desire to transcend the national in favour of a celebratory diasporic globalism. Where postcolonial studies veer in this direction, however, this trajectory is inevitably arrested by the counterpoised need for an ownership of particular histories and local landscapes. It is at this politicised limit that this dissertation’s proposal of a *transnational* model of Australian postcoloniality sits. In the face of the ever-increasing power of nation-states and hegemonic super powers, utopic discourses such as Lipsitz’s (above) seem highly idealistic. Whilst cosmopolitan postcoloniality may only be materially possible for bourgeois elites, or, as Laura Chrisman argues, the “neo-imperial metropole” (161), a transnational imaginary is nonetheless possible for contemporary postcolonial subjects. As Latin American theorists argue, discourses and ideologies of regionalism and “*glocal*” identities are already popularised in postcolonial states. Moreover, as is evident in poets’ and theorists’ employment of hyperreal methodologies, after the dissolution of nationalisms (as mythologies of a lost “real”), transnationalism becomes the *entry point* into the simulacrum. As a linguistic and methodological approach to reading Australia-as-text in a transnational framework, the practice and trope of translation is thus taken up in this dissertation.

This practice is not intended here as purely a strategy of *resolution*, where *lo latinoamericano* [that which is Latin American] can be conveniently appended to Australian poetry and postcolonial theory. Rather, my use of this trope and

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<sup>28</sup> See Chrisman (161), San Juan (2), Hardt & Negri (45; 361), Bhabha (*Unsatisfied* 44), Frankenburg & Mani (1863) and Grossberg (*Space* 169) for current debates about postcolonial nationalism and cosmopolitanism.

practice concurs with Ivison's definition of the term, which lands ultimately on *difficulty*:

Translation involves the persistence of difference – of the inability to fully represent the particular – even when settling on the equivalents necessary for communication. Translation does not necessarily entail transparency or reconciliation (46).

A resounding difficulty encountered in postcolonial studies is—to invoke Ivison's terms—the inability to fully *represent* the postcolonial, the individual, the national or the linguistic. Celebrating this as a *productive* difficulty, this dissertation *opens up* the disjunctures between Australian and Latin American contexts and between English and Spanish. This endeavour travels in a similar direction to the one that David Punter imagines in his introduction to *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order*, where he suggests that:

The book that this shadows, the one that is needed, is “needful”, is the one that would be able lucidly and accurately to compare different postcolonial writings across a variety of social formations and, more importantly, across the many languages – the languages of the colonisers, the “native” languages – concerned (6).

As Punter is clearly aware, there are many difficulties implicit in such an endeavour.<sup>29</sup> At the intersection of nations and traditions, the poetic text here shoulders the burdens of *both* misappropriation and accord, each of which can be arguably dangerous in locating postcoloniality as either universal or impossible. One function of this dissertation is therefore to fret the postcolonial fabric – where it is stretched between nations and differences – and to attend to the jagged edges, where (often disharmonious) notions of postcoloniality, identity and nationalism reside. One such discrepancy that this dissertation confronts is the universalist elision of the differences between postcolonial “subjects”. Here, the comparison of postcolonial nations exists, in one sense, in order to acknowledge the contingencies and distances between first, second, third and fourth world postcolonial subjects, as well as to actively problematise the use of such classifications.

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<sup>29</sup> As Leela Gandhi highlights, it is important to maintain a keen sense of difference in any analysis of postcolonial societies. As she notes: “There is a fundamental incommensurability between the predominantly cultural ‘subordination’ of settler culture in Australia, and the predominantly administrative and militaristic subordination of colonised culture in Africa and Asia. A theory of postcolonialism which suppresses differences like these is ultimately flawed as an ethical and political intervention into conditions of power and inequality” (170).

Moreover, the application of hyperreality to postcoloniality operates as another form of translation here, where divergent (but often sympathetic) methodologies are interpreted *in the same lexicon*. The same problematic also applies for the translation of Latin American theory into English and its interpretation in conjunction with postcolonial frameworks. A potential limit of this dissertation, therefore, is the possibility that hyperreality and Latin American theory will not be received in the lexicon of postcoloniality (as its “target audience”) in a cogent manner, and this is perhaps the chief risk of this scholarly undertaking.

As a fertile limit-space, however, Jahan Ramazani understands the process of postcolonial translation (particularly in its *poetic* forms) as a hybridising activity, where the translator effectively creates a *third* language, in which to describe and relate the connections and discrepancies between the other two:

Belonging to multiple worlds that are transformed by their convergence, postcolonial poets indigenise the Western and anglicise the native to create exciting new possibilities for English-language poetry (*Hybrid 2*).

However, Ramazani’s reliance on simple opposition here—which he transforms into a very simple process of cross-pollination—is challenged by Bhabha in his assessment of postcolonial politics as a much more Byzantine process of cultural engagement, where the practice of translation is again invoked as a principal postcolonial process—widening here to encompass culture as well as language :

The transnational dimension of cultural transformation – migration, diaspora, displacement, relocation – makes the process of cultural translation a complex form of signification (*Postcolonial 438*).

Rather than strict boundaries between self and other (which is the underlying premise to Ramazani’s observations) Bhabha is interested in the *movement* and *excess* in postcoloniality. His (pan)geographical terms for transformation make it a deconstructive process. Analogously, translation can be read as a hyperrealist practice that *brings reality to its extremes*, and also as a trope that can be used to deconstruct the liberal subject in its movement between sovereignty and subalternity, identity and alterity. Such deconstructions of postcolonial subjectivity are undertaken in Chapter 5, where Australian poetry is compared with Latin American poetry, revealing analogous articulations of Eurocentricity, coloniality and oppression, where postcolonial subjects negotiate a fraught relationship to identity politics.

In approaching postcolonial poetry through the lens and practice of translation, the influence of the emerging “transnational” interrupts clear-cut distinctions between any prescribed cultures, thereby adding to the “difficulty” of translation itself. In this time-lag between nations, which Bhabha equates with an unavoidably transformative conclusion, the global and the local are also entangled. Negotiations between the global and the local, which operate in such an arrested moment of time-lag, are very similar to the act of translation itself, which installs a pause in the adaptation of one language into another, which is inevitably a mutual renovation of both tongues. Within this facet of the postcolonial, spatiality and temporality become entangled – a phenomenon that Ian Baucom discovers through his generation of the “postcolonial submarine”. Baucom insists on a spatio-temporal problematic, acknowledging that

While this reading of the submarine again invokes a temporally dispersed subject, it equally implies a model of spatially-disseminated identity, a rhizomatic dislocation of the subject, a self which manifests itself not as an essence but as a meandering (*Charting*, par. 7).

Analogously, the translating subject (as much as the subject-in-translation) can also become spatially and temporally dispersed and thus, *transnational*.

In a practical sense, the translation of contemporary Latin American poetry is included here for political, poetic and theoretical reasons. Politically, its importance lies in challenging the hegemonic status of English culture, language and imperialism in postcolonial theoretical endeavours, by at least replacing (or displacing) this with a *negotiation* between English and Spanish, where English can be subordinated.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, to focus on Latin American literature, in particular, is to work away from the popular critiques of Commonwealth Literatures, to a broader comparative study of postcolonial literatures, which in turn reinterprets postcolonial canons. This works towards the achievement of González Echevarría’s proposed model of comparative literature:

A redefined comparative literature could begin to use the reflections of European literatures in the “marginal” literatures as a way of remapping the field and rewriting the canon. In these literatures a more severe and rigorous test to the presuppositions of canonical texts may emerge than what one obtains from the reflected self-analysis of much theory and

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<sup>30</sup> This endeavour is motivated by claims such as Ketu Katrak’s, that “A study...that focuses only on English-language post-colonial writers involves some loss, even distortion in terms of the complex reality of linguistic situations in post-colonial areas” (qtd in Punter 7).

speculation. The issue would then be one not of comparison but of rewritings (*Latin* 98).

By employing translations as “rewritings”, albeit in this case from the Western academy, my intention here is to register the need for the simultaneity of the transnational and the local across Australian and Latin American works. Although comparative in focus, this dissertation is intended also as an entry into the literary traditions of Australian studies. Rather than offering a wholly introspective look at this nation and its literatures, however, the emphasis here is on the location of Australia within the postcolonial (literary) world and the processes through which it is shaped as a member of the *global* community. Of paramount importance to this research, therefore, are the ways in which the discourse of postcolonial theory can speak to the Australian situation, especially in regard to its global postcolonial relations. As such, this dissertation operates as a starting point—an approach to limits—and intends to be read as an investigation into these spaces as the vectors that point back to an indefinitely complex order of postcoloniality.

### **Afterword: Theoretical Interrogations.**

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Focussing its production *towards* a transnational Australian postcoloniality, this dissertation reads postcoloniality—historical, literary, theoretical—as peripatetic and complex; as imbued with functions of coloniality that are insidious and often repressed; and as a condition whose major mechanisms are negotiated with(in) representational politics. In order to avoid what would be impossible resolutions of postcolonial aporia, this dissertation situates its investigation *at the multiple limits* of postcoloniality. Furthermore, in recognising the complex psychosocial vicissitudes of Australian postcoloniality, Australia is also positioned as a limit space. Finally, as uncharted territories of *potential* postcolonial critique, Latin America and Baudrillard’s hyperreal are also read as *at the limits* of the postcolonial.

In reading contemporary Australian and Latin American poetry as a productive site for postcolonial and hyperreal analyses, this dissertation also seeks to test the limits of poetics as a creative, individual, national and political sphere. Often politically activist and analytically astute, Australian poetry must nonetheless contend with its marginalisation—both within the literary marketplace and within Australian cultural production—and thus with the uncertainty of its diminishing

readership. In contrast, the *milieu* of Latin American poetry is one of individual and national importance. Historically tied to both the *avant garde* and the elite sectors of Latin American society, Latin American poetry has been associated with both nationalism and revolution and is arguably received as highly political.<sup>31</sup>

The theoretical interrogations of this dissertation revolve around contemporary postcoloniality and imperialism, particularly as these systems impact upon Australia and its poetry. The fundamental investigation of this dissertation, therefore, is concerned with how Australia is *limited* by postcoloniality—in its disciplinary and carceral culture, its psychosocial unhomeliness and oppression, its restricted theoretical understanding of imperialism—and how Australia might *extend the limits* of its postcoloniality—by engaging with the hyperreal, by critiquing neo-imperialisms, by reinterpreting and reinscribing “official” history. The inclusion of hyperreal and Latin American theories is thus designed encourage the negotiation of farther limits as a way of emphasising the transnational potentiality of Australia.

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<sup>31</sup> See Quiroga for a helpful outline of contemporary Latin American poetry and its social functions.

PART ONE: AUSTRALIA

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**The Postcolonial at the Limits of the  
Hyperreal.**

## Articulating Australia.

### Foreword: At the Limits.

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This dissertation offers a critical account of contemporary Australian poetry (particularly that written after the “Generation of ’68”). Expanding the theoretical category of the postcolonial, it embraces *both* the specifics of Australian settler colonial history and contemporary hyperreal manifestations of postcolonial identity discourses in Australian poetry. One of the ways in which Australian postcoloniality is renegotiated here, therefore, is by its interaction with Baudrillard’s concepts of hyperreality. The hyperreal is *introduced* into the postcolonial in this chapter, primarily via the structuring of these theoretical discourses as limit-points for an understanding of Australian nation-space. As such, this chapter is divided into two sections, “At the Limits of the Postcolonial” and “At the Limits of the Hyperreal”, which each refer to Australia as a liminal and ironically productive border space.

My intention here is to approach Australian postcoloniality as a theoretical territory that requires continual (un)mapping. One of the questions I pose, therefore, is how Australian poets communicate postcoloniality both within and *beyond* material historicism and beyond the limits of the “real”. Hence, the poetry of Lionel Fogarty, Robert Adamson, John Forbes and Kevin Hart is read within the context of the continuing legacy of (settler) colonialism in Australia, examining it as it pertains to *simulations* of culture and democracy in this country. As this chapter demonstrates, these simulations refer to a *border neurosis* which is distinctive, but not exclusive to postcolonial Australia.

Fogarty’s poetry presents a starting point for the ongoing discussion in this dissertation of the range of functions and receptions of contemporary Indigenous Australian poetries—an area of publication that has noticeably grown over the last 50 years but that requires much more detailed scholarship. Consequently, I aim to



pursue an analysis of Indigenous poetics beyond their circumscription within purely oppositional politics, into their engagement with complicated junctures of identity, nation and representation.

As Anglo-Australian poets/critics of Australia's tense and problematic relation to postcoloniality, Adamson and Hart, in very different ways, take on the problem of what I term Australia's "island consciousness", which they relate to simulations of Australia as estranged colony, as "white outpost", as carceral detention centre. In the texts of Adamson and Hart, Australia's postcoloniality is burdened with its settler colonialism, which translates as an unresolved and often repressive part of the Anglo-Australian psyche. Responding to this, their poetry depicts the neo-colonial and psychosocial effects of Australian postcoloniality.

As a new (and perhaps unexpected) territory for the hyperreal, the cultural text "Australia" is also examined here in its hyperreal relation to, and distancing from, its political and historical character. Although not traditionally recognised in their work, hyperreality is engaged with here in the poetry of Forbes and Hart, a hyperreality that underscores their poetics, but remains just beyond the reach of nomenclature. Within their texts, it is possible to find articulations of a virtual simulacrum Australia governed by a "hyperreal politik". Further, Forbes and Hart reveal, through their poetry, the *investment* of Australian politics in the hyperreal, and more crucially, how Australia's neo-colonial political effects can be read as functions of its hyperrealism. Hyperreality becomes an ambivalent limit-space in relation to Australian postcoloniality, therefore, as these poets critique its influential role in politics, but also co-opt its language and mechanisms in their poetics.

Ultimately, this chapter is an (un)mapping of the limits of Australia (as these are inscribed in Australian poetry) and, as such, is positioned as a starting point to the ensuing comparative analyses of Australia and its literature within transnational postcolonial contexts.

## 1.1 At the Limits of the Postcolonial.

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What are the active limits of Australian postcoloniality, as these limits manifest in the poetry of Fogarty and Adamson? These poets, among many others, pursue an engagement with contemporary postcolonial politics in Australia which expands postcoloniality beyond its current delineation in theory.

The poetry of Fogarty and Adamson depicts Australian postcoloniality as a *psycho-geographical* predicament which pervades cultural constructions of Australianness and temporal constructions of national (and local) history and progress. Both poets' work is informed by an understanding of Australia as *colonially inscribed*—where a contemporary paranoiac nationalism sits alongside the older cultural anxiety generated by an “island consciousness” of Australia as isolated and singular. These poets also reflect on how Australian postcolonial poetry is itself a limit-space, preoccupied with a notion of belonging that Australian subjects often cannot access.

This poetry leads the reader to question how the category “Australian” tests the category “postcolonial”. As such, it provides one response to A. L. McCann's challenge to foreground the urgency of an *informed*, “radical” postcoloniality in Australian literature:

Today a radical literature in Australia would consist partly in exploding the possibility of those transferences between historical catastrophe and aesthetic gratification (however ambiguous), and generating forms of writing in which notions of Anglo-Australian belonging—nation, landscape, the literature of the soil—are clearly identified as belonging to the toxic legacy of colonialism... (54)

As a move away from the “landscape, rural and pastoral models” that John Kinsella aligns with Australian poetry (*Landbridge* 18), and far from the Anglo-Australian historical epics that McCann critiques, the poetry of Fogarty and Adamson charts *political* and *cultural* landscapes, and is underwritten with a knowledge of this “toxic legacy of colonialism”.

### 1.1.1 Lionel Fogarty & “the madly stretched endurance”.

Fogarty is a highly political modern songmaker whose Aboriginality informs both the freedom fighter's response to assimilation and the artist's quest to distance himself from the “imported” literary traditions. a reversed colonisation of language and form blanks the literary page ideologically and creates autonomy. Fogarty simply refused to make his

lyrics conform to semantic conventions and linear syntax, the linguistic mercenaries of white imperialism.

—Eva Rask Knudsen (*Fringe* 3)

As a frontier zone, Aboriginal writing is marked on a number of levels as a place where persistent contests are waged over *who controls* the relationship between Aboriginality and textuality, and who defines the effects of this relationship on how we understand Aboriginality in relation to modernity and literacy more generally.

—Michele Grossman (*Bad* 153)

Perhaps as an indicator of its entanglement with the premises of colonialism, premises that it attempts to deconstruct, postcolonial criticism often ironically reverts to the Manichean fundamentals of colonialism in its language. The epigraphs above mark out this phenomenon inasmuch as they skirt around these discourses, where the language of black and white and of oppositions more generally, continues to be associated exclusively with Indigenous literatures in their relation to postcolonial Australia. Without undermining the larger projects of either Rask Knudsen or Grossman, it is interesting to note how their critiques reflect the polarisation of Australian Indigeneity whilst their polemic seeks to write against this. Hence, for Rask Knudsen, Lionel Fogarty represents the Indigene opposed (as “freedom fighter”) to “‘imported’ literary traditions”. According to Rask Knudsen, his is a project of “reversed colonisation” (rather than a re-imagined political alternative to an imperial/anti-imperial model) which “simply refuses” conformity to “conventions” (rather than problematising these). Furthermore, Rask Knudsen’s syntax suggests that Fogarty’s presence as Aboriginal poet *magnifies* whiteness, such that his work “blanks the literary page”, opposing (in the manner of war suggested) “the linguistic mercenaries of white imperialism”. That final tautological reference to a “white imperialism” underlines the structural and rhetorical way in which such criticism sits alongside, but misses, an arguably more poststructural and oblique poetics such as Fogarty’s.

It is just such rhetoric that Jack Davis takes on and redefines in his introduction to *Paperbark: a Collection of Black Australian Writings*, where he states:

this collection makes no claim for an Aboriginal literary aesthetic divorced from rhetorical writing. Its aesthetic, if anything, lies in the force of the political statements that it makes, a force which makes much Australian fiction look tame and parochial by comparison (2).

“Rhetorical writing” itself, this extract suggests an elision of aesthetics and politics, and highlights the essentialism and polarising vocabulary of Rask Knudsen, whilst explicitly claiming a negotiation of the rhetorical as embracing the political. As Davis suggests, there are certainly varying strengths of overt political force surging through Indigenous writing in Australia. Obversely, to curtail this work to a project that is only empty rhetoric—without a political aesthetic—is to disallow the slippages between politics and spirituality, aesthetics and syntax. Hence, for Davis, “rhetorical writing” bridges art and politics, providing a counterpoint to (but also engaging with) Australian writing generally. In its widening of the political and the aesthetic, Davis’ project highlights the poverty of other recent criticism of Australian Indigenous poetry, which often falls back on worn-out stereotypes with a kind of penitent political correctness.

Situating Fogarty’s poetics as “anti-colonial” (45) and “unassimilated” (46) Sabina Paula Hopfer exercises exactly this type of polarising criticism in her article “Re-reading Lionel Fogarty: an attempt to feel into texts speaking of decolonisation”. As her title suggests, Hopfer’s critical position appears to be one of sympathetic/emotive association, particularly where she separates black writer from white reader, claiming that:

The challenge for any critic lies in making visible the value of a writer who, with a unique style, forces us to feel rather than intellectually grasp what it means to be an Indigenous person in Australia (46).

Judging from this audacious and anti-academic assertion, it would seem that Hopfer’s reading of Fogarty is more simply designed as a reading of *any* Indigenous Australian writer, for the purposes of a psychological/emotional reconciliation of the white reader with their *own* conscience, or, as Hopfer has it, an orchestrated “making visible [of] the value” of these texts, which (as cleansing or catharsis) “forces us to feel”. As I will demonstrate, Fogarty’s poetics do not sit easily alongside prescriptions such as these, which often seek to *resolve* the complexity of Fogarty’s work by subordinating his multifaceted endeavours to the hegemonic codes of white reader sympathy. To this end, Hopfer levels Fogarty’s distinctive prose structuring (which could be considered an entry into *many* canons—for instance, as a counterpoint to the similarly postmodern work of L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E poets, or in dialogue with the creolising texts of contemporary Caribbean poetry), and is willing to make sense of it only through the frameworks

of a realist narrative and/or a pre-Modernist, traditional prose. Hopfer's essentialising claim is that:

The words pound down on the non-Indigenous reader like hail stones, so that the reading experience is one of complete exhaustion and despair... [But that, luckily for her white reader] Fogarty's latest poems show a refined style in achieving a harmony between complexity and straightforwardness (47).

Where she cannot locate this "straightforwardness", Hopfer instead opts for some kind of postcolonial, post-reconciliatory critical Corroboree, in which she situates Fogarty's work within the safely stereotypical realm of Indigenous spiritualism. As such, rather than attending to the often agonistic and uneasy juxtapositions in his texts, or to the detailed deconstructions of linear temporality (both of which will be discussed in my analysis here), Hopfer instead constructs Fogarty *reductively* as "songman", a construction that diverges from his attenuated recognition as "songman" in his own community, as it is overwritten in Hopfer's work with a dangerously primitivising gesture in her overt refusal of the intellectual register:

Rather than following Standard English syntax and word order, Fogarty develops what might be called a ceremonial kind of syntax that reflects a revolving and dancing around words. Indigenous dancing is acted out in his writing (48).

As Other to both English and intellectual pursuits here, Fogarty is thus limited to articulating what Hopfer calls "a singing and dancing spirit" (55) as his only avenue to an anti-colonialism where "we can almost feel the stamping on the ground" (56). After Hopfer's evaluation, then, Indigenous poetries not only present limits to Australian postcoloniality, but are also *categorically* limited by contemporary criticism.

Departing from the dangers of such essentialising criticism, Grossman, like Davis, employs the oppositional language of black and white politics in Australia with a strategic irony, and is hence subtler and more nuanced in her analysis than Hopfer. In her evaluation of contemporary literature (in the epigraph above), Aboriginal writing nevertheless forms the fringe to the mainstream white culture. Accordingly, in its maximal agency it is merely a "frontier zone" (rather than having a centrality of its own) and is "marked" by power struggles (suggested by the colonial inference of "*who controls*" and "who defines"), as the territory of battle. However, Grossman's claims are posited as evaluations of the contemporary climate of Australian literature and its criticism, and hence

inevitably *reflect* the essentialising tendencies of critics and readers, rather than simply assuming and promulgating these.

Notwithstanding the fact that commentaries such as those of Rask Knudsen, Davis, Hopfer and Grossman helpfully outline a climate of traditionally oppositional postcolonial politics in Australia, what is pertinent about these debates is how they structure Australia *vis-à-vis* its postcoloniality. Given the emphasis on the “frontier” and the “fringe” in relation to Indigeneity, and the nearness of the postcolonial to the colonial in these accounts, it follows that Indigenous Australian poetics are implicated in a number of the limits of Australian postcoloniality. Indeed, as Davis infers, the occupation of limit spaces is part of a particularly hybridising and deconstructive force within Indigenous poetics (an inference that is echoed by Colin Johnson in his *Writing from the Fringe*). As limit-functions, the reception of this work obviously engenders a “limit consciousness”, where these poetics are registered primarily as oppositional practices (and are sometimes markedly othered, as in Hopfer’s work). Secondly, as an object of study, Indigenous poetry circumscribes postcoloniality, in the sense that it foregrounds the conceptual heritage of postcolonial critique as at times systematically oppositional, at others retrogressive. Furthermore, as Fogarty’s work demonstrates, Indigenous poetics can *exceed* the postcolonial by trespassing across some of its established borders and by evading its traditional classifications. In this sense, Fogarty’s “Farewell Reverberated Vault of Detentions” (P. Porter 266) can be read as *activating* the limits of Australian postcoloniality.

In this poem, Fogarty clearly constructs the present as a force which (in a symbolic sense) overrides the injustices of colonialism by invoking the precolonial as well as a revolutionary future utopia. Hence, most lines start with “today” or “tonight”, a temporal emphasis that reinforces and amplifies this present. As Rask Knudsen points out (and Grossman alludes to) there is clearly an oppositional narrative in this poem. Demonstrating this, Fogarty’s utopia is laced with a rejection of colonial violence (as the product of the devil), as in the opening lines:

Today up home my people are  
indeedly beautifully smiling  
for the devil’s sweeten words are

gone (266).

Here, rather than exiting from “Standard English” by not measuring up to it, I would argue that Fogarty *exceeds* and *amplifies* the English language, giving its adverbs and adjectives extended effect (and giving his Indigenous subjects a fullness of character, brimming with this excess) as he alters their endings: “indeedly”. The characterisation of English hegemony as “the devil’s sweeten words” also cleverly locates colonialism and imperialism as *functions of language*—a situation which his own potentially “sweeten words” combat and redeploy.

As Johnson argues, Fogarty’s reinterpretation of English language is crucial to his representation and deconstruction of a “clash of cultures”:

In Lionel Fogarty’s verse, time is even more disrupted in the deliberate misuse of verb tenses. Tenses are ideological in that they mark out the time model used by a particular language group, and when two language groups collide there are grammatical problems reflecting the collision of different ideologies (*Writing* 172).

In what we might call this “violent linguistic hybridity”<sup>1</sup> marked out by Johnson, Fogarty’s manipulation of verb tenses, adverbs and adjectives significantly stretches the boundaries of temporality, suggesting that there can be no absolute, hegemonic linear teleology. So, as Johnson suggests, colonial history is subtly and cleverly negotiated by Fogarty, in the deconstructive probing of his refashioned grammar. For instance, there is something almost genteel in his construction “indeedly beautifully”, perhaps an audible echo or parody of Imperial, refined English. Where “the devil” is read as Empire, therefore, Fogarty does not allow this to be *purely* an historical characterisation. Rather, as in the excerpt above, “the devil” and its “sweeten words” are both derided and repeated by the Indigenous voice, evidence of the residue of McCann’s “toxic legacy” in contemporary poetry.

Whilst colonialism begins as a thematic inference in the lines above, elsewhere Fogarty makes more blatant references to this history, as he packages the present as a series of negations:

Tonight my peoples sleep  
without a tang of fear  
No paralysed minds

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<sup>1</sup> Other alternative models of hybridity such as Moreiras’ interpretation of Bhabha’s “savage hybridity” are discussed in 4.2.

No numbed bodies  
 No pierced hearts hurt  
 The screams of madness ends  
 The madly stretched endurance  
 are resisted with Murri faith (266)

Imbricating the colonial and postcolonial here, Fogarty manipulates plurals, representing Indigenous Australia as a compound counterpoint to monolithic white culture and history. As such, he highlights the many Indigenous nations in Australia—“my peoples”—but also fractures the effects of colonialism—“the screams of madness ends”—as both a communal and diversified individual suffering.

This fracturing of a monolithic colonialism can also be read in Fogarty’s more recent 2002 poem “Embassy” (69-74). In this poem, colonialism is constructed as an imposition, a complication, but mostly chaotic ruination. Fogarty separates the devastating finality of colonisation (which has a continuing trajectory)—“Navigable continent colonists still solitude / our death”—from the haphazard barbarity of this same colonialism—“Every navigable land been thrown / overboard by the hands / of a no body geographics / Wasting hastening seeps cold for the bold” (70-1). As can be seen in these excerpts, postcolonialism is imbued with the hypocrisy of continual oppression of Indigenous Australians (most devastatingly in the allusion to solitary deaths in custody as “still solitude”), as well as the potential for neo-colonialism in the continued trajectory of the colonising mission (and here the allusion to the ideological link between settler colonisation and the Tampa scandal of 2001 is most persuasive).<sup>2</sup>

Fogarty’s intensive complications of the (post)colonial in his poetry are brought into dialogue with his articulations of various modes of Indigeneity. Often, as in “Farewell Reverberated Vault of Detentions”, these Indigeneities are constructed as direct responses to colonial history, in the manner of what Fogarty terms “neo neo autonomy blackfellas returns” (“Embassy” 71), as in the following lines:

Our desires ain’t dying in pitifully  
 lusting over contempt and condition  
 [...]

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<sup>2</sup> Felicity Plunket’s analysis of Fogarty’s poetics is analogous, as she outlines Fogarty’s complex invocation of contemporary politics via his deconstructive mode: “Meaning flies in on the backs of words which look askew, yet narrate stories we do know, though they are wiped regularly from the record” (*Bone* 12).



Today my people have a Murri  
 Thirtieth Century culture  
 but with care safe and snarls (266)

Along with refrains of an oppositional identity politics, however, Fogarty's poetic praxis suggests a more complex engagement with this ideological impasse. Creating what some would dismiss as a utopian, revisionist answer to Australian history—"And my people never / wants to escalating barbarous century" (266)—Fogarty employs the *precolonial* as the antidote to the (post)colonial. His poem turns on the declaration: "Tonight overturned hells / brang surface innocent olds" (266), which itself implies a past permeating the present. In line with this reordering temporality, Fogarty overwrites European-Australian history with Indigenous histories. In the following lines, his rhetoric suggests a remobilisation of stereotypes—a "strategic essentialism" that reclaims and reworks the political position of primitivism:

The enchantingly lonely  
 pains by white constipations  
 are pushed gaped nailed by  
 our emerging loves for  
 primitive's potentials (266).

The language of physical struggle in these lines, which are propelled by Fogarty's insistently obstructionist verbs—"pushed gaped nailed"—as well as the inference of a blocked, limited and incompetent (physicality of) colonialism—the "white constipation"—argue for an understanding of postcolonialism as *inherently* difficult, as limited. This difficulty is configured by Fogarty as the presence of that *other* stereotype of Indigeneity (promoted in early Eurocentric discourse): the Romanticised, passive native. Hence, "The enchantingly lonely / pains" must be overcome by "primitive's potentials" in Fogarty's redressing of models of Indigenous identity.

Consonant with this project, the Dreaming appropriately supersedes the shocks of Australian colonial history, rendering the postcolonial as both redundant as a precondition to the future, and newly redefined as a condition that is a-temporal (or at least temporally complicated):

Tonight my people don't wait  
 for successions of society  
 But yell, sing the souls to  
 our endless dreaming (266)

Just like Fogarty's poem, the actions of yelling and singing here are imbricated in a creative project whose function is to *bring about* the utopic present-future—thus a complex and intellectualised position. It is significant that this present-future harnesses invocations of the past (in the form of the Dreaming) as not merely a material history but a sacred history that transcends Official History. Unseating postcoloniality from its moorings in materialist and linear historicism, Fogarty invokes paradisaical landscapes of “quenching the waters”, “eating delicious / rare food of long ago” and “a dance of leisuring enjoyment” (266) as the alternative topography to history.

As such, the title “Farewell Reverberated Vault of Detentions” dismisses the position of strategic victimhood in characterisations of Indigeneity (and subalternity more generally) and also throws the charge of “vault of detentions” against the cultural landscape of Australia, as its colonial signature. The juxtaposition of Fogarty's title and his content are here emblematic of the limit-space that this poem traverses, as it charts Indigeneity as the space of communal utopia as much as communal oppression. Fogarty's choice of title therefore emphasises the perseverance of the colonial in the postcolonial, but also declares a post-coloniality of its own. In this sense, Hopfer's absurd suggestion that: “Metaphorically speaking, the author needs to tear off his white mask...if he wishes to be reconciled with the land” (54) appears as a gross simplification of Fogarty's complex poetics. Perhaps as a response to aestheticising and superficial suggestions such as Hopfer's, Fogarty presents an alternative strategy in “Embassy”, in his utilisation of the term “ravelling”:

I ravelling in another lands people  
sparkling thoughts struck minds  
[...]  
I ravelling in your white land  
was too fast            too slow  
and massed to closed states (69)

Anti-federation, post-colonial and trans-geographical, Fogarty's subject here decisively imbricates Indigeneity *into* and *out of* white territorialism. Rather than representing the “reconciliation with the land” that Hopfer calls for (a loaded term in her context), this “ravelling” is more a disjunctive and activist objection to Australian territory as it is colonially inscribed.

Thus, it is with an ironic and tense sense of security that Fogarty claims a *central* space for Indigeneity in “Farewell Reverberated Vault of Detentions”—a terrain that is shaped by a cyclic model of civilisation as an ongoing process, where “Today my people feel precious as/ human beings burial and birth” and which is reinforced with the surety of the birthright:

Certainly my people are god given  
a birthright of wise men and women  
Our country is still our Motherland (266)

It is not surprising, given the narrative of communal utopia here, that critics such as Rask Knudsen identify Fogarty as “freedom fighter” (3). Advocating a strong sense of belonging built around country, kinship and sacredness—the signifiers for which are the god, the birthright and the Motherland in the lines quoted above—Fogarty resists partaking in dominant Australian discourses of nation, minority and denial. Reinforced by this belonging, Fogarty’s articulation of freedom in this poem is *already claimed*—“For now Today up home they free”—and sits alongside the (absence of the) struggle, as it is located “where no violence fights stirs”. Given this deconstructive premise, it is difficult to marry Fogarty’s complex poetics in this poem (where the temporal/historical register is problematised and deconstructed) with contentions such as Adam Shoemaker’s, which locate his work within a purely anti-colonial resistance, rather than a space beyond this: “The underlying principle of Fogarty’s “spoken” writing is undeniably a political one, supporting the Black Australian struggle for thoroughgoing autonomy” (*Black* 221). Whereas, for Shoemaker, the political represents a staunch (anti-colonial) activism, for Fogarty, the political is joined with the poetic and the imaginary also.

The “autonomy” that Shoemaker speaks of—which is obviously related to Rask Knudsen’s “freedom fighting”—is not presented by Fogarty in “Farewell Reverberated Vault of Detentions” as a direct *opposition* to Australian colonial history. Rather (as his privileging of gerunds and widening of the present suggests), this autonomy is characterised by a transhistorical agency—poetically, imaginatively, politically—that challenges the ideological strength of the colonial/postcolonial binary paradigm. Perhaps, as Fogarty seems to suggest, Australian Indigeneity can instead derive its complex political agency from his “madly stretched endurance”, where coloniality is “resisted with Murri faith”.

Against the “singing and dancing” advocated by Hopfer as Fogarty’s role, he suggests a much more intellectualised pursuit in carrying out this “endurance”. His is a *thinking* activism, an intellectual solidarity, as he communicates in “Embassy”: “Brains are protocols in memory we must / gather even the ungatherers” (70). Citing memory and critical thought as “protocols”, Fogarty evidences a self-reflexiveness shared by other Australian poetry, as it processes the influence of coloniality in postcoloniality. Robert Adamson can also be read as a collaborator in this discursive practice.

### 1.1.2 Robert Adamson: Australia & Island Consciousness.

Contrary to conventional belief, Australia is not an island—it’s an archipelago, culturally porous and edgeless. The Australian government has recently placed much emphasis on the notion of “border protection”, because it knows that the nation consists, in effect, of a handful of islands—Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Tasmania—each approachable from any number of directions and each engaging in its own internal and external commerce.

—John Mateer (*Australia* 89)

And her five cities, like five teeming sores,  
Each drains her: a vast parasite robber-state  
Where second-hand Europeans pullulate  
Timidly on the edge of alien shores.  
—A.D Hope (“Australia”, Tranter & Mead 16)

Working the ironic mode favoured in much contemporary Australian poetry, Robert Adamson satirises and shares in an “island consciousness” that characterises Australia in many cultural discourses. Hence, like A.D Hope before him, Adamson demonstrates his awareness of what we could call, after Judith Wright, *another* of Australia’s “double aspects” (qtd. in Goodwin & Lawson 351)—namely, the simultaneity of the island and the archipelago, or (in cruder terms) the hegemonic contestation of land and sea. The perplexity with which white settler Australians (and their descendents) deal with the concept of Australian borders reifies Australia as distinctly *colonially inscribed*. The cultural and political legacy of (settler and other) coloniality—specifically its inscription into national mythologies and the “national psyche”—is a crucial area through which postcolonial theory can illuminate contemporary neo-colonialisms, as well as

engaging with the construction of the “nation” in (post)colonial societies such as Australia.

As Hope’s and Mateer’s epigraphs attest, the Australian nation-space is overwritten with psycho-geographical aporia, which haunt the prose of much Australian writing. In comparison to Fogarty’s utopic deep resources in Indigenous Dreaming and facilitating of a continuous history, in Hope’s and Mateer’s estimates, postcolonial (Anglo)Australia is irrevocably fractured—diseased by colonialism and populated by alien races whose response to their displacement is a paranoiac nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

Robert Adamson’s “Not a Penny Sonnets” (Craven 61-2) deploys the Australian poetry scene as one microcosm of the nation, exposing an “island consciousness” in its practitioners and revealing Australian poetry as restricted by a suffocating parochialism. The interweaving of nation and poetry in Adamson’s framework presents an evident complication, however. Beyond a simple argument for the pervasiveness of “island consciousness” in Australia and in its cultural industries, Adamson also depicts the *distancing* of poetry from the national (cultural) agenda—in other words, its retraction into yet *another* secluded island space. To this end, poet Alan Gould’s recent unequivocal declaration is pertinent: “Poetry’s negligible place in the national psyche is incontrovertible” (6).

Adamson’s repetition of the sonnet form in this poem signals other repetitions of models of the contemporary Australian poetry scene. The strongly cynical narrator of “Not a Penny Sonnets”, characterised as a struggling Australian poet, judges poetry not as the lofty art of the sonnet, but as a rehearsal of modes—poetic, public, private, literary and ideological—which are inevitably meaningless, caught in the trap of language: “I’m talking hard but nothing seems to grip” (61). Hence, as David McCooley argues (perhaps by way of charting the movement of Australian poetry beyond modernism): “Adamson, like Hart, is concerned with the fictiveness of his art, with the impossibility of rendering the thing itself” (*Opaque* 46). If read as emblematic of Australian national identity, Adamson’s poetry alludes to an arrested development, an inability to finally articulate, which can refer to both the nation and its cultural products. Perhaps, therefore, it is the

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<sup>3</sup> This notion of contemporary (Anglo)Australian identity as anxious and paranoid (to be discussed further here in 1.2.2 in relation to Kevin Hart’s work) is taken up by a number of theorists, most notably Gassan Hage in his *Against Paranoid Nationalism* (2003).

national (or at least collective) context which precludes the individual's communication here. Where art crosses over into politics, therefore, both fields are imbued with restrictiveness and anxiety. This unease is inevitably projected onto the Australian landscape (as island) in "Not a Penny Sonnets", as the narrator charts an entrapment in the cultural context of Australian poetry.

Disillusionment and hopelessness are alluring to Adamson's narrator, who increasingly dissolves into self-pity and indulgence:

We've been looking at the edge for three decades,  
drinking hard, so we had something to blame,  
...  
I've nothing left, not a penny to my name—just references,  
living on Smith's Chips and lemonade (62).

This abject narrator, who is as preoccupied with the border, "the edge", (as are contemporary conservative politicians, according to Mateer) locates his/her calamity as a consequence of a repressed displacement. The vulnerability of "looking at the edge" and its juxtaposition with "drinking hard" epitomise the sense of repression here, as these castaways seemingly avoid an acknowledgement of their perdition. The admission "I've nothing left, not a penny to my name—just references" operates as both a criticism of Australian literature as marginalised and unsupported, and as a suggestion that the subject here is divorced from ancestry. Dispossessed of homeland and finance, Adamson's narrator (and the other subjects referred to) are tagged with the repeated description of their "separate skins" and are thus devoid of community, surrounded by both "enemies and friends" (62). The communal utopia of Fogarty's poetry, with its images of shared dance and song, seems indeed utopic in this context. Here, instead, Adamson's lost characters justify Hope's earlier cultural diagnosis, becoming the "second-hand Europeans [who] pullulate / Timidly on the edge of alien shores" (16).

Following Daniel Nourry, Hope's and Adamson's observations of Australian postcolonial identity are symptomatic of white Australia's convict origins. Nourry proposes convict displacement (our first European-Australian diaspora) as pivotal to contemporary identity politics:

It is this excising, this mark of subordination, that marks this space in imaginary terms and I argue is the traumatic condition of possibility or

the negative moment that the new national imaginary seeks to overcome (378).

Whilst the singularity and vagueness of Nourry's "new national imaginary" is problematic, his suggestion of Australian identity as premised on lack and displacement is analogous to the claim I am making for Adamson's "island consciousness". In "Not a Penny Sonnets", Adamson transposes this displacement from the nation to its poetry community, which is aligned with Nourry's argument for the displaced nation and its negative, if repressed, association with its own identity.

The devotion of three sonnets to the satirical derision of the Australian poetry scene is a very strange (anti)nationalist output, ironically chosen for *The Best Australian Poems 2003*. However, beneath the apparent disheartenment with an environment ranging from "The book launch, with plates of water biscuits" (61) to "Believing nothing, especially the way we feel" (62), there is a curious celebration of this abnegating life—or perhaps the fact that such scarecrows reveal the poverty of current public and politicised images of Australia as pragmatic, nationalist, hegemonic, refusing self-critique.<sup>4</sup> For instance, there is a considered and self-conscious recklessness about "...enjoying some anti-fashion / with enemies and friends" and the closure of the ensuing "then walk out onto the street and breathe the city in" (62). The ironic reference to the polluted city as fresh air gives a sense of both the underground element of the contemporary Australian poetry community as marginal, as well as the self-awareness of its members. Hence, for Adamson, the intrinsic *difficulties* in the status of Australian poet take precedence over any project to glorify the art, or, in McCooey's terms:

...this is not simply passive husbandry of a great tradition. It is—as the epistolary poems illustrate—a dialogue, which is in turn a self-dialogue. Fashioning poetic identity, then, isn't distinct from fashioning personal identity, an equally important theme in Adamson's work (*Opaque* 46).

However, to depart from McCooey's emphasis on the personal, the "dialogue" that Adamson facilitates in his poetry is also importantly public and political. If we read Adamson's "Not a Penny Sonnets" as representative of Australian postcolonial identity at large, specifically that of Anglo-Australians, (to take McCooey's lead) the empty scenery, the aesthetic of banality and the disbelief

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<sup>4</sup> The clubbiness and insularity of Adamson's poet characters also works as a strategy, answering back to the insularity of the nation, its promotion of homogeneity—a response that replaces this homogeneity with the poets' own form of exclusivity.

encapsulated in the book launch work as referents of a community disconnected from itself. Hence, the “self-dialogue” that McCooey registers in Adamson’s work becomes another representation of “island consciousness”, a descriptor of the insularity attending the cultural in Australia. Adamson’s scenery is revealing for its absence of a tradition of poetry as *culturally respected* and as a part of public discourse that is listened to—as a cultural scene akin to Fogarty’s communal celebration. Rather than *bringing about* a (symbolic) utopia, as Fogarty does, Adamson instead laments the individual’s demise within the hollow shell of communal identity in this scene—perhaps an echo of the earlier “cultural cringe”.

Adamson describes a routine existence in “Not a Penny Sonnets”—the compulsive repetition of “digging our biros in”; the flippant distribution of references to “old affections”; the routine of the hasty “reading aloud”, “using our wits” and “making quips”; and of course the evocative “We keep / splicing letters into words, our defence” (61)—which illuminates, by inference, a society that functions on empty gestures. As a representation of Anglo-Australia, therefore, these operational, distancing mechanisms characterise a society that runs on convention, but that satirises this also. As a strategy of border protection, the curtailment of language here (which in turn limits the individual and communication) marks out the boundaries of the social.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, it is not difficult to make the jump between Adamson’s subjects (poetry, the individual and culture)—to a reading of “Not a Penny Sonnets” as an argument for a nation constrained by its own uneasy settlement. In other words, Adamson describes a cultural sphere that *simulates* the cultural (the old European model of the “men of letters”) in order to escape the revelation of what Mateer claims as a “culturally porous” nation. Adamson’s final couplet completes the picture of the estranged colony; the “white outpost”:

Where’s the club sandwich now? The life we mocked  
surrounds us, we’re distracted but the tide keeps coming in (62).

The sense here of being slowly engulfed by approaching inevitability (the tide) signifies the Anglo-Australian anxiety embedded in contemporary postcolonial Australia. Here too, is an “island consciousness”, with its ocean metaphor, where the *urban* landscapes of Australia (which are both the internal[ised] sites of the

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere, and in relation to the politics of enunciation discussed in the Introduction, language is posited as a charged postcolonial site, which is potentially driven by colonialism and imperialism. See Talib, Chambers (*Migrancy* 67-91) and Fraser (11-24).



nation as well as its ports) replace its seascapes as borders. As such, Adamson ironically participates in Mateer's articulation of archipelagos—fashioning the Australian city as the locus of its internal and external fragmentation and isolation.

Many islands pervade the verses of “Not a Penny Sonnets”, finding expression in Adamson's enclosed spaces (the page, the bar, the poetry recital, the bus) and his border-fixated spatial metaphors (the audience, the road, the edge) which strengthen the divide between a definite “us” and “them”. In this sense, the realisation: “We walked into an illuminated page” is telling, for its allusion to what is painted—the exclusionary, excluded and outmoded nature of writing poetry in Australia. Even the narrator is an island, confessing to a total segregation from conversation, with the very programmatic: “I've written my response before you even speak.” (61). The “club”, therefore, is merely a ruse or a memory, only supporting the individual in the manner of plates of water biscuits—not a nourishing society (such as Fogarty's), but a site for the “porous”, into which the individuals insert their programmatic, empty response. Ultimately, the human subjects in this poem are as “porous” and “edgeless” as Mateer's Australia, as “limping figures dressed in skin” (62).

In the end, the Australian poetry scene is markedly reduced to the *personal* and the subjective in “Not a Penny Sonnets”, even as it is meant to refer to a tribe. Adamson's collection of sonnets is an island also (albeit an archipelago). The target audience is clearly not the world, or even the Pacific region, but a distinct group of fellow poets and enthusiasts, a ragged tribe, who register the cultural codes of Toranas and water biscuits (in their hybridised Anglo-Australianness); and fellow poet Gig Ryan, to whom the poem is addressed and with whom the poem converses subtly, in the manner of Adamson's “response before you even speak”.

As Adamson demonstrates, therefore, Australian poetry—as contested terrain, as insular society, as underwritten with unease and satire—speaks both *of* and *to* Australian postcoloniality. Exhibiting a particularly Anglo-Australian “island consciousness”, poetry such as Adamson's represents Australia's unresolved postcoloniality, as much as it critiques (in the demise of Australian poetry) the attendant cultural nationalism.

## 1.2 At the Limits of the Hyperreal.

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The context of an arguably complicated relationship to postcoloniality—where coloniality as history and imaginary invades the temporal, psychological and symbolic registers of Australian identity, abetting a deconstructed sense of individual and national selves—often engenders striking departures from realism and materialism in Australian poetry. Thus, there is much evidence in contemporary Australian poetry for the growing tradition of what we could term a *hyperreal poetics*. Beyond being simply an aesthetic reaction to a body of theory that is undeniably poetic itself—in that Baudrillard’s prose is constantly furnished with statements such as “Simulation is the ecstasy of the real” (Poster, *Jean* 187)—this poetry thematises hyperreality because of the convincingly hyperreal nature of contemporary Australia.

Akin to Adamson’s revealing of the underbelly and the impoverishment of the arts in Australia and the pervasiveness of “island consciousness”, John Forbes and Kevin Hart reveal that Australian culture can be read as a *virtual realm*; as housing a predominantly *aestheticised* politics; and as a *simulated democracy*. Within these confines, Australia conforms to a society of the “third order”, in which, as Baudrillard outlines, “the whole edifice of representation itself” becomes a simulacrum:

Such would be the successive phases of the image:  
 it is the reflection of a profound reality;  
 it masks and denatures a profound reality;  
 it masks the *absence* of a profound reality;  
 it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum  
 (*Simulacra* 6).

If considered under this descriptor of “pure simulacrum”, Australia figures in the work of these Anglo-Australian poets as variously carceral colony, provincial island and false paradise. In this way, the poetry of Forbes and Hart shares in the discourses of Australian postcoloniality that Fogarty and Adamson communicate. The nation is rendered as ironically unsettled and is presented as a simulation of (post)colonialism but with profoundly tangible neo-colonial effects.

### 1.2.1 John Forbes: *The Stunned Mullet* & the Hyperreal Politik.

Contemporary critique of representation, whether by Baudrillard or Rorty, aids and abets Forbes' poetics.

—Kevin Hart (*Open* 488)

Politics has stopped, aesthetics has stopped, and we have reached point zero for interpretation. The flight from meaning is complete.

—Stuart Sim (*Beyond* 133)

Forbes' "Watching the Treasurer" (*Stunned Mullet* 10) presents hyperreality as the obvious logic for 1986 Australia. Identity is fused to the multiple vortices of the simulacrum in this poem. Forbes laces up the lines of "Watching the Treasurer" with recognisable features of hyperreal simulacra, implicating poetry, politics and official national discourse as some of its major centres of simulation. Recognising Sim's "flight from meaning", Forbes deconstructs politics and aesthetics by submitting them to the simulacrum. As such, he declares the space of the *hyperreal politik*. Forbes situates his narrator as the advocate of hyperreality, performing a deconstruction of "truth" from the outset:

I want to believe the beautiful lies  
the past spreads out like a feast.

Television is full of them & inside  
their beauty you can act... (10)

As Martin Duwell argues, this kind of deconstruction is a Forbesian trait:

Forbes' poetry often takes as its raw material the beautiful truths which underlie and explain the details of the surface. But one feels that he wants to admit the impotence of such truths at the same time: as a late poem says, these are the truths that don't set us free (*Truth* 56).

As Duwell highlights (particularly by his emphasis on "beautiful truths" rather than Forbes' "beautiful lies") Forbes' work visits and revisits the slippage between truth and lie, associating this deconstruction with poetry perhaps as a way of revisiting and revising Keats' dictum in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know" (168).

Forbes cleverly alludes to Keats' chaste statement, particularly by his implicit reference to Keats in his subject: Paul Keating. Whether accidental or intentional, the echo of Keats in Keating makes for an interesting intertext in regard to Forbes' inversion of the truth/beauty dichotomy. This dichotomy, in fact, is

central to Alan Urquhart's analysis of Forbes' poem, where he draws connections between politician and poet, as the twin emphases of Forbes' characterisation:

Keating's "lie", if you like, is what liberates the "beauty" of the poem. The truth about Keating for Forbes, if you like, is that as a politician he was a beautiful liar; and his performance aspires to that of those other beautiful liars: the fictions of artists and poets (12).

Poetry, however, is not allowed a Keatsian space (with all of its Romanticist indulgences) in Forbes' poem. As the previous excerpt demonstrates, poetry takes as its object/context a newer media, in the form of the television. Hence, beyond the interplay between truth and lies in politics and poetry that Urquhart recognises, Forbes places deliberate emphasis on the teleportation of the poetic sphere into that of the virtual. His construction of Keating (as politician/public figure/poet) is thus *dependant* on the televisual context, which is rendered the *most* agential space for lies (or the deconstructions of truth) because "Television is full of them & inside / their beauty you can act" (10).

For Meaghan Morris, Forbes' poem presents a theoretical/generic dilemma in its blurring of the categorical lines between the written and the virtual. In her lengthy subjective analysis, Morris wants the poem to perform the double function of standing up as the poetic written text (for which Keats' earlier poetry is a predecessor) as well as the cultural text of the twentieth century, alive to its own construction. Morris moves between these readings, declaring that:

Writing [...] predominates in this poem: even the ampersands buttoning the narrative in place are vivid signs of Modern Poetry at its most scrupulously *written* (72)

but also insisting on the Forbesian slippage between writing and representation, in that:

the critical power of John Forbes' writing about Australian television culture has more to do with the way that a formal poetic "I" in his texts often struggles to articulate something which a vernacular, screen-wise "you" of his already quite casually knows (73).

What I wish to argue here, however, is that Forbes *frustrates* and *ironises* criticism such as Morris',<sup>6</sup> which presupposes a tenable separation of the literary and the virtual (or of poetry and visual media). Rather, Forbes' text is structured *beyond* this old divide, in an explicitly poststructural ideological field where the fertile

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<sup>6</sup> Analogously, Urquhart recognises Forbes' strategy as one of promoting "inscrutability": "Rather than reaching out to be found by the reader, the poems seem to be lost in their own cleverness and inscrutability" (9).

*crossings between* the literary and other aesthetics have more currency than their demarcation. A productive epistemology within which to interrogate and evaluate Forbes' position, therefore, is Baudrillard's hyperreal. Within these theoretical confines, the obfuscation of "the formal poetic 'I'" that Morris laments—which Urquhart terms Forbes' typical "disappearing subject" (*passim*)—is characteristic of the hyperreal problematisation of postulates such as unified subjectivity.

The acerbic zeal with which Forbes' narrator declares: "I want to believe the beautiful lies / the past spreads out like a feast" (10) provides the premise for an initiation of hyperreality. In many ways, this is exactly the kind of historico-cultural evidence that Baudrillard invokes in his advancement of hyperreality as *always already* implicated in (the reception and conceptualisation of) the real: "reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation so that we are now living entirely within the 'aesthetic' hallucination of reality" (*Symbolic* 74). For Forbes, this "aesthetic hallucination" occurs within the context of television (and of the media more broadly), which he nominates as the agential space for this *hyperreal politik*. In his opening lines (quoted above), Forbes reveals the performative and semiotic possibilities inside the simulacrum, where even amongst lies (or perhaps *because* of the destabilisation of truth) "you can act". Elsewhere, Baudrillard associates this virtualisation of the real (which facilitates the deconstruction of truth) as a symptom of the death of History, the limits of the communal imaginary, and the fallaciousness of the social contract as it relates to what we might call the "reality contract":

It is already increasingly difficult for us to imagine the real, to imagine History, the depth of time, three-dimensional space—just as difficult as it once was, starting out from the real world, to imagine the virtual one or the fourth dimension (*Screened* 154).

This re-imagining of the real and the historical as a hyperreal text is obviously pertinent to Fogarty's construction of a post-colonial, communal utopia. In an associated, but distinct way, rather than attempting to "imagine the real", Forbes clearly engages in attempting to imagine the *hyperreal*, with his twin emphases on History (presumably that which is inferred in "the beautiful lies / the past spreads out") and its subsumption into virtuality. This complicated duality structures the spatial and ideological reaches of "Watching the Treasurer", and feeds the irony with which Forbes approaches contemporary Australian politics and economics (specifically the Keating Era of the 80s and 90s). Under the influence of the

*hyperreal politik*, constructions such as “where / what seems, is & what your words describe / you know exists” (10) gesture towards Forbes’ hinging of significance between historical discourses of “the real”, and a growing awareness of the separation between speculation (“what seems”), semiotics (“what your words describe”) and a dubious truth (that which “you know exists”) in the flux of what we might now describe as the hyperreal.

Morris encapsulates this progression as a process of *ekstasis*. Although elsewhere in her text she fails to register the hyperreal structuring of “Watching the Treasurer”, here her analysis crystallises this hyperreal flux, albeit in a framework that privileges the Enlightenment relics of “empowerment” and “knowledge”. Nonetheless, her analysis is valuable, as it explores the disconnectedness of (hyperreal) terrain, as an ambivalent limit-space:

Each phase has its own modality: desire (“I want to believe”), empowerment (“you can act”), knowledge (“you know exists”). So the mediating phase of empowerment—at once a portrait of a “bottom lip” and a *mise en scène* of speaking—acts as a kind of passage, an event between two scenes: one on “this” side of the television screen, a place of subjectivity and desire; the other, a space of plenitude (with no true “subject” in the glow at the end) which is not on the other *side* of the screen, but simply elsewhere, other, in relation to the first (70).

Following Morris, as “*mise en scène*” or “passage”, Forbes’ narrative thus divorces speaking and the “events” or relations between “scenes” from a referential “real”. In other words, as Morris describes, “desire”, “empowerment” and “knowledge” must henceforth be negotiated somewhere between the “elsewhere” of the virtual realm and the “here” of reception. A similarly dematerialised relation is thus enforced between my nominations of phases—speculation, semiotics and dubious truths—as components of Forbes’ hyperreal discourse.

After Baudrillard, we can assess the hyperreal as precisely this kind of complication of ideology, language and philosophy: “...simulation is of the third order, beyond true and false, beyond equivalences, beyond rational distinctions upon which the whole of the social and power depend” (*Simulacra* 21). Governing “the social” and “power” under a *hyperreal politik*, as happens in “Watching the Treasurer”, is thus a question of juggling abstractions (ideology, semiotics, and communication) in the place of engaging with a “real”.

As many critics have established,<sup>7</sup> Forbes' poetics embraces a dimension of *abstraction* (whether this plays itself out as irony, satire, sarcasm, deconstruction or clever semantics) that is an iconic feature of his *oeuvre*. The immediate signpost for this level of abstraction in Forbes' work is usually a process of deferral—here, the stalling of meaning represented by the contradictory (or at least unexpected) allegiance of agency and deception. This is encapsulated in Forbes' characterisation of political economic discourse, where he satirises Paul Keating as an icon of Australian politics in general. Forbes' suggestion, in the following lines, is that Keating signifies the *hyperreal politik* and is ensconced in it also:

...Paul Keating's

bottom lip trembles then recovers,  
like the exchange rate under pressure

buoyed up as the words come out—  
elegant apostle of necessity, meaning

what rich Americans want... (10)

The simulatory nature of Australian politics (and its status here as political theme park for American desires) make it an ideal object for Baudrillardian analysis—particularly *vis-à-vis* his famous analysis of Disneyland in the context of the American hyperreal (*Simulacra* 12).<sup>8</sup> Forbes deliberately divorces politics from “meaning” here, rendering the political *primarily* an aesthetic (the obverse of Davis' prescription earlier). As such, the politician functions as a mouthpiece for inherited discourses (his lips are “buoyed up as the words come out”). The “elegant apostle of necessity” can arguably be read as both Keating *and* the exchange rate (and the echoes of Keating's famous phrase “the recession we *had* to have” are noticeable in this “necessity”), which, in its ambiguity, is another strategy of removing the “reality contract” from politics. Hence, as Angus Nicholls suggests, “The image is one in which real money and the real people which it affects are forced to rely upon economic hyperbole and political aesthetics...” (*Forbes* 87). Mimicking this conjunction of the material and the abstract, Forbes' elegant two-line stanzas achieve both syntactical and readerly dislocation *and* the closure of sealed imagery, as in the separation between the second and third stanzas (above), which stalls the effect of their content. Here,

<sup>7</sup> See Duwell, (*New*); Indyk; Tulip (*Poetry*); A. Nicholls (*Forbes*).

<sup>8</sup> This will be discussed in detail in relation to Hart's poetry in 1.2.2

there is both the aggravation of *enjambement* which *deliberately* installs a pause in cognition *and* the satisfaction of the conjunction of the treasurer's bottom lip with the performance of the exchange rate. This is a considered interweaving of poetic and political practice, which is repeated throughout the poem. Later, for instance, these arenas are united and they are characterised as cryptic and gestural, as Forbes melds cultural criticism with political diagnosis:

...his word is  
 like a poem, completing that utopia  
  
 no philosopher could argue with...(10)

Perhaps one of the chief voices of pathos in contemporary Australian poetry, Forbes plays this trait up again here, refusing to separate the political games his verses disparage from the poetry that describes them. As Nicholls reinforces, Forbes complicates "reality" by injecting difficulties between the public and private, the official and the personal, the political and poetic:

Here the author appears to suggest that poetry can play a normative political function by showing us that in politics, as in poetry, surface often is depth, and that appearance can become reality very quickly indeed. Although such poems never suggest that there is some kind of essential, "true" narrative that lies beneath the various layers of political and poetic spin, they nevertheless express a kind of nostalgia for "real" experiences in which what "is" might be more important than what seems (*Forbes* 87).

Forbes' satirical analysis of the merging of the political and the poetic here is a much more progressively postmodern discourse on poetry than Adamson's. Rather than lamenting a loss of tradition, Forbes instead charts the cooption of poetry into the artifice of Australian politics, which represents a dystopia of another kind. Within the context of the desire for/deconstruction of the real that Nicholls relates (above), Forbes mimics Baudrillard's project. In other words, the *hyperreal politik* in Forbes' work is *always already* underscored by a grieving for the lost *real politik*. Similarly, Baudrillard's many books of hyperreal theory attend to the lost real as much as they map the hyperreal—and this mourning for the real can be read as either an almost impotent gesture, or as a celebrated cynicism. Whereas, for Fogarty, the lost real initiates a simulation of communal paradise, Forbes registers the lost real as the scapegoat of the obsequious and totalising virtual.



This lost real is inevitably attached to language in Forbes' work. Relentlessly, Forbes even breaks poetry down to the word, implicating language in the hyperreal overthrow of meaning:

...where  
what seems, is & what your words describe

you know exists, under a few millimetres  
of invisible cosmetic, bathed

in a milky white fluorescent glow (10).

In a move that *almost* signals the symbolic death of poetry (but adroitly also provides its escape route from such a drastic reading), these verses demonstrate the subjugation of connotations and denotations, meaning and symbolism, which are blurred here beneath the artifice of media. The television image—the symbol of *all* signals, of *all* signifying systems—reigns supreme in “Watching the Treasurer”,<sup>9</sup> and there is an accompanying sense that the narrator of this poem has surrendered to the seduction of visual media, as even the lines in Forbes' stanzas die out and kneel before this conqueror, as punctuation gives way to the instatement of the “milky white fluorescent glow”.<sup>10</sup>

The sexual overtones of this engagement between narrator/viewer and the image are quite blatant. The explicitness of Forbes' images in this regard—a beauty “spread out”, inside which “you can act”; the trembling lips; the release of words; the bathing in “a milky white fluorescent glow”—emphasise the nature of our relation to the image as one of lustful submission to domination. Morris identifies with this seduction in her analysis of Forbes' poem, suggesting that Forbes' text *amplifies* this effect (rather than simply documenting it). She observes:

My own desire to eat lies is activated, turned into a greed for (words about) the image, and from “inside their beauty you can act” I have the most wonderful, powerful sense of zooming, of being sucked, into the television—greedy to be consumed by it, yes, but gently, not voraciously, to end up “bathed”, to be precise, in that “milky white fluorescent glow” (68).

<sup>9</sup> The influence of visual media on Forbes' poetics is discussed again in detail in 3.2.1, in relation to his “Love Poem”.

<sup>10</sup> Forbes' use of this trope in “Watching the Treasurer” was pre-empted by his 1972 poem “T.V”, which represents the inertia of the televisual image, spilling down the page without punctuation and thematising this also (29).

Morris' articulation of the titillation engendered by the seductive image (and Forbes' repetition of its allure) further supports the poem's representation of the seduction of the virtual (and hence, of the hyperreal).

In "Watching the Treasurer", Forbes constructs an Australian public that is just as strategically *produced* as the media it is *consumed* by. For Nicholls, this kind of manoeuvre translates as a comment on the contemporary cultural body, which moves further and further away from the natural:

Forbes reminds that the world which we experience is ineluctably framed by the cultural, economic and technological conditions in which we live, and that there is no way back to nature that does not involve some kind of cultural mediation (*Forbes* 87).<sup>11</sup>

At another remove from Nicholls' analysis, we can read Forbes in line with Wark's diagnosis of the links between television and Australian culture—as commenting astutely on both the mediatised stasis that Australia falls into behind the screen (and here the title of Forbes' collection, *Stunned Mullet*, is emblematic), as well as the necessity of scrutinising the complex simulacrum of artifice that the public embraces. As Wark argues:

It is since television brought sound and pictures right into the living room that the degree to which media pervade and transform social space has really started to sink in, but it is only on the basis of being immersed in television that it is possible to think about the further potential for the transformation of culture by the development of these vectors (*Celebrities* 26).

This attributing of contemporary virtual culture to the advent of the television is shared in "Watching the Treasurer". Certainly, Forbes uses the television as the aesthetic, metaphoric and philosophical touchstone for this poem. However, "the basis of being immersed in television" that Wark and Forbes use as the premise of their hyperreal analyses of Australian culture would be interpreted by Baudrillard as the *evidence* of a manifestation of the hyperreal, rather than its interrogator.

For Baudrillard, whose work always returns to the social as its primary text, such manifestations of hyperreality point to a *complete* submersion in the simulacrum, rather than a hint of its future transformation. In this sense, "Watching the Treasurer", although not critically acclaimed as hyperreal, is written out of the context of the simulacrum. To suggest that this text represents an Australia *at the*

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<sup>11</sup> This sense of a manufactured world is thematised in Forbes' 1988 poem "The Age of Plastic", in which he ironises technological progress and the technological development of poetry (*Stunned Mullet* 13).

*limits of the hyperreal* then, is not to suggest an entry point, but a threshold. This threshold is much like the screen that Morris identifies in Forbes' poem, as: "not a border between comparable places or spaces [...] but a radiance, an aura, an 'inside' without an outside" (70-1).

### 1.2.2 Kevin Hart: Incarceration & the Australian Asylum.

Hart regularly operates on this border where names lose their singularity, and where transient energy states and shifts in perception occur...Indeed Hart writes with complexity and precision, as if sensitised to a limit which is totally familiar to anyone's contemporary sense of experience and identity. What results from the knowledge of threshold and limit is a poetry which can neither disavow (ignore) nor name (identify) subconscious linkages. These are poems which, ordinarily using the materials of everyday experience, upset meanings which would otherwise resolve into clearly interpretable symbols and images.

—Martin Harrison (*Who* 47)

The transience under which Kevin Hart blankets his poetry would seem to be characteristic, if we accept Harrison's evaluation. There is certainly a duplicity to Hart's work, where the texts leave a residue of questions around them—the "upsetting" of meaning that Harrison refers to. Hart's poetry is littered with *double entendres*, allusions and deconstructions which provide the brink that Harrison sees him as occupying (particularly in relation to language and signification).<sup>12</sup> As an inhabitant of the limits of structuralism and deconstruction—or, in Harrison's terms, the ambit "where names lose their singularity"—Hart presents an Australian poetic voice that negotiates the thresholds of Australian poetry, as he increasingly engages with poststructuralism and postmodernity in his work. As Harrison argues, this transmogrifying power of Hart's poetry has a follow-on effect on Australian poetics, as Hart forces this genre to confront its own limits, and as he probes these limits also. According to Harrison, the contemporary implication of Australian poetry in this "sensitivity" to limits is most easily demonstrable in terms of how Australian poetry deconstructs "Australian poetry". As this chapter demonstrates, Fogarty, Adamson, Forbes and Hart are all "sensitised" to various limits. Individually, these poets approach the category "Australia" by pursuing some of its restrictions

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<sup>12</sup> Hart displays a keen sense of limits throughout his *oeuvre*. Whether the limit is represented as an approach to stillness ("The Calm"), the dawn ("Sunlight in a Room"), silence ("The Black Telephone"), space ("The Room"), knowledge ("Reading at Evening") or Apocalypse ("The Last Day"), it is clear that his work privileges this concept in its spatial, temporal, philosophical and spiritual translations.

(particularly its relation to postcoloniality), as well as its frontiers (most notably the hyperreal). Furthermore, each poet represents a sense of the limits (and limitations) of Australian poetry in its (un)mapping of the nation-space. For all of these poets, this becomes a test of whether poetic discourse can adequately *respond* to the subject of Australia, as well as whether the Australian public *bears* this discourse.

Hence, as Harrison suggests in reference to Hart, the relation between the terms “Australia” and “poetry” is the most contentious limit under scrutiny. For Harrison, the deconstructive practice common in different ways to contemporary Australian poetry *always already* magnifies the problematic of belonging in postcolonial Australia:

This obliges anyone writing about Australian poetry to recognise that a claim about the wider contemporaneity of Australian poetry must reflect a fairly high level of discontinuity: the claim is that almost inevitably in a specifically Australian relationship between poetry and place you will find a profound but at the same time a fragmented sense of subject and land (*Who* 54).

This, it seems to me, is another way of fashioning the central thesis of this dissertation—that Australian poetry necessarily resides in border zones (which are here construed as the postcolonial and the hyperreal) that relate to the formulation and articulation of the subject and the nation-space. Moreover, as Harrison attests, the liminality and complexity of “Australian poetry” as both practice and signifier, forces a discontinuity endemic to “the limit”. As Hart’s “To Australia” (Craven 77) reveals, both Australia and its poetry are complicated and made vulnerable by their investments in postcoloniality and hyperreality. In this sense, “To Australia” functions as a challenge from the poet to the nation, a speculative examination of Australia’s limits. As I will argue, Hart’s poem exposes the simulatory nature of discourses of Australianness, as well as Australia’s hyperreal relation to (and distancing from) its own political and historical character.

Hart’s interest in testing the category “Australian” with philosophy and mythology is reflected in his own criticism of Australian poetry, where he argues for the discursive urgency of analysing dominant prescriptions of what “Australian poetry” is:

The word Australian is much younger than poetry, but even so it has more immediate and overt ideological forces pulling it this way and that. It needs to be kept in play for as long a time as possible, given generous chances, so that it will not readily lend itself to dark aspects of nationalism or be pressed into the service of racism (*Open* 483).

His “To Australia” can therefore be read within the terms he sets up—as a response to this pressing need to put at least a question mark after the word Australian.

In the beginning, “To Australia” looks like a collection of wax models. The reader is subsequently assigned the role of *flâneur*, strolling through Hart’s lines as through a museum—where culture, history and the nation are transmogrified into artefacts. In his *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco indulges in an evocative analysis of the contemporary American *penchant* for wax museums. His observations of the hyperrealism of these cultural spaces provides a pertinent addition to Hart’s poetry—in the suggestion that this form of representation not only attempts to fabricate the reality principle (via artifice) but also renders the ideal of democracy decidedly fabricated:

Here, “reality” is a movie, but another characteristic of the wax museum is that the notion of historical reality is absolutely democratised: Marie Antoinette’s boudoir is recreated with fastidious attention to detail, but Alice’s encounter with the Mad Hatter is done just as carefully (13-14).

Employing similar traits of illusion and simulated democracy, Hart constructs his Australia-museum as a satire of the idyllic beach<sup>13</sup>—a presentation that inevitably exposes the myopic insularity of some conceptions of Australian nationalism. Invoking a juvenile imaginary, Hart lulls the reader into his ironised storybook innocence, appealing to a settler-derived national nostalgia for the beach:

You introduced me to nice girls  
With names like Debbie and with long blonde legs  
I thought you made them, with a smile,

Out of the heat while lazing on a beach (77).

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<sup>13</sup> This satire sits in dialogue with Forbes’ earlier 1988 juxtaposition of Australian beach mythology and the (im)possibility of constructing and representing nationalism. However, Forbes is much more overt than Hart in his treatment of the relationship of Australian poetry to the beach/nation paradigm, where he suggests that the cultural legitimacy of poetry is displaced by this more popular Australian mythology. His prescription can be read here as a measure of advice for Hart, or even as a description of Hart’s methodology: “later, / & like any poet / avoiding myth and message / to fake a flashy ode, consider / what model of Australia as nation / could match the ocean, or get your desk / to resemble a beach” (*The Stunned Mullet* 19).

If this is a creation myth of sorts, then Hart's territory is *deceptively* idyllic. Not only does the landscape become barren: "All your old broken land just lying there" (77),<sup>14</sup> the inhabitants are reduced to models, losing their individual identities as their names slip away, but also becoming stereotypes as they are parodied, set in place. The (parody on the) lack of humanity here (the indifference to names, the reduction of the women to a bunch of "long blonde legs") and Hart's allusions to creation myths and to the very dystopic symbolism of *Terra Nullius*, critique the colonialist vision of Australia—where the country was read as lack, as neither a territory, nor a people. However, even as this critique is set up, the narrator identifies as a tourist, hungry for more of the exoticism that Australia provides: "I was at sea for half my life / Because you did that sort of thing so well" (77). Ultimately, Hart constructs Australia as something akin to "the last frontier" for his narrator (for whom this ode signifies as much reverence as scorn). Whist Harrison understands Hart's enlistment of border thematics in his poetry as presenting "the edge of what anyone can know via language" (*Who* 51), it is also possible to read Hart's fixation on the Australian horizon as an astute reminder of the status of Australia as both *island* and *colony*.

Playing on the very juvenility that he sets up at the outset of the poem, Hart quickly administers a surprise dash of straight politics. He allows his narrator to judge the anti-intellectual spheres of Australian culture, replacing the sentiment "Old Cheryl said I was full of shit" with an equally abject and colloquial, but significantly more analytical:

...What I know full well  
Is that your government got pissed

And threw up barbed-wire prisons out the back  
Where refugees could count each star (77)

As a repetition of his argument that Australia (as a discursive/national signifier) too easily allows itself to slide into racism, Hart situates his strong narrative

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<sup>14</sup> This is reminiscent of the trend within European-Australian poetry to capitalise on the "dead centre" of Australia as a way of either articulating the physical locus of white Australia's angst, or as a critical and dismissive gesture. In 1939, A.D. Hope represented this in evolutionary terms: "They call her a young country, but they lie: / She is the last of lands, the emptiest, / A woman beyond her change of life, a breast / Still tender but within the womb is dry" (qtd. in Tranter & Mead, 16). For Ania Walwicz in 1991, the stereotype of barren land worked as a transferral onto Australian culture in her blunt lines: "You big ugly. You too empty. You desert with your nothing nothing nothing. You scorched suntanned. Old too quickly. Acres of suburbs watching the telly. You bore me" (qtd. in Goodwin & Lawson, 305).

endorsement of the critical activist individual in contradistinction to the State in these lines.

What is also happening here (which is strongly hinted at through the device of Hart's political critique) is a performance and disposal of what Baudrillard calls the "great toxic excrement of a hyperreal civilisation" (*Simulacra* 13). In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard refers to Disneyland as "a space of the regeneration of the imaginary as waste-treatment plants are elsewhere, and even here", suggesting that hyperreality requires that "Everywhere today one must recycle waste, and the dreams, the phantasms, the historical, fairylike, legendary imaginary of children and adults" (13). In this case, this waste analogously appears as simulations of a nation's utopian dreams, the phantasms of power and bigotry which haunt Australia as the hyperexcessive extensions of both its "island consciousness" and its claims to being a democratic safe haven.

The exclusionary foreign policies of a country full of people like Hart's "Frank" and "Kylie", who "...think it's fair enough" appear here as the excrement of the society formerly described as the golden land of "nice girls" (77). The sequence of Hart's lines turn this golden land (with its attendant appeals to creation mythology) into an absurdly nihilistic landscape, which prompts the narrator's confession: "I thought of Kafka's line about a place / 'Where one might die of strangeness'..." (77). Following this progression, the reader can elucidate how the utopian dreams that become in Baudrillard's terms the excrement of hyperreal societies, have mutated into the excremental output of the underlying bigotry in Australia. Here, Harrison's critique of Hart's poetry is again relevant, as he highlights the self-referentiality intrinsic to Hart's project:

Drawing on an impetus connected with dream states and reveries, the imaginal zone he works from is fluid and shape shifting, building a sense of a world never free from the ghost of psyche or self awareness (*Who* 47).

Like many contemporary Australian poets, Hart makes it his business to unravel the simulacrum composition of the "Australian Dream",<sup>15</sup> in order to unveil—through his utilisation of "self awareness"—the fundament of denial attendant to Australian postcolonial national identity. In this sense, Hart participates in a

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<sup>15</sup> Adamson, whose impoverished narrator stands as an ironic and somewhat degenerate opponent to the Australian capitalist mythology of the quarter-acre block and other contemporary consumerist fetishes, also witnesses the unsustainability of the "Australian Dream".

narrative of Australian postcoloniality as a psychosocial phenomenon, as much as a material and/or historical one.<sup>16</sup>

As in Baudrillard's famous analysis of Disneyland as "...a deterrence machine set up in order to rejuvenate the fiction of the real in the opposite camp" (*Simulacra* 13)—in other words, a fictionalised distraction from "real" America—Hart's political poetry fulfils a similar analytical role: establishing how detention centres can be deterrence machines too, by stabilising the fiction of a protected national frontier. Such a deterrence machine simulation has a dual function. Baudrillard's intricate analysis of Disneyland first posits this site as a copy and then reveals its status as a simulation of the "third order". As Baudrillard explains:

Thus, everywhere in Disneyland the objective profile of America, down to the morphology of individuals and of the crowd, is drawn. All its values are exalted by the miniature and the comic strip. Embalmed and pacified...But this masks something else and this "ideological" blanket functions as a cover for a *simulation of the third order*: Disneyland exists in order to hide that it is the "real" country, all of "real" America that *is* Disneyland (a bit like prisons are there to hide that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence, that is carceral) (*Simulacra* 12).

Complete with characteristically dystopic touches—the robotic/dead crowd, the subterfuge, the gross disillusionment—Baudrillard's prophecy here is quite frightening. And when such theory is applied to, or reveals by analogy, Hart's Australia, the national prognosis is not good. Eco also warns of the attendant cultural degeneration (the intellectual blankness) that necessarily comes with the hyperreal territory of Disneyland: "An allegory of the consumer society, a place of absolute iconism, Disneyland is also a place of total passivity. Its visitors must agree to behave like its robots" (48). Where Disneyland is replaced by Australia-as-detention-centre, however, the robotic qualities assigned to its "visitors" (here, the Australian public) take on a notably tortured character (the implication being that the Australian public must be detained; that lips may be symbolically stitched up but that protests are useless).

All of Baudrillard's features of Disneyland simulacra can be read in "To Australia". As Hart demonstrates, the idea that detention centres exist in Australia as *direct copies* of the nation, full of the *minutiae* of its individuals, would be considered sacrilegious in the current conservative political climate, especially

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<sup>16</sup> The psychosocial character of Australian postcoloniality is discussed in detail in the following chapter.



where a significant group of voters identify with Hart's "Julie", who "...wants to send them home" (77). However, as Hart loosely follows the conventions of the ode in "To Australia" (and certainly mocks them simultaneously with his derisive tone), it follows that his thematics trace the character of the subject to whom the ode is dedicated. Therefore, it is propitious to re-mobilise Baudrillard's analysis here and to read Hart's Australia as *one large detention centre*. Certainly, the convict history of Australia and its status as relatively secluded island give this reading a darkly satirical flavour. Furthermore, to follow the other feature of Baudrillard's analysis, detention centres in "To Australia" symbolise a state of national denial and of advanced delusional hyperreality in Australia. Accordingly, the third order simulation operating here is the artifice of the detention centre as both an *illusion* and a *delusion*—as the denial of Australia as *fundamentally* prison, refugee camp, colony.<sup>17</sup> According to Nourry, this delusion/denial is a function of Australia's particular and Anglicised (post)coloniality. For Nourry, this signifies a lack of belonging (to an originary Western identity) which emerges as a palimpsest from beneath the thin veneer of Australianness:

The conditions that gave rise to an identity that could be "imagined" as Australian—the transportation of the convicts—effectively designates this subject as always already potentially Other to a Western subject. In locating the threat to security and integrity in the person and difference of the Other, the Australian nation-subject is seeking to *overcome the conditions of its birth* (378).

Whilst Nourry's convict context is potentially reductive, it goes some way towards communicating the *coloniality* of Australia, continuing strongly into the contemporary postcolonial era. In "To Australia", Hart shares Nourry's elision of nation and subject, as well as his enunciation of "island consciousness" and paranoid nationalism, as Hart's nation-subject repeats its convict birth by the penalisation of the Other. At a biographical level, one could also read the nationalist anxiety in Hart's "To Australia" as a discourse of the *migrant* Other—Gibson's Westerner who looks South, but doesn't feel at home (x).

After Foucault of course, it is possible to recognise the "carceral mechanisms" of the nation-state and in such an analysis, Australia presents an ideal model for a psychoanalytic diagnosis of its dominant ideology of surveillance and fear (the

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<sup>17</sup> The possibility of these kinds of readings of Hart's work is alluded to by David McCooey, who highlights the metaphorical and abstract register as a key feature of Hart's poetry: "The simplicity of Hart's diction allows a surprisingly complex interaction between abstraction and concrete images" (*Opaque* 48).

sovereign state's fear of the deviant subordinate Other). Foucault's illuminating analysis is worth quoting at length here, as an articulation of the strength and likelihood of a governmental/national simulation of border control:

The "carceral" with its many diffuse or compact forms, its institutions of supervision or constraint, of discreet surveillance and insistent coercion, assured the communication of punishments according to quality and quantity; it connected in series or disposed according to subtle divisions the minor and the serious penalties, the mild and the strict forms of treatment, bad marks and light sentences. You will end up in the convictship, the slightest indiscipline seems to say; and the harshest of prisons says to the prisoners condemned to life; I shall note the slightest irregularity in your conduct. The generality of the punitive function that the eighteenth century sought in the "ideological" technique of representations and signs now had as its support the extension, the material framework, complex, dispersed, but coherent, of the various carceral mechanisms. As a result, a certain significant generality moved between the least irregularity and the greatest crime; it was no longer the offence, the attack on the common interest, it was the departure from the norm, the anomaly; it was this that haunted the school, the court, the asylum or prison. It generalised in the sphere of meaning the function that the carceral generalised in the sphere of tactics. Replacing the adversary with the sovereign, the social enemy was transformed into a deviant, who bought with him the multiple dangers of disorder, crime and madness. The carceral network linked, through innumerable relations the two long, multiple series of the punitive and the abnormal (299-300).

Can we claim Australia as chiefly colonialist, predicated on Foucault's "carceral mechanisms" then? Can Foucault's discursive analyses of other histories speak to Australia's (post)colonial history? For Australia, these "carceral mechanisms" (these detention centres reminiscent of the penal colony, these dominant discourses of containment and exclusion) might exist in Baudrillardian terms, in order to *deter* the public from making the obvious conclusions—that their nation continues to be a colony; that their "norms" are enforced by strict punishment for "deviance"; that theirs is a culture of surveillance and punishment (from the colony, to the school, to the prison, to the detention centre); and that there is no pardon in this remote island—that Australians were *always already* incarcerated here.<sup>18</sup>

In a much less extreme, yet nonetheless melodramatic way, Hart adds an interesting element to this potential Australian simulation of repression in his references to drunkenness. His slang "your government got pissed" (77) points to

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<sup>18</sup> Albeit in a psychoanalytical manner, Jennifer Rutherford's *The Gauche Intruder* (2000) covers similar territory to this in its structuring of the social as something akin to Foucault's "carceral network".

the weaker spots in the national subconscious, which manifest as performances also. In other words, here Hart illuminates the way in which Australia *rehearses* its denial of the fact that *all of Australia is a detention centre* in the manner in which a drunkard rehearses a denial of their aggression, or their affection, or their inhibitions.

Such denial ensues, according to Nourry, from the negative space, “the void”, in which the carceral is constructed in Australia, particularly in its relation to the Imperium:

Consider the space a prison occupies, for all intents and purposes, simultaneously imagined as part of and external to society. As such, while the penal settlement is imagined to exist in the geographical space of the Empire it does not exist, except as a void, within the imaginary *social* space of the Empire (377-8).

Following Nourry’s hypothesis, the “island consciousness” narrated by Adamson is a symptom of this negative identity syndrome, which, at its colonialist extremes, necessitates the oppression of Indigenous peoples (evoked by Fogarty) as well as the necessary exclusion of all peoples designated as Others.

Most alarmingly, it follows from Hart’s demonstration of this performance of denial that such rehearsals *necessarily repeat*. And in this light, Australia’s historical and current practices of detention, torture and cultural genocide (as xenophobic nationalist practices) are proof of such inevitable repetition. These colonialist impulses also function as repetitions in America’s detention centres, such as Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. If we trace, as Foucault does, the history and tradition of the “carceral network” as an Australian societal effect, it is clear that this can be read as a direct function of settler colonialism. The various representations of the carceral in Australian poetry—Fogarty’s resistance to and transcendence of detention vaults, Adamson’s ironic resistance to “island consciousness”, Hart’s characterisation of Australia as asylum—thus demonstrate how coloniality has been projected and refracted onto the populus, and how the present Australian public, through its elected government, has responded with like projections onto new “settlers”.

Hart’s final angry refrain “And I’m damn sure you made the lot of us / Out of the heat while on a beach” (an interesting repetition of the previously benevolent “I thought you made them, with a smile / Out of the heat while lazing on a beach”) (77) implicates *every* Australian in this hyperreal culture of denial and repression.

Ultimately, ensconced as the Australian citizen is in the intricacies of denial and subterfuge, the only option left is to return to the recognisable popular mythology of the beach—which is both carefree safe haven and national frontier.

Following Hart's depiction of Australia, to look to the beach is to be lulled into a comfortable state of apathy (bathed in mythology)—to “think it's fair enough”—but it is also to gaze from a prison window at the horizon; to reinstate the power of this island's borders. Perhaps, in the end, Hart's own comments on Australian poetry are the most evocative in relation to this nation he constructs: “One could organise a reading of Australian poetry around ‘Australis’ and ‘nullius’” (*Open* 482). For me, his gesture here is towards the intractability of *settling* Australia (as psychological territory), in the face of the hyperreal denial (which the claims of *Terra Nullius* already signified) that detains Australian postcoloniality.

## Afterword.

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The pervasive narratives of estrangement in contemporary Australian poetry, its diverse articulations of a continued legacy of colonialism that plays itself out as a *psycho-geographical* angst, and which registers in the neo-imperialism of its carceral mechanisms, ties this poetry strongly to postcoloniality and its unpacking of the horrors of colonialism. However, this legacy of colonialism is understood here as a relationship to the postcolonial which skews any neat or narrow categorisations of postcoloniality—such as the clear separation between colonialism and post-colonialism, or the suggestion of a purely oppositional politics for Indigenous writers and subjects—and as such, demonstrates how Australia and its poetry approach *the limits* of postcoloniality.

Analogously, the evidence of Australian simulations of nationhood, politics and cultural identity in this poetry—where the omnipresence of the virtual signifies an abandonment of the reality principle, and where simulations of the “third order” govern representational politics (and represent governmental politics)—resituates Australia as a hyperreal territory. The ideological negotiations between the increasingly pervasive hyperreal and the antithetical claim to “social realism” in the public sphere therefore also situate contemporary Australia *at the limits* of the hyperreal. Thus, to view Australia's simulatory political and cultural mechanisms

as by-products of its recent colonial past is to begin to recognise the ways in which hyperreality and postcoloniality, as two of Australia's limits, can interact. The task of "articulating Australia" must therefore necessarily contend with these limits.

## Hyperreal Translations of Postcoloniality.

### **Foreword: Case Studies in the “Postcolonial Hyperreal”: Michael Dransfield and Samuel Wagan Watson.**

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While the previous chapter charted one spectrum of poets in their linked but differing relations to postcolonial and hyperreal cultural production, this chapter represents detailed case studies of two Australian poets whose work persuasively brings together the “postcolonial hyperreal” and brings Australia (as an object of study) to the intersection of two of its ideological margins. Australia is understood here as an imaginary nation-space, which is overwritten with a “consciousness of coloniality”. Further, this chapter presents a critique of liberal humanist discourses of unified subjectivity, offering evidence of detailed poetic deconstructions of the unified subject in the work of Michael Dransfield and Samuel Wagan Watson—deconstructions that work to both postcolonial and hyperreal ends.

The poetry of Dransfield and Wagan Watson charts an Australian legacy of Eurocentric history, dispossession and alienation related to that of Fogarty, Adamson and Hart, yet distinct in their emphases. Within this context, their “ghost” subjects are both haunted and haunting, negotiating postcoloniality as a *psychosocial* predicament and employing a range of hyperreal approaches in order to do this. Representing an alternative to realist and historicist postcolonial texts, the work of Dransfield and Wagan Watson presents, in distinct but analogous ways, “*nation as simulation*”. Both argue for a fundamental alterity within Australianness, as well as the impossibility of community in postcolonial Australia.

By projecting the supernatural or uncanny as at the edges of the Australian “real” and the psychosomatic as permeating Australian postcoloniality, Dransfield undoes the rhetorical work of colonial poets whose agenda was predominantly either to re-indigenise or to re-colonise Australia. Instead, he foregrounds the instability and strangeness of this terrain of Australia and Australian lives. Dransfield’s Australia is overwhelmingly a land of imperial surveillance and unhomeliness, which prompts the self-destructing postcolonial subject.

For Wagan Watson, Australia represents *contested* terrain, for which his chief metaphor is the highway. Life, in his poetry, is constructed as precarious and hostile. His subjects, navigating this experience as one of exile, rely on the hyperreal and the virtual in order to negotiate the complex intersections of transhistoricism, the social and the personal. As this discussion will demonstrate, Wagan Watson presents a discourse of “hyper-indigeneity”, where he allows Indigeneity to intervene in different spaces and times, and where he articulates the agency of his Indigenous subjects as harnessing a specifically *simulated* and uncanny *modus operandi*.

## 2.1 “Psyched Out”: Australia’s Postcolonial Ghost Subject and the Hyperreal Allegory of Death.

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Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye.

—Homi Bhabha (*Nation* 1)

For me, to be a poet in Australia is wonderful and scary. Because poets in this country are the salt of the earth and the scum of the earth and just people too.

—Michael Dransfield (qtd. in Shapcott, *Australian* 203)

Beyond Anderson’s “imagined community” (*Imagined, passim*) and Bhabha’s “nation as narration” (*Nation, passim*) is the possibility, suggested by Baudrillard, of “nation as simulation”. One objective of this thesis is to re-map the Australian nation by way of such a hyperreal conceptual apparatus. So, in the place of conventional historical landscapes as the terrain of Australian identity, the simulacrum and the psychosocial landscape of Australian subjects become the ground for this re-mapping. After Bhabha, and informed by Baudrillard’s hyperreal, nation can be inscribed within a subjective register that insists on the “imagined community” as the *simulated community*. As such (as Bhabha suggests in the epigraph), nation can be read through the individual psyche.

In his distinctive poetics of subjectivity, Dransfield not only relocated the focus of the “New Poets” of the Generation of ’68, he also engaged with and refigured the national unconscious. Aside from the overt narratives of 60’s liberationist experimentalism, urban dystopics and individualist angst that are commonly

recognised in his poetry, there is a narrative, overlooked in Dransfield criticism, of what might be called a “consciousness of coloniality”. Nathan Hollier exhibits a common reading of Dransfield’s poetry, taking it as individualist and prominently ahistorical. He labels Dransfield “one of the most idealist” of Australian poets (101). Reducing Dransfield’s poetics to the usual Romanticist framework, Hollier allows the political in Dransfield’s poetry only insofar as it exists to amplify the individual. Thus, according to Hollier:

social criticism nevertheless generally functions more as an element of the poet’s personal tragedy than as part of a concerted critical intervention. Indeed, such a strategy, it is implied within his oeuvre is not only antithetical to poetry but illusory (100).

Conversely, I wish to argue that we can read Dransfield’s poetry *specifically* for its “critical intervention”, but that this reading relies on a departure from the biographical frameworks so often utilised in Dransfield criticism. A “consciousness of coloniality” is proposed as one narrative through which the “social criticism” that Hollier finds lacking supersedes the individualist strains pinned to Dransfield’s poetics.

When Dransfield’s texts are read in this way, two things occur. Firstly, this reading forces a rethinking of Dransfield’s poetics as not simply stopping at an introspective agenda, but as articulating a communal, even national question of identity in Australia. Secondly, the ensuing use of postcolonial theory to frame this engagement with coloniality (and to address its politics) demands the stretching of the postcolonial. Consequently, rather than proliferating the assumption that postcolonial theory *requires* an obligatory realist text, situated in a recognisable historical-materialist political context, this reading introduces the possibility of *psychosocial* registers for postcolonial theory.<sup>1</sup> Hence, Dransfield’s poetics are read as reinscribing the reach of the postcolonial as it attends to the legacies of colonial and neo-colonial ideologies manifested in settler societies such as Australia.

The mobilisation of postcolonial theory in this critique of Dransfield’s poetry is intended as a marker of how Australian poetics occupy a limit space in relation to

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<sup>1</sup> David Punter’s work moves towards this terrain in its exploration of the “Phantomatic” and the “Transcolonial” (61-78).



postcoloniality. Further, rather than indulging in Eurocentrism, this analysis attempts to expose a legacy of Eurocentric histories, by charting the *cultural* investment in Eurocentricity that Australian settler colonialism produces. The postcolonial analysis of Western subjectivities here is intended as part of the debate that Nourry enters, where he argues that Western subjectivity is necessarily negated and deferred in the Australian context (378). Lastly, the effect of Dransfield's dissolution of the subject is read here as a *further* deconstruction of the Cartesian subject (and hence a critique of the humanist foundations of colonialism). In this sense, Leela Gandhi's analysis of the allegiance between postcolonial and poststructuralist theory is pertinent, in that postcoloniality exposes the Cartesian subject as "the locus of absence, omission, exclusion and silence" (40). As I will demonstrate, such absences are endemic to the model of (Australian) subjectivity that Dransfield shapes in his poetry.

Although an argument for a *psychosocial* Australian postcoloniality, this analysis seeks to avoid the universalising gestures of pan-postcoloniality, which Ania Loomba characterises as an after-effect of poststructuralism, in which: "Postcoloniality becomes a vague condition of people anywhere and everywhere, and the specificities of locale do not matter" (17). Conversely, psychosocial postcoloniality is employed here in its examination of a particularly *Australian* manifestation of postcoloniality. Hence, it is *through* the "specificities of locale" (which are understood here as Australia's settler colonial history) that this postcoloniality is evaluated.

Oppressed by the tyranny of psychiatric and social imperialisms, the subjects of Dransfield's "Psyched Out" (*Collected* 363-5) contribute to a postcolonial narrative of alienation. As a reinscription of postcoloniality, this Australian subjectivity ironically echoes and reinterprets the charges that Ahmad levels against postcolonial theory. In his Marxist analysis, postcolonial theory represents a depoliticised and redundant discursive endeavour, where:

Colonialism thus becomes a transhistorical thing, always present and always in a process of dissolution in one part of the world or another, so that everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later, at one time or another, of being coloniser, colonised and postcolonial – sometimes all at once, in the case of Australia, for example (*Politics* 283).

Ahmad's analysis is useful here for the "transhistoricism" which it denounces, but it is in a different sense from Ahmad's that the transhistoricity of postcoloniality is

mapped here in Dransfield's work. In other words, for Dransfield's subjects at least, Australian settler colonialism can be read as a force that *continues to oppress* Australian subjects, whose identity processes shift between the positions of coloniser and colonised. The representations of this shifting subjectivity in Dransfield's work are read here as hyperreal simulations of nationhood. Hence, against Ahmad's dismissiveness, the "postcolonial condition" works as an existential category in the sense that postcolonial Australia engenders a "postcolonial consciousness", which oscillates between coloniality and postcoloniality. Rather than representing a *selective* postcoloniality, the simultaneity of the colonial and the postcolonial registers in Dransfield's work as a *difficulty* of Australian postcoloniality.

Australian postcolonial national identity is examined here as Dransfield painted it: as the unhomely space of diasporic minorities whose subjects haunt and are haunted by the past and the future, in a present that is overwrought with their (intra)national otherness. When read within the contemporary political context in Australia, which is arguably overshadowed by a mentality of border protection and detention (enforced by the Howard government), the contextualization of Dransfield's subjects, presented in spaces of oppression and asylum, is prophetic. Moreover, as Loomba advocates, this analysis takes account of "the local circumstances within which colonial institutions and ideas are being moulded into the disparate cultural and socio-economic practices which define our contemporary 'globality'" (256-7). As is obvious in Australia's contemporary governmental ideology of border control, coloniality manifests as both a suppression of the Other and a maintenance of the boundaries of the nation. Like Adamson's "poet", Dransfield's subjects *internalise* this colonial suppression, but are also directly victimised by mechanics of detention.

Bleak and moribund, Michael Dransfield's Australia is haunted by the oppressed psyches of its postcolonial ghosts. "Psyched Out" is Dransfield's audacious national simulacrum of desperate citizens existing in the exile of a hyperreal landscape, in Australia as psychiatric ward. Caught between death and surveillance, this poem's national subjects wither under an apathetic yet imperial detention, perishing collectively under the Australian sun. History is subjectified by Dransfield, as the boundaries of the nation recede to the "mind's eye"

(Bhabha, *Nation* 1) of his desperate wraiths, tortured by their subordination. In this sense, Bhabha's epigraph, which imbricates the imaginative and the historical, is applicable also to postcoloniality. Beyond simply "realising" the nation (as an imagined construct) however, Dransfield's subjects *hyperrealise* the nation as simulacry. Alongside dominant simulations of Australian nationhood, therefore—the ethos of mateship, the sporting country of a "fair go", the land of "hard yakka" and larrikinism—Dransfield's poetic simulation resituates Australianness in the psychosocial realm of imperialism, surveillance and paranoiac border control. Thus, this poem characterises Australia as *programmatically* colonial, in the sense that colonialism (here chronicled chiefly as individual oppression, but with communal effects) is the systematic and paradigmatic operation of the nation.

"Psyched Out" inscribes Australia within the walls of the psychiatric asylum—the site for an oppressed minority. Dransfield's hyperreal transit through exile and hopelessness depicts his Australian subjects as zombies, moving from torture to torture in hideous unison. His dispossessed subjects "stumble from Group in tears / at the end of their tether" (363), as almost-human automatons (propelled by his conveyor-belt verse), turning the cogs of an Australian hyperreal apparatus. They function as the cultural component of machinery in Baudrillard's purely "operational" hyperreality:

It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it any more. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere (*Simulacra* 2).

Existing beneath his own construction of what I am claiming as a postcolonial imaginary, Dransfield's poetry *represents* this operational context. Baudrillard's loss of atmosphere is represented by Dransfield as the depersonalising lack of humanity within the Australian asylum. This extends ultimately to a disregard for the lives of the subjects of "Psyched Out", where psychiatric imperialism denies them individuality. As a collection of simulacra itself, Dransfield's flat-line verse reproduces this unmoved imperial temperament, which is operational in the sense

that it negates subjectivity in favour of subjection.<sup>2</sup> Even mortality doesn't halt the progress of Dransfield's faceless spectres in their blue relentless odyssey:

what if the patients die  
Shock continues

only the sun-damned minority  
the biblical perish (364)

The ironising of "Shock" here as both a physical (enforced) effect and an emotional reaction signals Dransfield's emphasis on the ambiguous depersonalised identity of his subjects. There is an interesting dissolution of national mythologies here also, as Dransfield condemns the familiar cultural stereotypes of the bronzed Aussie and the non-secular Anglo-Australian (as "the sun-damned" and "the biblical") to a weakness that leads to their demise.

Mimicking the (imperial) machine, Dransfield's lines represent the monotony of the "purely operational". His famous poem "Bum's Rush" (Shapcott, *Australian* 205) also reflects his interest in the workings of the social-system-as-machine. In "Bum's Rush", as in "Psyched Out", Dransfield's lyrics inevitably simulate self-destruction and death:

...say farewell to friends you may have made among the graven images  
then walk as a human lemming would  
out across the bay to where the ice is thinnest and make yourself  
vanish (205).

Daring and iconoclastic, Dransfield's poetry thus mocks any suggestion of the stable Australian nation or the stable self, probing instead a volatile space on the precipice of awful contradiction:

longer we cannot  
stay in such a place ("Psyched Out" 363)

With this single gesture, Dransfield makes mainstream "reality" uninhabitable. "Psyched Out" concentrates on the fallen edges of national identity, and is illuminated by a postcolonial sensitivity to exclusion and marginality.

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<sup>2</sup> I borrow this distinction between subjectivity and subjection from Leela Gandhi, who articulates "the ideological wedge between histories of subjectivity and histories of subjection" (170). Obviously, in this Australian context, this distinction is deconstructed and is thus viewed as an interactive migration between these terms.

The “histories of disconnection” that Jane M. Jacobs talks of are reproduced in this poem as the foundation (and the end) of selfhood. Jacobs postulates a distinctively postmodern postcoloniality:

In a contemporary world, constituted out of complex processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, movement and cohabitation, it may well be that what Kristeva...calls the “cult of origins” needs to give way to a sense of place which is built around fractured vectors of communication and histories of disconnection (*Edge* 163).

Not unlike my reinterpretation of Ahmad’s “transhistorical” postcoloniality, Jacobs privileges a “consciousness of coloniality”, in the sense that, for her, alienation, disinheritance and migration are more concrete as contemporary cultural phenomena than any fixed sense of belonging. For Baudrillard also, identity itself is a useless fallacy, which is frantically and neurotically upheld as a practice of illusion:

Being unable to conceive that identity has never existed and that it is merely something we play-act, we fuel this subjective illusion to the point of exhaustion. We wear ourselves out feeding this ghost of a representation of ourselves (*Intelligence* 57).

Accordingly, Australian settler colonialism can be viewed as the most perverted extension of this mythology of identity, as its project is to enforce a *particular*, simulated identarian myth on its subjects.

Dransfield’s isolated nation, peopled by his “disconnected”, desperate minority, operates as a theme park to Australia’s postcolonial “reality”; a simulacrum akin to Baudrillard’s vision of Disneyland (as discussed in Chapter 1). Dransfield’s simulation of Australia as asylum can be read at both the individual and historical levels as an evocation of the inherently oppressive context of Australia as detention centre, just as Hart’s poetry can. “Ingredients of the Ballad” (*Inspector* 75) also exhibits a prophetic sensitivity to the hyperreal. Dransfield concentrates directly on how poetry relates to reality-as-theme-park:

i went to see reality  
i had to pay to get inside  
it was no better than my dreams  
but more expensive, being real (75).

The fabrication of the “real” mirrors the fabrication of these lines, as Dransfield’s syntax conforms to the tradition of tetrameters.

Within the context of the simulated “real”, “Psyched Out”, as the title implies, narrates the politics of exile and exclusion and can symbolise the nation’s repression of its identarian angst. Painted in sterile hues, the nation is pictured through the dross of its minions. The speakers’ tone is both loudly defiant and finally, meekly acquiescent. The protest takes on this double-voice, challenging Australian preconceptions about the reality of mental illness:

our treatment is the salem  
witchhunt

the sun shuffles  
over the sky of our day (364).

Visually and rhythmically lethargic, this poem embodies its subjects through its iconic imagery. Like the miserable inhabitants of “Psyched Out”, even the sun drags its feet. Devoid of punctuation, the rhythm in this section is often elusive, invoking a monotonous melancholy that signifies the apathy of inmate and authority. However, the air of lethargy starkly contrasts with the politics of Dransfield’s subversive agenda; a protest couched in archly disillusioned verse. The cry of witchhunt reveals what Perry calls a “play of ideology” (*Hyperreality* 78), where history is used to bolster the dubiousness of “reality”. Perry’s ideological deception is here represented by Dransfield’s clash of models – the historical/political in friction with his mechanical voice.

Like the Magic Kingdom’s characters, the postcolonial subjects of “Psyched Out” are exiled to their own world; a realm that exists to hide the death of the real. This “sun-damned minority” (364) is ironically surrounded by the stereotypes of the empire that colonised them: “...farmers might call this / midas weather gold brilliant...” (364). In very direct ways, Dransfield reminds us of the anomalies of place for his subjects, who exist apart from the “gold” of empire. The imperial emphasis in “Psyched Out”, felt in every verse of this elegy of exclusion, borders the terrain of both the postcolonial and the hyperreal, thus situating Australia as a limit to both spaces.

This transhistorical hyperreal imperialism is overtly considered by Dransfield in “Lamentations”. Eschewing the subtlety of his imperial symbolism in “Psyched Out”, Dransfield uses “Lamentations” to name the brutalities of colonialism, as an abhorrent national monument:

Nearby, last century,  
convicts were flogged,  
blacks shot.

They ringbarked the Dreamtime  
now they murder  
with this slowest torture, indifference.  
No separate identity excuses me  
from past barbarities, the guilt of blood (*Streets* 41)

Unlike “Psyched Out”, where he demarcates the boundaries between coloniser and colonised, in “Lamentations” Dransfield collapses this divide, as imperialism oscillates the Australian postcolonial subject between the two extremes. In this way, Dransfield articulates a common postcolonial theoretical discourse, construing postcoloniality as *always already* inclusive of coloniality and postcoloniality. In “Lamentations” Dransfield thus introduces an *imperial consciousness*, where Australia is made sense of according to an imperial taxonomy. Hence, the separation (between lines and punishments) of “convicts” and “blacks”, as well as the separation between ancestors and their settler offspring (which Dransfield undermines) replicates imperial categories. A recent history marked by material and psychological imperialism (infecting Dransfield’s present also) in conjunction with the simulation of an Australian “real” that tries to repress this history, necessitates a haunting and produces ghostly postcolonial subjects.

### 2.1.1 The Figure of the (Ghost) Subject / The Diasporic Condition.

What I am suggesting is that Dransfield’s later voice is like a ransom paid in the kingdom of the silent...he is the romantic without a country, so that the effect is like reading the private diary of a poet who has lost his outer skin...The landscapes, outer and inner, coalesce, and we hear a voice still determined to communicate at all costs, from the centres of human sadness, irresolution and isolation. Apart from the power of this learnt language there is immense value in it, because Dransfield is reporting back from the boundaries of human alienation, and what he has to communicate is important to us all.

—Dorothy Hewett (7)

One is dead in one’s lifetime itself; multiple deaths accompany us, ghosts that are not necessarily hostile, and yet others, not dead enough, not dead long enough to make a corpse.

—Baudrillard (*Intelligence* 199)

Working away from a conventional postcolonial agenda of recuperating agency—or, in Simon During’s terms, “the desire of decolonised communities for an identity” (*Postmodernism* 458)—Dransfield concentrates his poetics on the deconstruction of the self, as Hewett infers. If we follow Hewett’s suggestive metaphors (of country, landscape and kingdom) and read Dransfield’s self as iconic of the *national* self, these texts represent a reading of the *coloniality* of Australia, rather than of a progressive postcolonial nation. Therefore, in terms of Dransfield’s texts, it may be assumed that the oppressed subject’s absence (from itself and from community) signifies that the “post” in Australian postcoloniality relates to a history of continued coloniality and dispossession rather than to an ideological break from the colonial past. In this sense, the ghostliness of Dransfield’s subjects becomes pertinent to the simulated community. Hewett’s description of Dransfield as “a poet who has lost his outer skin” therefore also works for his subjects, who both haunt the nation and characterise its haunting. In this role, Dransfield’s subjects—convicts, “blacks”, psychiatric patients, druggies and loners—also conform to Baudrillard’s description of those ghosts who are “not dead enough”. As such, these ghosts represent the unresolvedness of Australian postcoloniality and the nearness of coloniality to Australian subjectivity.<sup>3</sup>

Hewett’s “boundaries of human alienation” can thus be read as referring to a series of dualities in Dransfield’s poetry: life and death; oppression and liberation; self and other; colony and homeland. Dransfield demonstrates a marked interest in such ambiguous and transitory spaces of postcoloniality. He concentrates on the figure of the exile with an ardour akin to that demonstrated by postcolonial theorists. This outcast figure is of particular interest to Leela Gandhi, who contends that exile is the elevation of the diasporic condition: “Not surprisingly, diasporic thought finds its apotheosis in the ambivalent, transitory, culturally contaminated and borderline *figure* of the exile, caught in a historical limbo between home and the world” (132). In Dransfield’s poetry, this “figure of the exile” is represented in the form of the ghost subject—who is the (dis)embodiment of the subject-in-the-process-of-effacement. For Dransfield, the

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<sup>3</sup> This cotemporary pervasiveness of coloniality in what is an unresolved Australian postcoloniality is discussed at length by Jacobs (*Edge* 22-34).



ghost subject is mostly an agent of transgression and deconstruction, who trespasses across the life/death threshold. This subjectivity can also be seen at Gandhi's postcolonial "borderline" by virtue of its inhabiting the abyssal space between being and nothingness, as well as that of the nation-as-borderland; as coast *and* country. Taking Gandhi's lead, it follows that the black humour of Dransfield's "Psyched Out", its bleakly nonchalant tone and all of its swaying pendulum ambiguities are Dransfield's psychological marking of this postcolonial "borderline". Hung miserably between life and death, his subjects cannot assume either state. Perpetual phantoms, they haunt the "real" concrete edges of these mortal concepts with the black satire of Dransfield's "limbo":

the lake bridge is  
 too low to jump  
 fall thirty feet  
 and swim for shore (364)

Livio Dobrez characterises this ghostliness of Dransfield's subjects as a transparency:

Hence the final resting place of the aesthete was the enclosed mental area, the void of the eye-mirror. In transforming this epistemological Black Hole into penetrable space, allowing matter entry and exit, Dransfield now makes the subject neither unreal nor non-existent but transparent (385).

Using Dobrez' rather cryptic description, as it is informed by Bhabha's earlier epigraph, it would seem that the nation, in this entanglement, is condemned to introspective erosion, or, more likely, Dransfield's charge: an indifference that allows the streamlined passage of (political) matter.

Following Dobrez, Dransfield's subject/nation is hence both deterritorialised and deterritorialising. The noir identities of Dransfield's subjects haunt the edges of his paced syntax, taking their cues from his existentialist refrains:

actor  
 hanging about  
 waiting for tips when  
 longer we cannot stay (364)

These lines read like a set of stage directions and an opening line to a piece of absurdist theatre in the lingering stasis of Dransfield's characters, coupled with that last, slightly antique, existentialist declaration reminiscent of Beckett's *Waiting*

*for Godot*. In this terminal Australia, home is endlessly elusive (and allusive) in the absurd moments of this verse. In this world, where comfort falters—“the staff is unconcerned / what if the patients cry” (363) — life is homelessness and death stretches out hospitable arms. The subjects of “Psyched Out” thus find inevitable respite in death’s fantasy as they are: “designed for such / eventualities the suicide capital” (364).

### 2.1.2 Suicidal Subject, Suicidal Nation.

Through reproduction from one medium into another the real becomes volatile, it becomes the allegory of death, but it also draws strength from its own destruction, becoming the real for its own sake, a fetishism of the lost object which is no longer the object of representation, but the ecstasy of denegation and its own ritual extermination: the hyperreal.

—Baudrillard (*Symbolic* 71)

Dransfield cancels out any option of home and can be read as approaching the vast fascination in the state of “unhomeliness” in postcolonial theory.<sup>4</sup> Anindyo Roy understands this homeless nomadism as a distinctly discursive feature of both postcolonial theory and national consciousness:

The loss of a stable point of reference as home means acknowledging the presence of this “unhomely” subject. Therefore, instead of dismissing this site as simply a redundant, “nostalgic” space, postcolonial writers deal with understanding it as a “discursive” site. In short, they attempt to understand the complex dialectics that inform the “speaking position” of transnational subjects in the act of renegotiating their historical and national selves (104).

As a specifically *discursive* event, the enunciation of the postcolonial subject therefore responds to an historical construction of this subject, potentially risking reductionism or determinism. Hence, in Dransfield’s work (to use Roy’s model), the formation of the subject *in language* responds to how “the postcolonial drive towards identity centres around language” (*Postmodernism* 458) as During argues.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Said depicts postcolonial peoples as “...prisoners in their own land” (*Culture* 258), naming them as “...homeless wanderers, nomads, vagrants, unassimilated to the emerging structures of institutional power, rejected by the established order for their intransigence and obdurate rebelliousness” (*Culture* 403). Bhabha is also interested in postcolonial exile, blaming the ‘liminal’ nation for the ensuing “...otherness of the people-as-one” (*Nation* 301). In fact, for Bhabha, the postcolonial subject is determined by distance: “The individuation of the agent occurs in a moment of displacement” (*Postcolonial* 451).

Moreover, Roy's characterisation of the postcolonial subject as positioned between nation and globe is also pertinent to Dransfield's project. Clearly, "Psyched Out" advocates a transnationally-aware Australian postcoloniality, in the sense that these second and third generation diasporic Australians represent Bhabha's "otherness within" (Bennett 33)—the *internal* diaspora that creates these national and discursive displacements.

Such cultural otherness is recognised by Livio Dobrez in Dransfield's work: "...for all its solitude, Dransfield's poetry operates in a social context...Dransfield is curious about otherness, it excites him because it *is* Other—and this otherness is something he recognises without difficulty" (386). Dransfield tackles alterity as he lyrically walks through the urban streets of his unhomey Australia in "Geography" (*Inspector 3*):

...the problem of the day. being alone. there  
are no people in cities, only strangers, populations,  
or the sometime consolation of familiar  
others. it is all other. but people, they do not  
live in these lanes and towers...(3)

The estrangement here in an urban landscape depicted as the heart of an empty, ghostly Empire—"all other...these lanes and towers"—as well as the alterity of the familiar, results in a commentary on the colony as simulated artifice, a thesis that recurs throughout Dransfield's work. The situation of Australia, like this one, at the intersection of the postcolonial and the hyperreal, is the central interest of this dissertation.

The "displacement" and "imprisonment" that Bhabha and Said align with postcolonial subjectivity find an apt context in the estranging nexus of the "postcolonial hyperreal". Dransfield opens up this psychosocial geography in "Psyched Out". Here, his opening line (and repeated refrain) decorates his unhomey Australia ironically, like a bronze name plaque on someone's weatherboard dream on a quarter acre block: "longer we cannot / stay in such a place" (363). This non-place invites only ghostly visitants, travelling between homes. Roy articulates this bedevilling in relation to postcolonialism:

Appearing as a ghost-shadow of the familiar, the unhomey stands in the place of the experience of human location and signifies the impossibility of securing a safe continuity for the self, of identifying this self's status within given cultural notions of habitation (108).

Dransfield aligns such unhomeliness with the figure of the “lunatic” and the poet, often allowing his own unsure sense of self to inhabit the skin of these figures. He writes this palpably in “Byron at Newstead” (*Inspector* 82), cladding his “poet” in Romantic armour:

to be a poet  
 what it means  
 to lose the self                      to lose the self (82)

The impetus for Hewett’s identification of Dransfield as “the romantic without a country” is obvious in these lines, as the self is situated on the terrain of Roy’s “unhomely”. Further, in his epigraph to “That Which We Call a Rose” (*Streets* 50), Dransfield articulates a distinctly posthumous and desecrated “self”: “Writ out of ashes, out of twenty years of ashes” (50).

In “Visiting Hour (repatriation hospital)” (*Streets* 73), Dransfield is more direct, less metaphorical – treating suicide with gentle pathos:

before lunch was brought round  
 the soldier in the next bed  
 quietly opted out (73)

He obscures the presence of the psychiatric asylum here, instead depicting this space as chiefly imperial and hauntingly national, his “soldier” a sardonic fighter for his country. So, for Dransfield, in death, there is life in the form of a transcendent identity, or at least one beyond half-names such as “soldier”—in which his subjects can both defect from and stand for national mythologies.

In a hyperreal sense, Dransfield’s “Psyched Out” (particularly when read for its poetics of suicide) points to the added impossibility of a “habitation” in “reality”, and the defection of the soldier above attests to this. Roy’s contention that the unhomely appears “as a ghost-shadow of the familiar” (108) works alongside Baudrillard’s assertion that hyperreal simulacra behave as models of the real: “Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (*Simulacra* 1). Similarly, “Psyched Out” is not chiefly about home or homelessness, but a state beyond both. Dransfield flavours the distance between the terms “home” and “homelessness” with what would now be called poststructuralist irony. Linguistically cunning, he chooses the trope of asylum to distance his readers at the moment that he welcomes them in—asylum here a deeply ambivalent

synonym for the word “home” (especially in the contemporary context of Australia).

Australia equals isolation in Dransfield’s diasporic poetry. Not only is Dransfield’s individual “alone in a desert full of strangers” (*Streets* 74), there is also a railing indignation at the political and psychological estrangement felt by the poet figure:

In the cold weather  
 the cold city the cold  
 heart of something as pitiless as apathy  
 to be a poet in Australia  
 is the ultimate commitment (“Like This for Years”, *Streets* 74)

This exiled poet figure is also strangely immobile – caught in Dransfield’s pun on “commitment” – with both the agency of vocation and the oppression of the asylum detainee. Not only are Dransfield’s subjects marked by their distance from the Australian homeland, their alienation also brands the Australian nation. Through Dransfield’s bleak poetics, these subjects tell the postcolonial story in innovative, psychological ways, infecting and subjectivising Australia’s postcolonial discourses. Rather than focussing on the force of colonialism as historical reality, Dransfield expands its discursive reach to include the colony of the psychiatric asylum. So, as Kinsella points out: “He [Dransfield] is a nodal point in the development of a hybridised poetry in Australia – a poetry that confronts the ‘colonial past’, and tries to upend it, distort its effect” (*Michael Retrospective* xii). Like a plague of white ants, the people of “Psyched Out” eat away at the nation, exposing its structural impermanence. In a very corporeal sense, these ghosts haunt Australian life with their half-lives. So, as Bhabha surmises:

The partial, minority culture emphasises the internal differentiations, the “foreign bodies”, in the midst of the nation – the interstices of its uneven and unequal development, which give the lie to its *self-containedness* (*Culture’s* 33).

It is these bodies, these subjects, which are the vehicles for the corrective “distortion” of colonial history that Kinsella suggests occurs in Dransfield’s poetry (above).

### 2.1.3 The Traps of Language: Translating Postcoloniality.

But the other side of Dransfield’s work is the metatextual theorist, constantly investigating the way the self and subject-object relationship shift in the poem. References to things of the past abound, but so does a

language of the future. Time is destabilized. Dransfield is both Transcendental and what we might now term with consistency, Deconstructive.

—John Kinsella (*Michael Retrospective xi*).

Silent and virtually invisible, the subjects of “Psyched Out” are also strange national advocates for a “transformed” postcolonial Australia. In a different though related context, Bill Ashcroft praises the merit of silent postcolonial subjects as pivotal to a heightened understanding of the value of postcolonial writing:

The discursive event, the site of the “communication”, therefore becomes of paramount importance in post-colonial literatures because the “participants” are potentially so very “absent”. Indeed, unlike spoken discourse, the central problematic of studies of writing is *absence* (*Post-Colonial Transformation* 61).

It is no surprise, following Ashcroft, that the Cartesian subject, which Gandhi also suggests is overwritten with absence in poststructural/postcolonial texts (40), is the central figure of this absence in Dransfield’s poetry. Dransfield’s deconstruction of this subject (via narratives of damaging alienation and psychological oppression) and problematisation of the “real”, exemplify the postcolonial discourse of absence. When this absence figures as a silence, the Australian postcolonial subject represents the impossibility of enunciation also.

This silence operates as a narrative strategy of power in the political arena of the postcolonial. Ashcroft characterises this complex use of language as the postcolonial “double bind”:

Thus the post-colonial writer finds him/herself in a double bind in which language, as a field in which the “self” is constructed, is conveying two contradictory orders of message: identity and otherness. Consequently, post-colonial discourse copes with this double bind by inserting a hermeneutic space between itself and the received language, a space which can be called the “metonymic gap” (*Gimbals* 88).

Ashcroft’s postulate of postcolonial literature ventures another plausible explanation of Dransfield’s silent, elusive subjects, and his thesis on the language/self relation can be read as a prelude to Kinsella’s comments (in the epigraph above). It would follow, from Ashcroft, that the *pause* in communication for Dransfield’s subjects (their voicelessness) could veritably be this “metonymic gap”; inserted in this unconventionally postcolonial literature to address the societal horrors that lead to their “double bind”.

As ghosts, the absent, silent subjects of “Psyched Out” evade the conclusiveness of “reality”. Such hyperreal elusiveness equates, for Deborah Cook, to virtual freedom: “In silence, the masses disappear; their failure to respond makes it impossible to locate them, to analyse them, and to manipulate them” (153). Dransfield harnesses the evasive power of his “sun-damned minority” (364) by characterising their silence through his poetry-as-speech. Dransfield points to his poetry-as-speech in “circle, August” (*Streets* 72), where he names the poet’s purpose as the simple verb “to speak”: “and now all our poems / mean is that we have not lost voice” (72). Like much of Dransfield’s poetics, this articulation (and deconstruction) of the (non)speaking subject—this complex conflation of poet and subject—is a complicated dance between absence and presence. When placed in the context of postcoloniality, the speech/silence dichotomy in Dransfield’s work also reflects the coloniser/colonised dichotomy in Australian history.

Like Ashcroft, Dransfield supports a veneration of the “discursive event”. His is a humble homage to discourse (as poetry), surrounded by a thick fog of ambiguity: “i’m not dead / sure of the poems” (365). As separated lines, these statements communicate a certainty. However, Dransfield’s resistance to punctuation, coupled with his unrestrained *enjambement*, creates an open-ended finale to “Psyched Out”, situated in the ghostly half-world that Dransfield favours: the deconstructive in-between. Dransfield’s conclusion to “Psyched Out”, rather than undermining his poetics, again points to both the possibilities and the restrictions of language as representation, thereby giving the silence of his subjects more volume. In “What the mind hears” (*Streets* 65), Dransfield characterizes this conundrum as being:

What the mind hears  
when it will not give utterance  
Art itself but how to make it real? (65)

In these lines the interweaving aporia of Dransfield’s *oeuvre* cohabitate. Here, there is the psychological in combat with language; the impossibility of enunciation; the ungraspable real. Moreover, what Dransfield insists on throughout his work is a critique of the social as an unachievable ideal, which is evident in his sardonic separation of artist and audience above.

The elegy “Psyched Out” ends with an audible key change. Aesthetically indented, this five line refrain removes Dransfield entirely from his subjects, stitching up the narrative with its unravelling:

i’m not dead  
sure of the poems

life seems  
to suffer a bit

in the translation (365)

Here, Dransfield scoops up meaning and reality, spilling them with woeful understatement in an enigmatic gesture that is either defeat or peace. He brushes aside the injustices of “Psyched Out” and names its simulations of reality with six words: “life seems / to suffer a bit”. The succinctness with which this poem rests assuredly on the shoulders of one metaphor is enough to disarm any reader. Much like his use of the trope “asylum”, Dransfield’s choice of “translation” can also be understood as a comment on Australia as cultural text. Not only does he facilitate numerous transformations of the nation-space (as psychological, physical and inherently volatile), Dransfield enables the transformation of language through translation. However, as he makes clear through his critique of enunciation, translation is also a site of impossibility in postcolonial Australia,<sup>5</sup> with its “melting pot” multiculturalism shifting any practised multilingualism off the public agenda.

Translation, particularly in Dransfield’s texts, is hence engaged with here as another limit to Australian postcoloniality.<sup>6</sup> As a symbolic practice, examined more fully in chapters 4 and 5, translation engages with both postcoloniality and hyperreality. As Maria Tymoczko explains, “Translation as metaphor for postcolonial writing...involves the sort of activity associated with the etymological meaning of the word: translation as the activity of *carrying across*...” (19). Dransfield’s reliance on the power of language to “carry across” meaning in “Psyched Out” is drenched in humility, perhaps because he recognises the

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<sup>5</sup> This is reminiscent of Ivison’s formulation of the *difficulty* of translation (46), as discussed in the Introduction .

<sup>6</sup> Another notable study of translation is Spivak’s (*Translation*), which both deals with the politics of translation and extends conventional linguistic analyses in its deconstructive scope.



opposite, the elusiveness of language and its inevitable exile from itself. Livio Dobrez, highlighting the inseparable vinculum between Dransfield's life and art, suggests that this struggle with translation was a personal labour of Dransfield's that easily infected his writing: "it could be said that while Dransfield himself is not yet ready for burial ("i'm not dead"), his life *is* in the process of just such interment in the very act of translation into art" (389). Dransfield articulates his endless struggle with language in his preface to his work in *Australian Poetry Now*: "Poetry's what I feel and cannot write but only approach a little, because what I feel is inestimably more than I could get into words" (qtd. in Shapcott, 203).

It is in rendering meaning defunct that Dransfield embraces the hyperreal. For what better methodology to explain the endless refraction of meaning's postulates – truth and reality? As the porter of meaning, "carrying it across" from writer to reader, through language, Dransfield shoulders a shifting weight. Ashcroft sees language's capriciousness in postcolonial terms, declaring that: "All language is 'marginal', all language emerges out of conflict and struggle" (*Post-colonial Transformation* 67). However conflicted and elusive language is, Dransfield resides in it finally as the only viable abode. He has only the shelter of words in "Psyched Out" as a model of home. Roy uses Said's work to describe this distinctly postcolonial circumstance:

For him, [Said] then, the home/writing nexus presents the new paradox of belonging in the modern world – the loss of home provides the very condition for securing a home in writing, an activity that, while remaining vulnerable, still provides the only challenge to the world of material and intellectual commodification (103-4).

In Dransfield's work, this "loss of home" in its material and psychological sense, is equated with a deconstruction of unified subjectivity, effecting both the nation and its citizens.

"Psyched Out" shadows the national desire for stable identity (which is evident in very different ways in the poetry of Fogarty, Adamson, Forbes and Hart), haunting the present and the future by emphasising the brutalities of a *psychologically* colonised condition. To be "postcolonial" (in any sense of the word), as Alfred J. Lopez demonstrates, is thus to be inexorably haunted:

to know the postcolonial, to inhabit the space or index of the "post", is to be forever surrounded, enveloped, by... generations upon generations of spectres, both of lives that have been and lives to come;...the

postcolonial is both a past and a future inhabited, *haunted*, by them all (67).

This mode of ghostliness, therefore, is what Dransfield aligns with the tyrannies of empire. In Baudrillardian terms, his subjects are imbued with “generations of spectres”, and in turn write themselves into Australian subjectivity at large. As Dransfield prophetically declared in 1969: “I’m the ghost haunting an old house, my poems are posthumous” (qtd. in Shapcott 203).

The transhistoricism embraced (and claimed) here by Dransfield is one window through which his poetry may be viewed as an expression of a particularly liminal Australian postcoloniality. Through his ghostly mode Dransfield traverses time, invoking both the past and the future in his volatile, shifting present. As Kinsella recognises, his is a conscious re-charting of the Australian postcolonial nation-space. His poetry is often markedly postcolonial in its interests (as is especially evident in “Psyched Out”), achieving a distinct psychological re-situation of the hegemony of materiality in postcolonial theory. Dransfield’s work relocates the material world (and therefore “reality”) in the (in)tangibility of language and in the politics of the body as (shifting) national ground.

Ashcroft’s call for a new national imagining of a “transformed” postcolonial Australia is answered in the altered spaces of postcoloniality in Dransfield’s poetry, though perhaps not in the same terms as the more optimistic theories of Ashcroft. Dransfield’s psychological spaces, in their remarkably hyperreal formations, make traditional claims about the sanctity and transformability of material reality in postcolonial experience seem naïvely utopian. Hyperreality, although perhaps not the ultimate space for postcoloniality, nevertheless marks its increasing transformation into postmodern and importantly, post(-)colonial spaces.

## **2.2 Travelling Poetics: Samuel Wagan Watson’s Hyper-Indigeneity & the Haunted Postcolonial Landscape.**

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Here the idea of a spatial history is a tautology. Travelling and storytelling are inseparable from each other. The country is not the setting of stories, but the stories and songs themselves. The re-enactment of the country does not occur on a stage: it is what brings the country into being and keeps it alive.

—Paul Carter (346)

What is lacking is a Nomadology, the opposite of a history.

—Giles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Thousand 23*)

Samuel Wagan Watson's poetics challenge contemporary Australia with an insistently hostile bottom line, levelling out a country full of wanderers (from nomads sanctioned with spiritual purpose to aimless "yobbos") with the suggestion that perhaps it is not the centre of the *land* that is "dead", but the soul of its people. Wagan Watson's unravelling of middle Australia is different from, but deeply resonant with Dransfield 40 years earlier. His violent imagery assaults the comfortable fictions of the assured middle class—in their "white stucco dreaming" ("Night Racing", *Itinerant* 12)—with a speed that matches his motoring metaphors and a trail of national criticisms in its wake. His "ravelling" in postcolonial Australia arguably takes this effect, articulated in Fogarty's poetry, to different, more contemporary extremes, as his subjects interact with the text "Australia" in virtual, twenty-first century, high-tech spaces. His poetry uneasily unites Dreaming narratives with the lustful city, in an Australia that is ultimately both a dead end and the last escape highway. The resistance to a Cartesian, linear mapping of this deliberately disjunctural Australia hence looks to Deleuze and Guattari's "Nomadology", as the spaces of narrative re-inscribe the country, in Carter's sense of a travelling and a storytelling.<sup>7</sup>

Wagan Watson's poems employ symbolism and grunge realism. His poetics confronts (and constructs) what I would call a "hyper-indigeneity", with landscapes of the nation, both physical and spiritual, in the language of the hyperreal simulacrum. However, Wagan Watson's expression of the hyperreal departs quite markedly from Baudrillard's theoretical articulations, in as far as the invocation of the simulacrum emphasises a model of virtual *jouissance* (with measures of menace), rather than a language of dystopic reproduction and

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<sup>7</sup>Beyond this Nomadology functioning as an easy reinscription of an Indigenous poet as representative of his traditionally nomadic peoples, I employ Deleuze and Guattari's framework here in order to *point to* and *ironise* the difficulties of such cultural prescriptions in contemporary Australia. Further, as I will demonstrate, Wagan Watson stages Deleuze and Guattari's Nomadology within their terms of reference—as an opposition to official History—and expands the associative symbolism of the descriptor "nomadic" by his suggestions that such territorial errancy has also been a feature of (colonial) white Australia.

simulation. His register of hyperreality is therefore in tune with the playful and ironic tone often present in Forbes' "Watching the Treasurer". Where Wagan Watson's employment of the language of the hyperreal to describe Australian nationhood becomes important is in relation to how Australia, in his representation, *constructs itself*. As McKenzie Wark ventures, Australia can be a "virtual republic":

...its existence, like the existence of the "fair go", is predicated only on the possibility of disagreement about its qualities. Australia is that which Australians disagree about; Australians are the people who disagree about the possible pasts, presents and futures of Australia (*Celebrities* 32).

As one of these "people who disagree", Wagan Watson trials, in his poetry, a number of arguments about the postcolonial temporal scene and the Australian poetry scene, charting how the category of culture is virtualised and eroded.

### 2.2.1 Wagan Watson's Virtual Australia.

The investment of Australia in Wark's "virtual" (which I interpret as a version of the Australian hyperreal)<sup>8</sup> not only enables the discursive and imaginative exchange of simulations of nationhood—in Wark's terms the "possible pasts, presents and futures of Australia"—but also sits alongside constructions of a necessarily *haunted* Australia (as narrated by Dransfield). The *unresolvedness* of the Australian nation (in discursive, but also political terms) evokes a sense of a troubled national psyche for critics such as Ken Gelder and Jane M Jacobs, who prescribe an "Uncanny Australia", as the title of their 1998 book suggests. In their estimate, the haunting of Australia by its postcoloniality (which they imagine as not just a past, but importantly a present and future also) fundamentally destabilises the unification of the nation. Thus, the ensuing disagreements that Wark highlights might be construed as effects of this "postcolonial uncanny", where:

When a nation engages with others—indigenous people, immigrants, separatists—a sense of national identity is both enabled and disabled. The presence of "foreigners at home" can intensify a nation's investment in the idea of a national "self" at the very moment at which such an idea is traumatically unsettled (*Uncanny* 25-6).

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<sup>8</sup> Virtuality is also an important component to Hardt & Negri's postcolonial analyses (353-369).

The disjunctural effect of this haunting is evident in Wagan Watson's poetry, which works through the traumas of postcolonial Australia. There is a revitalised (and somewhat ironic) search for origins operating in Wagan Watson's virtual Australia, where evocations of postmodern and postcolonial bewilderment grapple with articulations of established national simulacra, such as cultural and territorial stereotypes. Often Wagan Watson stages his quest for a renegotiated Australia upon newly imagined landscapes—the future, the re-imagined past, the virtual, the psychological, the intellectual, the sacred—which constantly overwrite material landscapes. In this endeavour, his poetry works from the earlier poetics set up by Fogarty. His nomadological (un)mapping satirically takes up the spirit of Eliot's "Four Quartets", which he cites as the epigraph to his *Itinerant Blues*:

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time (2).

As well as functioning as a sceptical reference to colonial expeditions, Eliot's quoted passage can be read in this context as a demonstration of the usefulness of the "*hyperreal virtual*" for the subjects of Australian poetry. As a cyclical practice, the virtual (as a model of the imagined nation) allows for Australian stories and landscapes to overlap, to *become* each other and to facilitate a becoming (as in the epigraph from Paul Carter). This processual enabling of allegiances and discomforts is well placed by Wark as a signpost of Australianness (and is also helpful as a descriptor for Australian poetry):

What makes it possible to become this people who disagree about this public thing is the existence of a matrix of vectors that thread images and stories together, and thread them also into people's lives...From the telegraph to the telephone, to telecommunications, these vectors change, and in the process they change the way subjective experience of reality gets made (*Celebrities* 32).

As a matrix of uneven "vectors" then, it makes sense that contemporary Australian poetry (as is evidenced in the work of Fogarty, Adamson, Hart, Forbes Dransfield and Wagan Watson) is inherently deconstructive of its own premise as "Australian poetry". The ways in which these poets contest and rearticulate Australia and its poetry—and, in the end, fundamentally destabilise both sites—are thereby embraced by Wark's "virtual Australia".

As a suitably technological model of hyperreality, Wark's concept of virtuality (as a matrix) fits well with the operations of Baudrillard's simulacrum. As manifestations of Wark's "vectors" of communication (and miscommunication), Wagan Watson's narratives ideologically interact with contemporary Australia. Often, Wagan Watson's narratives thematise his disjunctural poetics, as in "Recipe for Metropolis Brisbane" (44-46):

Ingredients:

1 utopian landscape with blue river  
 a mixture of European cultures seasoned with convicts  
 200 years of conservative politics  
 1 trillion tons of bitumen, steel, glass, concrete and  
 treated timber  
 garnish of exhaust (44)

Over and above the demonstration of Australia as heterogeneous cultural space, with its "mixed" and "seasoned" cultures existing in the urban chaos of steel, chemicals and pollutants, Wagan Watson also depicts Australia here as necessarily *contested* ideological terrain.

Building on postmodern concepts, cultural practices and technologies, Wagan Watson's work is amenable to the twenty-first century character of hyperreality. In his poems, traditional cultures and consumer fads are often fused in the postmodern simulacrum, where "the dreamtime can be resurrected anytime / and found on the video store shelves" ("the dingo lounge", *Of Muse* 52). Moreover, to read his simulations of nationhood and identity in terms of the virtual matrix is to recognise how Australian texts communicate a cultural context (as Wark demonstrates) that approaches the limits of the hyperreal.

One of Wagan Watson's recognisable agendas in negotiating Australian hyperreality is to dissect Australia topographically, providing a host of intersections, rather than an expansive geography. In this sense, his popular positioning of his subjects in ambiguous spaces and times, such as "walking along a bitumen shoulder / 'round the witching hour" ("deadman's mouth harp", *Of Muse* 25) epitomises their border status. Often, though, such intersections are subordinated by the emphasis on the *journey* in Wagan Watson's work. With Wagan Watson at the wheel, this trip through an often barren Australia marks out a new *spatio-temporal* map of the country which is necessarily virtual.

In one way, what contemporary Australia amounts to in Wagan Watson's poetry is a series of highways. Politics, spirituality and philosophy negotiate with each other on this new terrain for postcolonial identity. As a matrix of highways (a series of points of connection and disconnection, entry and exit) Australia is mapped by Wagan Watson as liminal and treacherous. His subjects exist on the peripheries of the highway and establish its supremacy even as they become its roadkill. In "a verse for the cheated" (*Of Muse* 28), Wagan Watson structures the highway as an evil beast: "the recalcitrant animal / prepared to deliver us on our future paths of success / and to pick a few off on the way" (28). As the chief topographical metaphor for Australia in Wagan Watson's work, the highway symbolises a travelling nation *under negotiation*. With this in mind, Wagan Watson's structuring of the highway as a line between freedom and death reinforces Wark's argument for a dialogical (if antagonistic) virtual Australia, as much as Eliot's philosophy of processual exploration.

Wagan Watson's "the dusk sessions" (*Itinerant* 2) launches straight into the lexicon of the highway, where motoring metaphors are strewn throughout the very imagist poetic lines and syntax, joining land and sky at the apex of the horizon, which the poem hinges itself on:

the pyromaniacs of the gods were kicking it  
into that desert sunset  
upon a fire-pink, burner-blue horizon line  
(2)

Even colour here is over-stimulating, as part of the concentration on *excess* that characterises this poem. Humanity, in this context, becomes inextricably linked to stimulants, thirstily hunting for the next drug: "the tourists overdose on shooting stars" (2). These characters often simulate consumerist indulgence, for which Wagan Watson's hyperreal highways are ideal mediums of expediency.

Often, the highway represents a bordering of these "simulations of indulgence", which are critiqued by Wagan Watson as he sets them up. As in the previous excerpt, tourists figure as internal foreigners in Wagan Watson's postcolonial

Australia.<sup>9</sup> They visit to curate their own Australian national landscape and to fossilise it, but also represent the otherness of outsiders. In “a verse for the cheated” (*Of Muse* 27-8), their “bright plumage” signifies other ethnicities, and their “brand-new cars that sparkled” (27-8) become the symbols of foreign currency and foreign exchange rates. Aligned with “a strip of bitumen that we regarded as a petulant beast”, the tourists abjectify the locals, “taking photos of the roadside crosses” (27-8), and are hence voyeuristic, complicit in the death of locality. In the context of a hyperreal postcolonial Australia, these tourists are part of Wagan Watson’s emphases on alterity and the impossibility of community, emphases that echo Dransfield’s work.

This sense of an alienating Australia is crystallised in “crust” (*Of Muse* 44) which presents a decomposing human subject who is objectified and attached to the urban landscape as “10am traffic and oblivious / vitreous and dirty and open” (44). The subject’s divorce from community is underlined by his specific separation:

no-one builds a nest for him,  
for him in his stained denims

and glass crust  
and vitreous ways walks the sidewalk alone (44)

In many ways, this dispossessed and alienated subject is related to Dransfield’s subject. Eroding in a similar way (but with an angry “glass crust” that suggests his self-conscious abjectness) and signifying an analogous social leprosy in his “vitreous ways”, he is as isolated as Dransfield’s drug addicts, psychiatric patients and poets, for whom no-one (particularly the nation) “builds a nest”. Wagan Watson’s subject is also a cousin of Adamson’s poet figure in the postcolonial genealogy of internal exile, which amounts to, in Adamson’s terms, a family tree of “limping figures dressed in skin” (“Not a Penny Sonnets” 62).

As a place for the disconnected and the homeless, Australia is implicated in Wagan Watson’s generalising gesture at the end of “crust”, which melds this homeless subject to a sense of Australia as (peripheral and harsh) crust: “You

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<sup>9</sup> In this sense, Watson engages with Gelder and Jacobs’ “foreigners at home” (25-6) and his analogous linking of this foreignness within the nation to a postcolonial haunting will be discussed at length here.



never really get over the big punches / the glass crust / or the vitreous demise” (44). There is logic, then, in reading Wagan Watson’s poetry (like Adamson’s) as a commentary on Australia as isolated island, engulfed by distance and internal abjection. In this sense, Rockel’s evocation of Wagan Watson’s narratives as estranged and estranging (par. 1) is appropriate to an unresolved and haunted nation-space.

### 2.2.2 Australia as Psychic Territory.

The dijeridoo sits in the corner of my room  
 near the window, ghosts breathe  
 my frailty of spirit  
 resonates in the acoustics of this gouged plain.

—Samuel Wagan Watson, “Four Apocalyptic Quatrains: The Australian Wheatboard-Iraq Bribery Scandal” (3).

Like his symbolic attraction to the highway, Wagan Watson’s verses often launch off into the distant space of Australia-as-periphery, embracing the allure of the never-ending horizon as their thematics speed off tangentially, “fuelling until darkness” (“the dusk sessions”, *Itinerant* 2). The tone of “the dusk sessions” is at once celebratory and cynical. Wagan Watson assembles this incongruous and often ironic tone and also creates a peculiarly inviting mixture of lyrical poetry and colloquialisms, as in the playful evocation:

the lark of min-min lights  
 on the petals of midnight bloom<sup>10</sup>

Searching for origins and mapping ideological intersections around the concept of the Australian nation, Wagan Watson’s choice of the min min lights frets the edges of the Australian “real” with an emphasis on the supernatural. As some accounts of the min min lights have it, these hauntings refer to massacres of Indigenous peoples, as they occur above Indigenous burial grounds (Chalker, par. 13).

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<sup>10</sup> It is nearly impossible not to hear the loud echo here of Ezra Pound’s “In a Station of the Metro”: “The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough” (35). This intertext marries industrialisation with the Australian outback in a way that signals alienation, but also importantly points to the significance of an *Australian* haunting (with the word “apparition”).

As an expression of the Australian landscape—entirely divergent from pastoral conventions—they give the country a *psychic* and liminal textual dimension, rather than a predominantly *physical* one, as Bill Chalker describes:

The Min Min Light is many things. First and most paramount, is that it is and perhaps always will be, an enduring part of Australian folklore...Attempts to explain the light, even if successful, will not harm the legend that is the Min Min Light...the locality of the Min Min Light's hauntings, may simply translate into a site of enduring significance, as manifestations of marvellous natural phenomena and attendant folklore (par. 89).

To structure the nation, then, as Chalker does, as to some degree predicated on folklore, is to enable understandings of Australia as the *narrative* topos that Paul Carter describes. To this end, it is possible to extend on Gelder and Jacobs' work—where ghost stories figure as the primary texts for their “Uncanny Australia”—by applying their analysis to poetry as a broader cultural prognosis. Like the min min legend, for Gelder and Jacobs, “the haunted site, at least potentially, is an unbounded or luxurious thing which can reach across place indiscriminately” (31). Furthermore, aside from the ephemeral register, *Uncanny Australia* contends that Australia replicates Freud's *unheimliche*, in that it is both estranging and familiar. As such, “the haunted site” doesn't simply refer to place, but to its people as well. As Gelder and Jacobs have it, and as Wagan Watson demonstrates in his poetry (in accord with Dransfield), postcolonial hauntings disturb settler and Indigenous Australians equally (if unevenly) in an “entanglement” that implicates a “divided nation” (42). Hence, the poststructural equation for the “uncanny effect” of the Australian ghost story that Gelder and Jacobs provide can be put to good use for Australian poetry, where: “the site is (not) the nation” (39). In this sense, as in Wagan Watson's fixation on the highway and the horizon space, Australia is distinctly constructed as limit point, as occupying the edge *and* the ambiguous middle.

Searching always for the function of min-min lights in politico-poetic landscapes, Wagan Watson's project in poems such as “the dusk sessions” appears to be a focussing on supernatural excesses, which are structured as the insistence of the hyperreal (as the super-real and as virtual realm). This insistence is at times characterised by spiritually alive landscapes, such as the Dreamtime; at others by the haunting of Wagan Watson's ephemeral subjects, who inhabit these liminal

spaces. Wagan Watson's tale of frail spirits inhabiting the "gouged plain" of Australia (in the epigraph above) encapsulates this notion.

Working on supernatural effects (as supernationals effects), akin to min min lights, Wagan Watson's "for the wake and skeleton dance" (*Of Muse* 50-1) attempts to make sense of the warring simulations of the Australian symbolic. The context of postcolonial Australia as necessarily both junctural and disjunctural is reinforced by Wagan Watson in his chilling analysis of contemporary Australia as limit-space:

the dreamtime Dostoyevskys murmur of a recession in the spirit world  
they say,  
the night creatures are feeling the pinch  
of growing disbelief and western rationality  
that the apparitions of black dingoes stalk the city night, hungry  
their ectoplasm on the sidewalk in a cocktail of vomit and swill  
waiting outside the drinking holes of the living  
preying on the dwindling souls fenced in by assimilation (50)

This first verse presents a systematic evaluation of a range of postcolonial political effects in Australia. Chiefly, Wagan Watson deals with assimilation, which figures as both a hybridisation in his "dreamtime Dostoyevskys" and as the culture of a "fenced in" asylum. As products of (a history of) assimilation, the "drinking holes" carry the iconically Anglocentric suggestion of pubs at the same time that they suggest native waterholes; the Dreamtime is economically rationalised; and the black subjects are both mythologised and celebrated in their totemic association for Indigenous readers and potentially, for some non-Indigenous readers, animalised in their transformation into dingoes. A crucial expression of Australia as the edge of "reality", this poem makes the physical and the phantasmagorical coexist (albeit in an abject meeting of ectoplasm, vomit and swill), as this nation-space produces excesses that seemingly emanate from the forced contexts of "growing disbelief and western rationality" (50). In an Australia that is "fenced in" and ordered in terms of "rationality", Wagan Watson's privileging of excess represents a crucial political manoeuvre. According to Gelder and Jacobs, this is an effect of the "postcolonial uncanny", which unexpectedly infiltrates political and ideological spheres. Their description of uncanny effects could also be applied to Wagan Watson's poems: "these are 'excessive' things, extending both downwards (you will sooner or later uncover a ghost), and outwards: vertically and horizontally" (31). In this haunting, Wagan

Watson's poetry shares in Dransfield's legacy, which sets up Australian poetry as haunted and haunting, where its texts (beyond the life or death of the poet, beyond their inscription in genres such as Romanticist individualism, beyond the page) "are excessive things, extending both downwards [along a spatial axis]...and outwards [along a temporal axis]".

Wagan Watson's postmodern Australia is intersectional territory—where identity is fractured between the ancient and the modern; the division between the global and the local is interrogated; style and subject are pluralised—thereby haunting the ideological limits of "the nation" with the mystery and haunting of ghost lights. Narrating a country suffering from an acute long-term case of *border neurosis* (already vindicated in Adamson and Hart's poetry), Wagan Watson exhibits a kaleidoscope of frameworks for Australia, from mythological playground, to cultural void, to mercilessly punishing landscape, to (somewhat alienating) homeland. Each of these Wagan Watson complicates, until it is only their fractured and multiplied relationships that are left. These represent, therefore, simulations of Australia's limits, where the nation becomes a series of intersections as a response to its border problematic.

### 2.2.3 Hyper-Indigeneity at the Limits of "Australia".

Poems like "the dusk sessions" are edgy, in the sense that they seek to leave the reader *on edge*, now contemplating the visual magic of a sunset "dancing a wake for the dying light"; now arrested by the brutality of the "...sun bleached bones/of dry-spell roadkill"(2) underneath. As part of this edginess, there is always the presence of a menacing hyperreal lurking around Wagan Watson's poems—in this poem, the "ghostriders", who quash "truth" and undermine the mythology of the "real".

Nowhere in *Itinerant Blues* is this haunting presence more strongly felt than in "the night house" (33-4), in which Wagan Watson stages a spectral performance of episodes in Australia's dark history (and potentially darker future). In this poem, Wagan Watson convincingly employs the language of the curse, invoking a *hyper-indigeneity*—in this case under the guise of a transcendent and timeless Indigenous wisdom which informs the voice of the narrator. Wagan Watson registers the denial of Indigeneity in this poem (a repetition of Australian history), and

amongst the violent imagery, there is a passionate mourning for this civilisation of nations, for:

those black women who once upon a time  
had their babies in this yard  
before the bulldozers mowed down the birthing plain (33)

This simulation of Australian history *reinscribes* these atrocities onto our national imagination, during a post-ATSIC, post-reconciliation time when Indigenous histories have been all but removed from the public agenda in any ongoing way. Producing a response to the public trivialisation of Indigenous issues, Wagan Watson re-maps (and hence re-tells) Australia according to its treatment of Indigenous peoples. As Whitebeach argues, such a re-mapping is nonetheless imbued with a sense of futility, in that colonial history presents itself simultaneously as “irreversible” (165). This is crystallised in the final stanza:

the sepia images of memory  
in a landscape formed  
along the blackened fringes  
of this sunburnt country (33)

Reminiscent of colonial photography, this stanza communicates how the colonial imprint in Australia was *predicated* on the violent marginalisation of its Indigenous peoples to the “blackened fringes”. Ironically, the stark absence of white as a colonial symbol—in favour of the rust coloured land, the sepia memory and the blackened edges—also comments loudly on the *otherness* of the white presence in Australia. Further, Wagan Watson answers Kevin Gilbert’s call here for an anti-canonical, anti-colonial poetics—through which Indigenous poetics write *absence* onto the text of white invasion, blatantly inverting recent Australian history. As Gilbert stridently declared:

Black poets sing, not in odes to Euripides or Dionysus, not Keats, nor Browning, nor Shakespeare; neither do they sing a pastoral lay to a “sunburnt country” for they know that the russet stain that Dorothea Mackellar spoke of is actually the stain of blood, our blood, covering the surface of our land so the white man could steal our land (xxiv).

Prompted by and staged upon these bloody landscapes, “the night house” reads like a gothic novel (ironically invoking a markedly Western tradition) and Wagan Watson doesn’t spare the malevolent touches. The night, as backdrop for this tale, provides a suitably gruesome blanket for the cursed house:

the lips of primal vengeance

camouflaged in an eternal apron of midnight's plague (33)  
 With this night as their scene, an immense metaphysical battle occurs between the forces of hellish colonisation, "the demons" (34) and the traditional inhabitants, whose haunting presence continually re-affirms the curse.

In keeping with the paradigmatic conventions of the gothic genre, this house must fall, in due course, by its own undoing, which in this case is its association with "heartless atrocities" (34). Wagan Watson's poem thus represents the cultural erosion endemic to postcolonial Australia. Although the night house, in its materiality, represents Anglo-Saxon Australia as colonial structure (and is also readable as an image of the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the *loss* of home), Wagan Watson endows the displaced phantasms of Indigenous Australia with much more permanence. His "hyper-indigeneity", which ensues from the exclusion of Indigenous life from the "real" and its exile into the metaphysical and the virtual, also inaugurates "...the doomed foundations of the night house / unable to stop / the curses falling" (*Itinerant* 34).

Where Indigeneity is aligned in "the night house" with a powerful spirit world (and with the virtual and supernatural in the broader collection of poems), white Australia is represented as fundamentally carnivorous, beastly and hellish. This is a very effective reversal of the stereotype of the "uncivilised savage". In this demonic slaughterhouse, the only viable option for indigenous agency is "hyper-indigeneity": an escape route from a place where:

it is not the smell of Sunday roast that lingers in the air  
 but other flesh that emanates from  
 the night house

and the crows that cackle in its unkempt grounds  
 they too have witnessed the decrepitude  
 (33)<sup>11</sup>

As another evocation of "hyper-indigeneity", and as a response to Australia's postcolonial haunting, Wagan Watson's "the dingo lounge" (*Of Muse* 52) takes up the supernatural/supernatural as an expression of Indigenous identities.

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<sup>11</sup> This image of the nation as haunted house is reminiscent of Patrick White's image of colonial imposition, in the form of the decaying colonial ghost house, Xanadu, in *Riders in the Chariot*.

Representing a negotiation with the haunted and the haunting, “the dingo lounge” structures its “hyper-indigeneity” as a positioning—often darkly witty, infinitely hybridised—of identity along the margins of the land, the Dreamtime, the indigenous, the foreign, the past and the future. The impossibility of a “real” and of unadulterated subjectivity for Indigenous Australians is wrapped up in various hauntings in the opening verse:

those of the brown-skin lycanthrope  
 have merely become the forgotten offspring  
 from the dark ages of the dreamtime  
 the black man’s beliefs  
 are being swallowed up and regurgitated in foreign lands for a  
 dollar  
 the night creatures sucked into a vacuum of the techronic abyss  
 the shapeshifters skulk around the dingo lounge  
 haunted by the screaming engines of the machines of  
 consequence (52)

Definitively ephemeral, Wagan Watson’s ghostly subject is not an *essential* unified identity, transforming as it does between the were-wolf, the forgotten, the commodity, the night creature and the “shapeshifter”. A sense of foreignness pulses through this text, as its landscapes move from dystopia to dystopia: from the haunted night to the lost Dreamtime; from multinational capitalism to the “vacuum of the techchronic abyss” (52). This neologistic site, which can be nominated as the contemporary Australian “postcolonial hyperreal”, implies nothingness (the abyss), post-human impartiality (technology) and long-term inevitability (the chronic). Ultimately, when these are the simulated landscapes of “hyper-indigeneity”, the only conclusion the poem can make is to (un)trace the subjects “as they fall into the landscape of the shadowmead / and the faded memories of a storytelling damned” (52). So, in this instance, the travelling/storytelling advanced by Carter is problematised in the inevitable frustrations of a cultural storytelling in the “damned” context of postcolonial Australia. The Eurocentric indicators here—“landscape”, “mead”, “storytelling damned”—are emblematic of the diminished boundaries of contemporary Indigenous Australia. However, Wagan Watson coopts and sullies these Eurocentrisms, in a powerful hybridisation and haunting of Australia.

### 2.2.4 (Un)Mapping Australia.

Australian poetry [...] is a geographical and psychological entity rather than a purely historical one.

—John Kinsella (*Landbridge* 15)

Wagan Watson's poetry is not merely a collection of symbolic colonial and postcolonial stereotypes, but a powerful and constant deconstruction of these. Elsewhere, for instance, Wagan Watson departs from his hellish night and instead celebrates the night image as a transgressive space of agential possibility. Wagan Watson's highway is politicised in "night racing" (*Itinerant* 12), polarising black and white Australia, as the line between reckless freedom and burdened middle class stagnation. Undeniably repressed, the representatives of white Australia are reduced to voyeurs who "spy through the holes in their lace curtains" (12), whilst the young Indigenous subjects re-colonise the streets,

black feet pumping racing pedal to the floor  
breaking the silence of the settlers' sacred sites  
(*Itinerant* 12).

Wagan Watson's measured poetics—like his studied alliteration here—create a host of reversals in this poem. Beginning with the opposition between restless Aborigines, "night racing through the suburbs" and the white citizens incarcerated in their own prisons "of white stucco dreaming" (12), "night racing" moves to the hybridisation of animal and machine in the car with "a growling junkyard dingo under the bonnet" (12) as a complication of stereotypes of Indigeneity, where the dingo is associated with Indigeneity in Wagan Watson's work and propels technology.<sup>12</sup> At one level, Wagan Watson mimics hyperreality here, as his characters represent the excessive *extensions* of repressed national "reality effects"<sup>13</sup> such as incarceration, asylum and colonisation.

Truncated portrayals of identity are also present in Wagan Watson's overt celebration of "...the dreaming of jaywalkers and nightstalkers", characters who

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<sup>12</sup> This is also potentially another example of Wagan Watson's "technochronic".

<sup>13</sup> Whilst constantly denying the existence of the "real", Baudrillard allows for "reality effects", which, as he argues, come about only within the confines of the virtual, which "now marks the vanishing or end of the real": "I have already said that, as I see it, to bring a real world into being is in itself to produce that world, and the real has only ever been a form of simulation. We may, admittedly, cause a reality-effect, a truth-effect or an objectivity-effect to exist, but, in itself, the real does not exist" (*Passwords* 39).



are causally linked to “the warriors of old” (12). Indeed, ancient “warriors” are the models for identity for this band of joy riders, for whom guerrilla action on the streets is a tactical manoeuvre—anarchic, childlike, disruptive—in their battle to avenge the barbarous usurpation of their land. In Whitebeach’s estimation, Wagan Watson’s *Itinerant Blues* conforms to a trend in contemporary Indigenous poetry (particularly that of poets such as Lisa Bellear) where it performs the function of mapping the urban: “In the tradition of Lisa Bellear’s *Dreaming in Urban Areas*, this book maps the urban dreaming tracks, which are both sites of defeat...and places to assert identity, even if it is just to fight back...” (166). Here again, Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on the function of mapping (as distinct from tracing) is strongly applicable to Wagan Watson’s work.

(Un)mapping Australia, Wagan Watson’s subjects re-conceptualise the texts of Australian politics and the landscapes of nationhood, with the alternative of a counter-hegemonic *spatial* ontology. As Carter observes, the economy of space can undermine the Eurocentric supremacy of temporality:

Herding the natives into centres, the government further centralised its own power. It was not that the Aborigines were unorganised, only that their power was distributed horizontally, dynamically. Their wandering did indeed constitute a “state”—a form of social and political organisation. But this was expressed, not as a power over past and future—the pet obsession of the usurping historical culture—but as a power over space (336).

The spatial realm is posited in Wagan Watson’s work as the site for a contestation and reinforcement of Indigenous identity. There is a recognition of colonisation in “night racing” (and a repetition of it) in the acknowledgment of “these areas we treat with the same contempt as laid upon us” (12) as well as a wish to stifle the violence of Australian history by “drowning out the dying heartbeat of this captured landscape” (12). Such warring impulses in Wagan Watson’s characterisations of contemporary Indigenous Australians make obvious the unresolved status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. Travelling somewhere between the Dreaming and the technological future, Wagan Watson’s subjects often perform “hyper-indigeneity” as the only available negotiation of such indistinct psychic space.

The intersection of hyperreal simulations is the nucleus of “kangaroo crossing” (*Itinerant* 3). The poem commences with the confessional voice of the narrator as another important instrument for vocalising this difficult junction of virtual realms:

I know this stretch in my blood

this is where the *Megaleia rufa* song  
cries louder than any car stereo

the dreaming that suddenly crawls onto the road (3)

The country—the backdrop of Wagan Watson’s characters’ psychological and existential dramas—now becomes the simulacrum, encompassing the traffic of identity simulation at this intersection of highways. In “kangaroo crossing”, temporality is reduced to a series of virtualities that connect the realms of Dreamtime and contemporary time. In the end, the security of both ambits is undermined by Wagan Watson’s concentration on the miniscule connectors between time and space, the enigmatic “refraction of light / from split seconds / to eternity” (3).

Beyond a simple recognition of the complicated simultaneity of Dreamtime and contemporary time within Australian Indigeneity, Wagan Watson’s concentration on temporal complication also demotes European time. Reconfiguring the temporal axis of “Australian History” by having it intersect constantly with indistinct spatial axes (such as those that the theories of Baudrillard, Gelder and Jabobs and Deleuze and Guattari engage with), Wagan Watson’s Australian moment is as intricate as it is expansive—accompanied by the insistence on the uncanny. To read this transhistorical impulse in Wagan Watson’s work is to recognise an echo of Hugh Webb’s defence of the coexistent seniority and immediacy of Australian Indigeneity, where he argues that Indigenous texts are received as “damned cultural artefact[s]”, as a repression of the fact that “it is Aboriginal culture which is the *senior* culture on this continent (and not only in a temporal sense)” (1).<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Mueke covers similar ground in his *Ancient and Modern: Time, Culture and Indigenous Philosophy*, where he investigates the modalities of Indigenous temporalities.

The seniority of Indigeneity and the immediacy of its contemporary challenge to settler postcoloniality emerges again in Wagan Watson's "we're not truckin' around" (*Itinerant* 5), where the metaphysical meets the "real" on a plain distinctly saturated with twenty-first century technology. Wagan Watson's thematic and metaphorical attraction to the virtual displays itself immediately in this poem:

upon the dining table of the Invader  
there were those who thought  
that they could simply mimic creation  
and plough through this land  
inventive  
but blindfolded (5)

As colonialism is reduced to a simulation—with the computer game and the referential pun on "Space Invaders" here—the actions of Wagan Watson's inferred white subjects are definitively machinic (yet still carnivorous), performing routinely their own imagined history. The presence of the machinic in Wagan Watson's work engages with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomic structure of the book (and literature) as an assemblage, whose value doesn't have as much to do with its own internal functions, as with its necessary interrelation with other kinds of machines (for example, the History machine):

A book itself is a little machine; what is the relation (also measurable) of this literary machine to a war machine, revolutionary machine, etc—and an *abstract machine* that sweeps them all along?...when one writes, the only question is which machine the literary machine will be plugged into in order to work (*Thousand* 4).

In the context of such a reading, we could take the mention of blindness at the end of the first stanza (above) as a reference to the incapacity of colonialist machines to ethically self-regulate. Wagan Watson's reference to this (within the context of his poem machine), potentially interrelates all sectors of Australian society (such as history, literature and politics) under a machinic, yet postmodern order. Wagan Watson's staging of interactions between history and postcoloniality present some of the identity effects of this postmodernity.

What the brutalities of Australian colonial history always come back to in Wagan Watson's work, however, is hybridity *not* as utopic, but as *sad*, uncertain but also vigorous, based on a knowing cooption of European and Indigenous narratives. This is exactly the direction in which "we're not truckin' around" (*Itinerant* 5) travels, documenting how the colonisation of this continent was not only a beginning, but an irreparable end:

and the bitumen vine of wandering impetus  
drove right through the bora-ring  
and knocked our phone off the hook  
forever (5)

Writing of a moment *beyond* that of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's "We are going" and Judith Wright's "Bora Ring" (obvious intertexts here), Wagan Watson locates the site of the bora-ring in the recent past, after the process of destruction charted in "We are going" is achieved. Indigenous identity is divorced from the bora-ring in Wagan Watson's poem (or fatally interrupted in its intersecting with white Australia).

Wagan Watson documents colonial destruction in portraying an automated colonial settler culture "...who thought / that they could simply mimic creation" (*Itinerant* 5), undermining colonial ideologies with this unravelling of their "impetus" as drifters in "we're not truckin' around", where they negotiate Australia forcefully, via "the bitumen vine of wandering impetus". As Wagan Watson's own peripatetic *enjambement* displays, (in the previous excerpt), stubbornly resisting even his own colloquial interruptions, these drifters have made the *entire country* a collection of simulations of their wandering, dispossessing state. Therefore, rather than constructing *only* Indigenous subjects as dispossessed, Wagan Watson alters the terms of representation by structuring this dispossession as a tragic reflection of the *settler colonial* culture—whose very unravelled state writes a copy of its internal dispossession onto the colonised culture. Hence, as a derivative of the aspect of "colonial consciousness" that relates to Nourry's impossibility of a unified Australian (Western) subjectivity, Wagan Watson presents a mechanically dispossessing colonial culture. The postcolonial "bitumen vine of wandering impetus" therefore works as one obvious symptom of a repressed nation.

The out-of-control colonialist highways, which blaze their paths through Australian history, here dispose of Indigeneity, so that it becomes the waste of the technological future. Wagan Watson's evocation of the indigene

...feeling a kinship  
with the discarded and shredded  
black pieces of truck tire  
on the fringes of the big road  
(5)

aligns Indigenous subjectivity with the redundancy of road kill, or even less, the detritus of the machines that cut through the country. John Fielder notes a similar association of Indigeneity and exile in his reading of Mudrooroo Narogin's work: "Because of the devastating consequences of colonialism, Narogin describes Aboriginal people as belonging to a fringe culture: dispossessed, marginalised, ghettoised" (*Postcoloniality* par. 21). Like Fielder, rather than reading this dispossession as a side-effect of Indigenous nomadism, Wagan Watson strategically rewrites this marginalisation as a direct effect of *colonialism*, which is ironically aligned with settler nomadism, in its indifferent trailblazing.

Within this arena, his Indigenous subjects face the risk of being represented as merely stereotypes of Indigeneity and nationalism, but instead are launched into the matrix of a postmodern "hyper-indigeneity". Not only do these subjects perform their identity amidst a spiritually decomposing Australia, their often ghost-like status on the edges of society and the simultaneity of past, present and future, makes any adherence to the colonial reality principle fallacious. Wagan Watson's articulation of "hyper-indigeneity" offers Indigenous subjects the chance to refuse Australian colonial discourses of citizenship and nation that operate under the rubric of the metadiscourse of "reality". This opens up the hyper-national sphere for these subjects—where time and space are not limited by calculable, linear time and by physically bordered space; where the nation is *always already* a processual becoming, a contested debate, a "virtual republic", an Australian machine, a simulacrum; and where Carter's call for an Australia that is fundamentally "a travelling and a storytelling" can be realised. However, attendant to both the postcolonial and the hyperreal, as Wagan Watson structures them, are their dangerous, limiting and negative effects. Accordingly, temporal and spatial negotiations of Australia, as well as ideological negotiations with the text "Australia" must confront the machinic and simulatory phenomena of the nation—its illusory, repressive claims, its dispossessing history. Moreover, along with the capacity for "a travelling and a storytelling" goes the evidence of the colonial imprint, of exclusive nationalist narratives, and of the dangers of a conservative and xenophobic national imaginary. Thus, it is both the *treachery* and the *potentiality* of Australia as limit-space, unsteadily holding together these antagonistic effects, the double-edged hyperreal, that Wagan Watson engages with in his work.

## Afterword.

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Hanting Australia, Dransfield's and Wagan Watson's poetics take Australia as *psychic* (rather than purely physical) territory. As Carter's critique illuminates, this poetry attests to the requirement to be able to *read* Australia textually, rather than attributing a steadfast material "reality" to it that is somehow divorced from the discursiveness of history and politics.

It is possible, therefore, to read Australia *against* colonialist models of "the New World", the antipodean solution. To partake in this kind of reading (via the poetry of Dransfield and Wagan Watson) is to acknowledge the ways in which colonialism—its structures, its mindsets, its texts—can be a dystopia for *all* postcolonial subjects. As Dransfield and Wagan Watson make clear, the irony of our awareness of Australia as penal colony and as a territory of massacres could not be more acute than in relation to the last ten years of the Howard Government, under which asylum has taken on yet another grim context in this country.

These internal politics in turn affect Australia's relation to global politics, particularly given the sensitivity to colonality and imperialism charted in contemporary Australian poetry. Hence, Dransfield and Wagan Watson not only provide a new range of textual frameworks for contemporary Australia, their work also pre-empts the discourses through which the national can and must be read in relation to the global. Colonialism, neo-colonialism, incarceration, border control, long histories of repression of the colonised are, after all, intensely local *and* national *and* global "reality-effects".

## Australian Postcolonial Politics at the Limits of the Hyperreal.

### Foreword.

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This chapter engages with the permutations of hyperreality, postcoloniality and imperialism within the two contexts of “Australia”, and what is currently referred to as “The New World Order”. This terminology (used pervasively in the media to describe contemporary U.S. imperialism) takes on a more fraught meaning in relation to Australian Indigenous poetics, however, as the work of Indigenous-identified poets Bobbi Sykes and Tony Birch demonstrates. One of the links between their poetry and that of three other poets examined here—John Forbes, Robert Adamson and Jennifer Maiden—is an intense awareness of neo-imperialisms. More generally, this poetry is interrelated in the sense that it deals with Australian politics as its central subject. For all of these poets, this engagement with politics inevitably involves a probing of Australia’s colonial history and its possible futures, usually interpreted in this poetry within the context of postcoloniality. This chapter also examines how Australian poets structure local and global politics, by using an “advanced hyperreality” and “consciousness of colonialism” as ideological tools with which to make sense of the issues of reconciliation, the Gulf War and the War on Terror.

My contention here is that the text “Australia”, produced as a number of hyperreal nation-spaces, conforms to Baudrillard’s “Integral Reality”—a condition characterised by the “non-event” and the ubiquity of media saturation. According to Baudrillard, Integral Reality defines a culture that has moved beyond the possibility of both the “real” and the “historical”, but that nonetheless falsely promotes the reality principle and the history principle “integrally” (*Intelligence* 126). In simulating “reality” as its overarching ideology, a society under the order of Integral Reality *internalises* its commitment to the myth of the “real”, but in this state of advanced repression of artifice, is programmatically dependent on

hyperreal simulation.<sup>1</sup> It is also characterised by an over-stimulation by mediated information, which gives the *illusion* of the occurrence of *meaningful* events. In dealing with this Western Integral Reality, these poets necessarily confront the loss of an historical “scene”, but also importantly test the possibility of a “beyond” of history, as well as the potentially rupturing effects of their poetry as predictions of Baudrillard’s counteractive “pure event”. However, as Baudrillard controversially argues, “pure events” are singular and near-impossible implosions of Integral Reality, a system which perpetuates its myths of reality and history at “zero degrees”, where no momentous change can occur (*Intelligence* 122).

Australian poetry is proposed here as a Baudrillardian “deterrence machine”, which forces representations of the New World Order to their epistemological extremes, via the implementation and extension of hyperrealist logic. As such, the poetry examined in this chapter capitalises on the Western *penchant* for simulations of the “real”, but mimics these simulations with a great degree of irony, and with the parallel emphasis on the role of poetry as advancing a strong social ethics.<sup>2</sup> As I will demonstrate, Australian poets exhibit a familiarity with a hyperreal social logic (as in Forbes’ work) and thus utilise the symbolic tools of hyperreality, as well as its deconstructive logic, in order to both engage with the social (and thus engage with contemporary readers), but also to *combat* hyperreal political rhetoric. As such, Australian poetry constructs itself on the threshold of the material and the discursive—a hotly contested area in postcolonial studies. Ultimately, poetry is offered here as a vital site of political activism, and one which is able to harness the symbolic manipulation endemic to the contemporary political sphere, mobilising the semiotic as its counter-offensive against hyperreal conflicts. However, this poetic activism is dependant on its reception and readership for effect. Perhaps the most urgent and volatile limit that Australian poetry confronts, the uncertainty of a committed readership is the ultimate test for these discursive and political endeavours.

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<sup>1</sup> Integral Reality can thus be used as a descriptor for the ideological system under which Australia both promulgates and represses its coloniality, particularly in McCann’s and Nourry’s senses (as discussed earlier).

<sup>2</sup> This is similar to Baudrillard’s work, in that the hyperreal is often brought to bear on sites of reality production and particularly world orders. See particularly his recent texts *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, “Pornography of War” and *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*.



### 3.1 Approaching the Postcolonial Hyperreal.

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Contemporary Australian poetry, as has been argued throughout this dissertation, engages with the limits of the postcolonial and the hyperreal in its articulations of twentieth-century Australian culture and politics. If we read this poetry in terms of one of Baudrillard's chief ideological challenges, which is to analyse the character of the New World Order and its effect on globalisation, it follows that Australian postcoloniality necessarily confronts *another* limit.

Carrying the burden of its own history of imperialism, Australian poetry confronts its contemporary cultural and political ally (the U.S.) and U.S. neo-imperialism, as a counterpoint to its postcoloniality and as a challenge to the utopianism implicit in the "post".<sup>3</sup> When this clash of models of imperialisms is staged in the simulacrum, there follows an inevitable confrontation with Integral Reality. The claims that Baudrillard makes—about another death of history, a cultural inertness, a virtual and ideological hegemony—though contentious, are nonetheless approached in Australian poetry in its processing of the New World Order. Given Baudrillard's seemingly contradictory assertions—that we operate under the reality illusion, but that the world system is at the threshold of the "inertia of the real"; and that we inhabit a dead history characterised by a culture of the "non-event", yet one that awaits the upheaval of the cataclysmic "pure event" (which he suggests belongs to a history of its own)—it follows that Integral Reality is not an unproblematic space (*Intelligence* passim). In its concentrated negotiation of hyperreality, Australian poetry narrates and challenges the theoretical terrain of Integral Reality, particularly in its processing of neo-imperialisms in Australia and overseas.

Here, therefore, I will demonstrate how the poetry of Sykes and Birch exhibits Baudrillard's Integral Reality, which he characterises as (a reaction to) the perpetuation of the "non-event":

The non-event is not when nothing happens.

It is, rather, the realm of perpetual change, of a ceaseless updating, of an incessant succession in real time, which produces this general

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<sup>3</sup> This application of postcolonial critique to contemporary Western Imperialism and the evolution of neo-imperialisms is an area which requires much more scholarly work, particularly in relation to literary and cultural theory.

equivalence, this indifference, this banality that characterises the zero degree of the event (*Intelligence* 122).

At “zero degrees”, therefore, we are saturated by media representations of global events, which, in fetishizing the “real”, remove it from reach. The paradoxical media emphasis on “real time” is an emblem in Baudrillard’s work of the illogical manner in which the “real” is now constructed. Under these pressures, the event (as an historical and “real” scene) is reduced to banality, condemned to inhabit a nullified position at “zero degrees”. More than a total, all-consuming lack of reaction by the viewers, Baudrillard’s prose (above) suggests that it is rather the agency of *the event* (as we once might have understood it) that is paralysed.

Faced with the advent of Integral Reality, civilisations can only hope to respond with a resurgence of the “pure event” as the antidote, as Baudrillard argues (*Spirit* 27-30; *Intelligence* 127). Where a system approaches implosion, he argues, the “pure event” resuscitates it by the introduction of a “reality effect”. For Baudrillard, September 11 represents the most convincing instance of the “pure event”. Encapsulating the (im)possible, the suicide bombers played out a simple extension of American fantasy, by replicating blockbuster films and thus giving the U.S. a chance to save itself from an annihilation staged amongst the icons of capitalism, an annihilation that was very much a product of their national imaginary (as well as the terroristic imaginary). In this way, this event introduces “reality effects” into a hyperreal culture, forcing it to confront the nexus of the virtual and the real. The literal implosion of the World Trade Centre (a meta-symbol of U.S. hegemony) works as the implosion Baudrillard points towards. “Pure” in the sense that it was singular and operated “against its own simulacrum” (*Intelligence* 126), September 11 is used by Baudrillard to ratify his theoretical construction of Integral Reality.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly, for Lacanian scholar Slavoj Žižek, September 11 represented a breaking through what he calls America’s “phantasmatic screen” (*Welcome* par.8). As such, this event is most significant for Žižek in its relation to the (Lacanian) “Real”: “one can effectively perceive the collapse of the World Trade Centre towers as the climactic conclusion of the 20<sup>th</sup> century art’s ‘passion of the real’—the ‘terrorists’ themselves did not do it primarily to provoke the real material damage, but FOR THE SPECTACULAR EFFECT OF IT. The authentic 20<sup>th</sup> century passion to penetrate the Real Thing (ultimately, the destructive void) through the cobweb of semblances which constitute our reality thus culminates in the thrill of the Real as the ultimate ‘effect’, sought after from digitalised special effects through reality TV and amateur pornography up to snuff movies” (par.4). The simulacrum that such an event operates against, according to Baudrillard, is here characterised as the vulgarity of televisual culture.

As a culture experiencing Integral Reality, Australia plots its recent history along the axis of the “non-event”—at zero degrees—where “perpetual change” (which, for Baudrillard, ironically amounts to stasis) obscures the absence of the “pure event” and also denies its possibility. Out of this context, the poetry of Sykes and Birch *narrates* the “indifference” of official History as “non-event” (particularly in relation to the obfuscation of Indigenous histories in Australia), but also importantly presents its poetics as anticipating the “pure event”. I will thus demonstrate below how Sykes and Birch *interrupt* and reformulate Australian postcoloniality via the hyperreal, rendering the Australian social text as infected by a host of cultural imperialisms that sit alongside other colonial and neo-colonial effects. Baudrillard’s contemporary landscape of Integral Reality will be interpreted in this discussion as the product of colonial and neo-colonial impositions—a societal logic that sees the Australian populus integrating the “reality principle” into the dominant discourses of its national history.

### 3.1.1 At “Degree Zero”: Bobbi Sykes & Tony Birch Beyond History.

But the end of history is not the last word on history.

For, against this background of perpetual non-events, there looms another species of historical reason, events which occur against their own image, against their own simulacrum. Events that break the tedious sequence of current events as relayed by the media, but which are not, for all that, a reappearance of history or a Real irrupting in the heart of the Virtual (as has been said of September 11). They do not constitute events *in* history, but *beyond* history, beyond its end; they constitute events in a system that has put an end to history. They are the internal convulsion of history

—Baudrillard (*Intelligence* 126)

Sykes draws attention to the lack of knowledge concerning “black” identities which have their own histories in and relationships to “white” Australia.

—Sonja Kurtzer (*Is She* 55)

An acceptance of *its own history* by non-Aboriginal Australia requires questioning, re-thinking, and a re-evaluation of the Australian psyche.

—Tony Birch (*History* 45)

Baudrillard’s “[other] species of historical reason”, his “internal convulsion of history” (above) can be usefully applied to the politics of Birch and Sykes, as their poetry presents the inevitable abreaction (of Indigenous Australians particularly) to the hegemony of Integral Reality as it is characterised by official History. The

claims to a differentiating of Indigenous histories from white history made by Kurtzer and Birch (above) hence articulate the possibility of Baudrillard's events "*beyond* history", as much as they narrate the culture of Integral Reality and the oppressive dictates of Australian national history.

The work of Sykes and Birch is bordered by Baudrillard's "zero degree" space, where the non-event denotes the experience of the present, as well as the continued experience of the past-in-the-present. In their poems "Black Woman" (*Love* 52-3) and "Footnote to a 'History War'" (Murray 7-11), both Sykes and Birch present Australian Indigeneity as decimated by the culture of the "non-event". Through a screen of sociological data thick with statistics and bytes of official information, Sykes and Birch configure the personal and the indigenous as ironic and counteractive responses to "dead" History. In both poems, although the personal is magnified, it is nonetheless silenced by the discourse of official, colonial History (read here as coterminous with Integral Reality), which frames these poems, appearing in Birch's title and in Sykes' retrospective analyses.

History, in these poems, conforms to the "dead" history of Baudrillard's Integral Reality: "When nothing happens to interrupt the thread of history, then it can be regarded as dead, since it is unfolding in accordance with an identical model" (*Intelligence* 203). The greatest irony present in these two poems, of course, is that history is not dead, but brimming with happenings—happenings that are symbolic, take on large significance, not just mere successions of events, as in Baudrillard's Integral Reality. However, as *representations* of the workings of Integral Reality, they maintain that all happenings are prone to becoming "non-events"; that things unfold in accordance with an imperial, linear, tidying notion of Australian history. Hence, for Birch, his otherwise evocative and empathetic revelations of Indigenous lived experiences throughout the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries have been demonstrably reduced by colonial history to a collection of footnotes, as his title directs. Whilst the "History War" (itself, in this singular form, a monolith that suggests a fight over *the history principle* and the democratic right to claim a "reality") supposedly rages *beyond* Birch's poem, the space of these revelations is distinctly mapped at "zero degrees". Thus, as a "non-event" in Australian history, Indigeneity and its detailed historical realities

becomes at best a tangential adjunct to more public non-events (for example, the cultural debates that constituted the “History Wars” of the 1990s and beyond).

In his discussion of the New World Order, Baudrillard claims that the sense in which History has ended now relates directly to the denial of events by the West as a meaningful historical “scene”. Hence, according to Baudrillard, the New World Order *falsely dictates* that the irruptive change of “pure events” (such as September 11, which he is referring to here) cannot interrupt the perceived supremacy of Western History:

The aim of this world order is the definitive non-occurrence of events. It is, in a sense, the end of history, not on the basis of a democratic fulfilment, as Fukuyama has it, but on the basis of a preventative terror, of a counter-terror that puts an end to any possible events. A terror which the power exerting it ends up exerting on itself under the banner of security (*Intelligence* 119).

Baudrillard argues that under these security measures, the Western world simulates what amounts to a “police state” mentality (*Spirit* 32), which provides the context for the War on Terror.<sup>5</sup> Analogously, the persecution of Indigenous Australians throughout Australian history can be understood as another such surveillance, containment and security system. In this sense, this poetry works in conversation with that of the poets discussed in previous chapters. The slaughter, oppression and forced separation of Indigenous Australians therefore figures as a strategy of denial, where “securing the natives” masks the detention and incarceration of the public, of white Australia.

As a consequence of the fictions promulgated by the New World Order, therefore, Baudrillard views the “pure event” as the cataclysmic extension of the “end” of History. For Baudrillard, this relates to both a *symbolic* erasure—where History “is no longer meaningful” as a discourse of “events” (*Fatal* 192)—and a *ruptural* erasure, where each catastrophic “pure event” represents the beginning (and the end) of an historical order.

It follows, therefore, that where the “non-event” characterises Western History, its function is to engender a belief in steady, civilising progress, against the threat

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<sup>5</sup> The following section of this chapter (3.2) provides a detailed discussion of Australia’s relationship to the War on Terror, in relation to both its hyperreal and imperial aspects.

of the “pure event”.<sup>6</sup> As a *symbolic* erasure, the “pure event” dematerialises self-evident historical meaning, rendering it as illusory as “reality” in hyperreal terms. In this sense, Baudrillard also aligns history and reality as elements that are superseded by his Integral Reality, but which nevertheless resurface as their own excesses:

It is the same with history as it is with reality. There was a reality principle. Then the principle disappeared and reality, freed from its principle, continues to run on out of sheer inertia. It develops exponentially, it becomes Integral Reality, which no longer has either principle or end, but is content merely to realize all possibilities integrally. It has devoured its own utopia. It operates beyond its end (*Intelligence* 126).

Fuelled by the excessive operation of inertia conducted by and endemic to Integral Reality, the non-event is the symptom of an overpowering simulacrum of history when applied to Indigenous experiences in Australia.

In Sykes’ “Black Woman”, Indigeneity exists on the borders of public culture (in the kitchen, on the stage, in prison, on television) and has a tenuous relationship with History. For Indigenous Australians, this amounts to the observatory role of viewing the making of national History as simulation:

The present is so un-real  
its new /liberal views  
mouthing anti-racist slogans  
in demonstrations of the day— (53)

As these verses argue, even the present is overwritten with an historicising gesture—a mouthing, sloganeering performance—where it becomes a locked-off era, a past of its own. The “un-realness” of this present also signifies a deconstruction of the reality principle, an operation which Baudrillard sees as work vital to his “lucidity pact” in responding to Integral Reality (*Intelligence* 45-6). Given that here, as well as in Birch’s poem, the past overdetermines the present (and therefore disallows it), it is clear that there is still an active *imagination* of the historical, particularly for minority histories. Anticipating the “pure event” (in their deconstructions of Integral Reality and subtle refusal of a completely passive voyeurism) these poets chart the coordinates of Integral Reality but also critique

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<sup>6</sup> There is an analogy here with the terminological emphasis of the postcolonial in that (particularly in McClintock’s estimate) it privileges a cult of progress as a means of skipping over the disjunctures of the present. Hence, the postcolonial and the hyperreal share a colonial/imperial burden in their relation to linear temporality. As their attendant bodies of theory demonstrate, however, this burden becomes the critical object which these theories interrogate.

and satirise it, as Sykes does above, imagining a space beyond official History.

As recognition of the “dead history” of Integral Reality, “Black Woman” exposes politics and the public sphere as a series of performances. The “demonstrations of the day” merely keep history aligned with its predetermined course as the record of a young, postcolonial country which consciously simulates “/liberal views”, presumably to disguise the fact that its primary mechanisms are colonial and oppressive (as signalled in Sykes’ pun), especially for minority subjects such as Sykes’. Meanwhile, a tangible, active engagement with History is kept at a distance, which is emphasised by the particularly *mediated* modes of communication available to the Indigenous subject—her role as listener to politicians; her receipt of letters about “black services”; her (distanced) address and fetishisation by churches; her role on television. Kurtzer’s evaluation of Sykes’ autobiographical subject in *Snake Cradle* and *Snake Dancing* are applicable to her subject in “Black Woman” also: “She must, of necessity, find herself located within discourses of marginality that served to define Aboriginality and mark her as ‘other’” (*Is She* 55). Her very placement on these margins means that she cannot speak from the place of power, the ability to change history. This, therefore, is the subject of Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak” (Williams & Chrisman 66-105). However, the larger situation of this subordinated subject within a poetic discourse that *critiques* the oppressive system alters this subject’s effect. The critical diarising mode of Sykes’ narrator also disrupts her marginalisation, as the border space allows for a productive distancing of this subject from the identity fictions of the dominant culture.

Further, as readers of these texts, we can recognise the meta-textual politics of Sykes’ narrations of Integral Reality. As such, Kurtzer locates Sykes’ construction of Indigenous subjectivity as necessarily signified as part of a “dead history” and as subjugated to the “discourses of marginality” (55) that have silenced subaltern histories within the lexicon of imperialism more generally. The premising of the “pure event” (as it is anticipated in Sykes’ and Birch’s poetry) is thus inextricably allied to the function of interpretation and the role of the reader in recognising and responding to the politics of the text. This is to suppose, however, that the reader can and is willing to differentiate these texts from the pervasive simulations of Integral Reality. Such an active reader, who can recognise the neo-imperial

ideology of the New World Order, is modelled by Baudrillard (amongst others) who demonstrates a variety of resistant readings of the current world order in his criticism. This reader, according to Baudrillard, would be the hyperreal critic who engages in the “lucidity pact” (*Intelligence* 45-6).

The Baudrillardian death of history also finds expression in Birch’s “Footnote to a ‘History War’” as the impetus for endless, unproductive cultural debate—the logic being that where history is dead to itself, and is therefore reduced to the status of inert (cultural) object, it can be fought over. As a function of Integral Reality then, perhaps the “History Wars” could be read in this context as facilitating the kind of “perpetual change” that keeps the system aligned at “zero degrees”. Moreover, as Birch demonstrates, no amount of individual and demarcated responses to History (in the form of his footnotes) can alter its predetermined course. Even the tone of downtrodden desperation of the fourth stanza of “Footnote to a History War” doesn’t render this “response” exempt from a necessary subjugation to official historical discourse (in the form of a propriety appropriate to the colonial time), and it is worth quoting the verse in full, in order to appreciate this progression from the personal to the public:

my colour debars me  
my child is dead  
& I am lost

we are broken into parts  
our home left in the wind  
& it grows cold here

my wife is aborigine  
I am half caste  
and I am, Sir, dutifully yours

I await your response (8)

Shifting rapidly in style from the testimonial, to the anthropological, to the official, the speaker charts a fragmented relationship to the “reality effects” of colonisation, most notably in the separation of self and community, which must be articulated as discrete projects. The speaker also displays a shifting relationship to the simulated course of official History (in the plea to a missionary sensibility for a redemption of the “lost” and “broken”; also in the mimicked adoption of



Darwinian and Nineteenth Century anthropological race theory in its references to the pureness of heritage; and finally in the recognition of imperialism signified by the “dutiful” subject).

Representing Integral Reality, these poems demonstrate the prevalence of the “non-event”, which operates *as* its own simulacrum, rather than operating *against* its own simulacrum, as is the case for “the pure event” (*Intelligence* 126). Denoted as entries into an historical “archive”, Birch’s “footnotes” represent an ironic simulation of minority history—where their archival status is subsumed into the officialdom of national history, and hence doesn’t represent a catastrophic interruption to this.<sup>7</sup> Birch displays an awareness of this irony in his arguments for historical revision (which his footnotes represent), and also demonstrates the perpetuity of Integral Reality, as the effects of official History continue to oppress Indigenous communities. As Birch elsewhere declares: “It is obvious to me that damage continues to be done to Aboriginal communities in Australia resulting from the lack of transparency given to the colonial past” (*History* 43). It would seem, then, that his poetic project is markedly one of *interrupting* the continuation of this damage, of making the past more “transparent”—a project that presupposes that readers of poetry are willing to be critical of official History, or desire a return to the “historical scene”, the “history principle”. Contemporary Australian poetry, however, like the theoretical realms it approaches, is a limit-space itself: potentially powerful, potentially futile.

In their mutual identification of what might be termed the order of the “non-event” as one symbolic site of Indigenous struggle, Sykes and Birch importantly align endless information with the death of history (or the loss of its “scene”). Both “Black Woman” and “Footnotes to a ‘History War’” are punctuated by the ubiquity of sociological data. Sykes negotiates the sociological by repeated material and personal references to poverty and inequality—the “near meat-less stew”, the unpaid electricity bill, the petty crime—and fuses it to the personal in her concluding lines:

and you view your “liberation”  
with a scepticism born of poverty,  
corrugated-iron shacks, no water,

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<sup>7</sup> In 5.2, analyses of other Australian and Chilean poetry demonstrate the ways in which minority histories (as they are represented in poetic archives) can be enabling sites of postcolonial agency.

four children from six live births  
and the accumulated pain of two centuries (53).

Amidst these listed images of poverty, there is the shadow of a history locked off from the present—the legacy of “accumulated pain” that continues to run its course. This is history as indifferent, repetitive, history as “non-event”. As part of this temporal register, “Black Woman” demonstrates Baudrillard’s “incessant succession in real time” (*Intelligence* 122), where ceaseless changes operate at “zero degrees”, extending poverty into the future, steering the Indigenous subject through various eras (from the memory of two centuries to the “trendy 70s” and beyond) yet reinforcing the trajectory of “dead history” under the monotony of Baudrillard’s “banality” (122)—and nowhere is this more obvious than in the *ennui* of the routine stirring of the meatless stew throughout the poem.

Analogously, the superimposition of sociological data onto the Indigenous subjects of “Footnotes to a ‘History War’” bears witness to a form of incessant change that ironically signifies stasis. Birch sites various cases of sickness and misfortune in his poem, underlining the subaltern status of Aboriginal peoples under the weight of a history that records them as disadvantaged rather than agential, or, as in the first stanza, “irresponsible, hopeless & / worthless” (7). All of the manifestations of disadvantage add up to more of the same in this poem, demonstrating the monolithic nature of imperial history in Australia:

we suffer influenza  
typhoid & sores  
...  
he carries a rancid leg  
...  
their children are gone  
one [toxaemia]  
two [pneumonia]

one [ditto] (7-9)

The litany of corruption and tragedy here (both physical and societal), as merely a footnote to a public debate, exemplifies the divorce between information and experience in what Sykes characterises as “the new world / that promises much but delivers little” (53). In this zero-degree world, where, as in Birch’s poem, each trauma is equalised by another of the same proportion, events that occur *in* (dead) history are circular, produced by the information that dictates them, as in Baudrillard’s analysis:

Information represents the most effective machinery for de-realising history. Just as political economy is a gigantic machinery for producing value, for producing signs of wealth, but not wealth itself, so the whole system of information is an immense machine for producing the event as sign, as an exchangeable value on the universal market of ideology, of spectacle, of catastrophe, etc—in short, for producing a non-event (*Intelligence* 121).

Although thick with typically dystopic prognosis, Baudrillard's statement also constructs itself as a starting point for *resisting* Integral Reality, chiefly by resisting contemporary media (which, in the original French his term “information” also strongly alludes to).<sup>8</sup> To apply Baudrillard's sceptical prognosis to Australian Indigeneity is to recognise the ways in which public discourse and official History have conspired to “de-realise” Indigenous histories. Furthermore, following Baudrillard, the traumas which characterise these histories are inevitably (re)produced as “signs”, rather than “events”. However, as another genre of information, poetry carries its own agenda, which is to give its narrative the status of *a different level of symbolic event*. Although Sykes' and Birch's poetry charts the society of the “non-event”, their work presupposes a reader (such as Baudrillard) who could resist Integral Reality, at least imaginatively.

Birch's clever re-contextualising of these archival “footnotes” into poetry is already a resistance to the “non-event” (which the reader can recognise) and hence calls for a different range of responses to official History. In his published historical criticism (which can be read as an intertext to his poetry), Birch addresses the need for responses such as these to a hegemonic political climate that arguably occupies Integral Reality. For Birch,

It is important that we deal with these issues before we conveniently move to what journalist Paul Kelly calls “a post-apology climate”, that rhetorical Shangri-La, of John Howard's practical reconciliation. In this place, Aboriginal people who have been dispossessed by white Australia, who have been separated from their family as an outcome of the removal policies *may* be able to run the water-tap or flush the toilet and know that this is the generous compensation for their lost land, their lost children. The “Aboriginal problem” will have solved itself after more than 200 years, without the problem ever being seriously addressed or some responsibility accepted by white Australia. And we will not have a politician to thank. Or a journalist, or historian. The salvation of “the Aborigine” will be in the hands of a plumber (*History* 3).

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<sup>8</sup> Chris Turner, who translated Baudrillard's *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact* (2005), specifies in his introduction the subtle deconstructive reference to the traces of meaning between the terms *l'information* and *l'informatique* that Baudrillard makes reference to in the original (10).

So, to employ Baudrillard's lexicon, the continued culture of the "non-event" that Birch warns of amounts to a *simulation* of the event of reconciliation, as John Howard's hyperreal spectacle of historical "change". As he is clearly aware of the mediatised manipulation in Australian Integral Reality, Birch presents his "Footnotes to a 'History War'" as the insertion of *another* history (*beyond* the model typified by Integral Reality) into this climate of "practical resolution", issuing in a resistant and symbolic history.

Nonetheless, against the machinic order of the "non-event", the responses of Indigenous subjects in Sykes' and Birch's poems also communicate futility. As representations of minor "non-events", signifying only the kind of change that will keep the system at "zero degrees", the narratives of these poems respond to the New World Order, whose primary mechanism is to *deny* catastrophe:

In the New World Order there are no longer any revolutions, there are now only convulsions. As in an allegedly perfect mechanism, a system that is too well integrated, there are no longer any crises, but malfunctions, faults, breakdowns, aneurysmal ruptures (*Intelligence* 127).

Such minor tremors, which presumably market themselves as spectacles or catastrophes (as in Baudrillard's preceding quote) in order to adopt the *ruse* of crisis, are inscribed with pathos in "Black Woman", where revolution is long abandoned. Sykes' use of inverted commas stresses such a fabrication of crisis, as well as the attendant simulation of revolution:

you must try not to let your bitterness  
be construed as 'black racism'  
as you recall the abuses  
heaped upon you all your life  
and you view your 'liberation'  
with a scepticism born of poverty (53).

There is little room outside of manufactured politics here, as identities are stereotyped and closeted by the inverted commas. The litany of abuse and suffering noted by Sykes here also reappears in Birch's poem as the source of futility. The collection of sad incidents in his "footnotes", delivered in groups of ten lines, communicate a great degree of pathos purely due to their aesthetic similarity (which implies a sense of officialdom and bureaucratic distance). Furthermore, the combination of the personal and the official conveys a sense of voicelessness, as Birch's blended discourse doesn't conform to either the tradition

of personal correspondence, nor of official notification, as in the following excerpt:

I am nearly bootless  
& my colour is a curse  
[too white, too dark]

I am to be recommended  
within unit 4 [subfile 3]  
for licence renewal (9)

Increasingly, as is obvious here, the phraseology becomes much more impersonal, as lives are relegated to archival details under the reign of a ceaseless historical oppression.

What is most clearly communicated, therefore, in the poetry of Sykes and Birch, is how Indigeneity is constructed as a “non-event” in contemporary Australia. The residual implication, however, is that this is the ground upon which the “pure event” will occur. In other words, the order of the “non-event”, as an important part of Baudrillard’s Integral Reality, provides the basis for the immanent catastrophe. Indigeneity in Australia therefore signifies both the momentum of the imperial machine *and* the irruptive potential of sites of “aneurysmal rupture”. This fissure finds poetic expression in Sykes’ distinctively repetitious ending: “black woman black woman black woman black woman black” (53), which promises mere circularity but also, potentially, the subject-as-excess and irruption. Birch’s “footnotes”, as liminal entries into the public record, which are both *intrinsic and extrinsic* to its content—occupying the border zone of footnotes—are another method of negotiating such rupture.

As Baudrillard promises, these kinds of interruptions to world orders (or to the hegemony of the “non-event” in Integral Reality) are a certain derivative of the system itself:

Lines of fracture, inversions, splits, rifts: there is, as it were, a line beyond which, for every expanding system—every system which, by dint of exponential growth, passes beyond its own end—a catastrophe looms (*Intelligence* 191).

Although the poetry of Sykes and Birch is aware of this potential futility, the “catastrophe” that Baudrillard predicts is also glimpsed by these poets as another potential disruption of Integral Reality. It is in this sense that this poetry

consciously posits itself (in line with its narratives and subjects) *at the limits* of the “postcolonial hyperreal”.

### 3.2 When Poets Take up Arms: Combating (Hyper)Real Wars under the Abstractions of the New Empire.

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From beneath the Romantic mantle of “lyricism” that conceals their ideological fervour and intellectual energy, Australian poets have emerged in what is *perhaps* an unexpected guise—as human rights activists, ethicists and dexterous critics of world politics. The Western presence in Iraq, for which Australia is strongly accountable, has fired the imaginations of Australian poets, whose work fills a discursive/critical space that much of the Western media has kept blank. As an alternative media (and hence resistant to Baudrillard’s order of information) these poets sift through the rubble of recent global relations, writing back to the West (from the West) with a tirade of verses that canvas trans-global ethics and postcolonial responsibility.

The relationship between politics and poetry is itself a negotiation of border zones, especially in this case. The cognitive and literary allure of the spectacles of the Western occupation of Iraq is obvious and could be said to *implicate* poets fascinated by it. What is much more poignant is the Australian poetic *response* to these situations—where war is understood discursively as a struggle for supremacy within the realm of representation. Much contemporary Australian poetry consciously unearths this hypothesis—that Western interference in the Middle East has occurred on both physical and virtual terrain—detailing it in lines of sophisticated critique.<sup>9</sup> Beyond this being an unlikely quarter from which such analysis has emerged (for some), the potency of this poetry lies in its ability to *respond* to the assaults on freedom and democracy which are transformed into image propaganda for a “secure” West, by brandishing an elegant mastery of

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<sup>9</sup> Whether or not this poetry structures itself as realist (as in the recent work of Bruce Dawe), deconstructive (as in Jennifer Maiden’s work) or symbolic (as in that of Adamson), the common crux of its interest is in the politics of representation. For further evidence of this poetry, see Adamson (“Flag”), Bakowski, Brown, Dawe (*passim*), Forbes (*Collected*), Harry (“Outskirts”; “A Sack”), Maiden (*passim*) and Bellear.

discursive manipulation *of its own*. We are here in the arena of a discursive and ideological war, which is everywhere present and scrupulously mediated by the West. This poetry, therefore, poses rhetoric against rhetoric.

Not only does this current war provide evidence of a newly forged Western transnational empire<sup>10</sup>—whose colonising practices have written anew the texts of political manipulation and ideological and religious cleansing—the spectacularly aggressive way in which Iraq has been “freed” has given poets the lyrical ammunition for an onslaught of verses focussed on these atrocities.<sup>11</sup> These verses operate in both the literal and figural orbits, dissecting the physical, political and discursive casualties of the war in lucid detail. Alongside the discursive activism of this poetry, however, is its *implication* in the culture of Integral Reality. Seduced by and feeding off the war, this poetry also risks relegation to the “non-event”, in its imaginative support of the drama of this war. However, in their resurrections of earlier historical “scenes” (by analogy), their deconstruction of the ideology of the New World Order, and their ironising of the West, these poets traverse critical and imaginative paths *around* the “non-event”. Furthermore, given their wholesale abandonment of the reality principle in their hyperreal poetics, it follows that these poets haven’t “integrated” reality into their ontology, and thus aren’t necessarily restricted by Integral Reality.

How effective then, is the work of Australian poets John Forbes, Robert Adamson and Jennifer Maiden in scrutinising the terms of global politics and in focussing so acutely on the mediated *reception* of Western initiatives in Iraq in countries like Australia, which are complicit in these processes? As I will demonstrate, as a poetic activism, this poetry often situates itself within the ideological geography of Baudrillard’s hyperreality—the (anti)theory whose lexicon lends to these poets an active and germane mode of analysis. Following

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<sup>10</sup> I use the term “empire” cautiously here, but wish to register the way in which the “Coalition of the Willing” has transformed from its earlier incarnations into a transnational body which is demonstrably interested in domination in the way in which previous empires were, but enacts this desire through distinctly *novel* practices, which are in some ways more concerned with ideological subjugation than the acquisition of physical territory. Baudrillard, speaking of the Gulf War in 1992, categorises this new empire (for which he attributes most of the command to America) as the leading strategy in The New World Order. Of this regime, he says: “...in the New World Order, war is born of an antagonistic, destructive but dual relation between two adversaries. This war is an asexual surgical war, a matter of war-processing in which the enemy only appears as a computerised target...” (*Gulf* 62).

<sup>11</sup> Much of Bruce Dawe’s recent work is particularly evocative in this sense, in its realist digestion of the events in the Middle East. See ‘Um Qasr’ (Craven 133-4).

Baudrillard, it is possible to elucidate, amongst the intricate structuring and metaphoric complexity of this poetry, the sophistication and frequency of the “fatal strategies”<sup>12</sup> of these poets, as they linguistically force the New World Order to its hermeneutical and epistemological extremes.

### 3.2.1 John Forbes: Seduced by the Simulacrum.

Forbes thought of himself as a public poet—his frequent recourse to the ode, and his penchant for both satirical scorn and celebration, testify to this. Yet increasingly he portrays the poet, not as the bearer of a public vocation, but as an affront to the society which denies this vocation.

—Ivor Indyk (149)

In 1992, Forbes depicted the Gulf War in his “Love Poem” (*Collected Poems* 158), postmodernising poetic and historical traditions in Australia in his deconstruction of this global event. Like Baudrillard, Forbes characterised this war as a simulated hyperreal performance, strongly emphasising the dangerous surplus of misplaced desire that, in certain permutations, manifests as war. His “Love Poem” is ostensibly constructed as a letter to a lover, where the personal fuses with the national and the virtual, as his narrator relies on the context of the Gulf War for both romantic context and contrast.<sup>13</sup> Years after this conflict, it is easy to see how predictions such as those embedded in Forbes’ poetry (about the Western lust for domination of the Middle East and its extraordinary program of neo-colonisation) have played themselves out as reality.

Forbes parodied this lust by enveloping his “Love Poem” in an acutely sardonic register, characterising lust as an excess of desire for domination that is also carnal in nature. Baudrillard structures war in similar terms, arguing for pornography as a useful trope for the baseness of the West’s desire for wars (here, he refers to the recent occupation of Iraq and the sexual assaults of Iraqi prisoners of war):

For the worst thing about this is that here we have a parody of violence, a parody of war itself, pornography becoming the ultimate form of abjection of a war that is incapable of being merely war, or merely killing,

<sup>12</sup> Paul Patton (who translated Baudrillard’s *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* into English) describes Baudrillard as “...a writer who believes that writing should be less a representation of reality than its transfiguration and that it should pursue a ‘fatal strategy’ of pushing things to extremes” (6).

<sup>13</sup> It is interesting to note the echoes of John Forbes’ “Love Poem” in Peter Bakowski’s “A letter from Baghdad to Melbourne, 1 June 2004”, which employs a similar framework.



and that is being drawn out into an infantile, Ubuesque “reality show”, a desperate simulacrum of power (*Pornography* 23).

“Love Poem” functions as an *ironic* objection to the Gulf War, and, as it invokes the scale of these events, flirts dangerously with the magnetism of their execution. Consequently, Forbes demonstrates the degree of imaginative complicity in these wars that is risked in their narration. Poetry becomes another form of military technology in Forbes’ complex seduction, as his narrator documents the start of the encroachment of this war into the arts. Following “Love Poem”, poetry *exhibits* war, as it exhibits its own art(ifice):<sup>14</sup>

But what they don’t show, until  
now, is how at ease I can be

with military technology: e.g.  
matching their *feu d’esprit* I classify

the sounds of the Iraqi AA – the  
thump of the 85 mil, the throaty

charter of the quad ZSU 23 (158).

Forbes demonstrates an awareness of the interpenetration of imagination and reality in this poem, subtly pointing to the *genesis* of war in the collective imaginary—even the *national* imaginary, as is often the case—and its devastating performance in the “real”.<sup>15</sup> Baudrillard hints at this collective inauguration of war, but structures his analysis in terms of our inculcation of the virtual:

By dint of dreaming of pure war, of an orbital war purged of all local and political peripeteias, we have fallen into soft war, into the virtual impossibility of war which translates into the paltry fantasia where adversaries compete in de-escalation, as though the irruption or the event of war had become obscene and insupportable, no longer sustainable, like every real event moreover. Everything is therefore transposed into the

<sup>14</sup> This deconstruction of poetry as both art and artifice is typical of Forbes’ ironic mode, and Hollier attests to the widely held critical recognition of this Forbesian trait: “Forbes has been praised as a poet refreshingly aware of the irony of his own artistic assertions” (101). Hollier’s language, of critical “praise” of a “refreshing” poetics, suggests that perhaps, by satirising his own already marginalised art form, Forbes gave these critics an outlet for the cultural cringe, rather than being read as solely a tragic herald of the demise of poetry in Australia.

<sup>15</sup> This interest in the simultaneous invoking and deferral of the “real” within the context of the Gulf Wars is repeated also in Bakowski’s “A letter from Baghdad to Melbourne, 1 June 2004”, where the narrator carefully outlines his attachment to the “real”, even in its decline: “I have three sketchpads left / and two black lead pencils. / At first I drew streetcorner and rooftop snipers, / their gunfire startling / donkeys, goats, old men in cafes / stubborn in their addictions / to tobacco, the recitation of poetry, the playing of chess” (104).

virtual, and we are confronted with a virtual apocalypse, a hegemony ultimately much more dangerous than real apocalypse (*Gulf* 26-7).

So, for Baudrillard, the most dangerous form of neo-imperialism is exercised in contemporary war, specifically where the West brings about global participation, as a function of its hegemony. This “transpos[ing] into the virtual” of the “unsustainable” event, also potentially translates as a function of Integral Reality. Where change (or the event) is *denied* by a society that internalises a false reality “integrally”, it would appear that the only viable realm for the event is the virtual. However, as is evident in the Gulf War and the War on Terror, these virtualised conflicts still unleash violent “reality effects” on the social body.

However, Forbes’ “Love Poem” also uncovers the inherent *repetitiveness* of wars, their inevitability, their participation in “dead history”. Like entertainment, they light up history with their spectacular effects, simulating an interchange (which is ultimately both virtual and physical) between two powers which denies their inability to connect *in the real*. As “Love Poem” demonstrates, wars can operate on the same ideological trajectory as love, as both events are linked by desire. Hence, according to Forbes, who exerts irony onto love also, the more intimate the connection (or, in the case of war, the more invasive) the more any *real connection* with the other is deterred:

Spent tracer flecks Baghdad’s  
bright video game sky

as I curl up with the war  
in lieu of you... (158)

Thus, the narrator of “Love Poem” might as well replace the lover with the battle. Following the poem’s logic, what love and war are about is addressing (and failing to address) an unbridgeable distance—and here Forbes’ resonant “in lieu” is particularly effective—which is contradicted endlessly by the mediatised closeness of these events to their subjects. Like Baudrillard, it appears that Forbes’ narrator sees simulations everywhere usurping the (fallacious and impossible, if we agree with Baudrillard) “real”.

The *intimacy* of the Gulf War—here represented by and contrasted with the lover—which is at once immediate and simulated (via media), tugs at the inherited desire for war within the collective imaginary and also slyly exposes it. If mimicry

can be a mode of activism, Forbes achieves a sophisticated protest here, by unveiling the degree to which the West is seduced by the *idea* of war. As Indyk observes of Forbes' work: "What we have in abundance is irony, springing from a deep sense of limitation, and intractability" (138). When applied to "Love Poem", this contention can refer to the *duplicity* (in both senses of the word) of the Gulf War as both intimacy and distance—a complex relation that was, as Forbes' sardonic mimicry suggests, obfuscated from the public. As with the construct "love", the intimacy of war necessitates a *denial* of its opposite: a profound sense of alienation. Here, Baudrillard's final analysis of the Gulf War is pertinent. He argues that: "The crucial stake, the decisive stake in this whole affair is the consensual reduction of Islam to the global order" (*Gulf* 85). Hence, as the West finds itself alienated by the *Other* that is Islam, it responds by initiating a world that will efface this alienating distance. In this sense, Australia's border neurosis (as discussed in Chapter 1) *repeats* this model of alienation and distance as it projects its carceral coloniality onto its Others.

Accordingly (to employ Forbes' language), wars occur *in lieu* of global relations; battles occur *in lieu* of human contact; explosions, bombs and other output of weapons occur *in lieu* of person-to-person combat; mediated representations of war occur *in lieu* of actual participation; poems about all of these simulations occur *in lieu* of love poetry, which here seems to have been both *replaced* and *misplaced* by the great excess of desire involved in the production, reproduction and reception of wars. However, the *absence* of the love poem (and its object) here also inheres in the war, configuring this war (for Forbes' narrator) as a strangely misplaced battle for what we might call the love principle. Such a surplus of simulation should not be surprising, however. After Baudrillard, there is no escape from this incessant hyperreality, which potentially fools as all with its convincing performance:

It retains all the features, the whole discourse of traditional production, but it is no longer anything but its scaled-down refraction (thus hyperrealists fix the real from which all meaning and charm, all depth and energy of representation have vanished in a hallucinatory resemblance) (*Simulacra* 22).

Whilst readers of these texts (and viewers of these wars), like Baudrillard, can still maintain a critical *distance* from reality hallucinations, Forbes personalises such

hyperreal existential conundrums<sup>16</sup> by aligning the effects of romance and battle (both of which result from a desire to possess the other) until they are strangely inseparable:

Our precision guided weapons  
 make the horizon flash & glow  
 but nothing I can do makes you  
 want me... (158)

This *tête-à-tête* between love and war, between the literal and the symbolic, may amount to referential sacrilege (as it extends the war metaphor not only into the “real” but into the *personal* “real”), but it also makes a defiant stand against the ritualised effacing and forgetting of this slaughter in Australia. It is almost as if Forbes waves his love/war conjunction at us in a gesture near defeat, which signifies the futility of hoping for the West to resist its own desires. If we accept Baudrillard’s argument, it is too late to resist these desires, too late to even *call* them desires, as they are now subsumed into the all-pervasive cultural mythology of the New World Order: “We are all accomplices in these phantasmagoria, it must be said, as we are in any publicity campaign” (*Gulf* 64).

However, as Forbes demonstrates, our complicity in hyperreal “phantasmagoria” doesn’t have to serve the agenda of the New World Order. To read *against* Baudrillard’s cynicism then, these poets remobilise the hyperreal *against* the hyperreal, thus ironically exposing the fabrication of the simulacrum, which has a poetics of its own.

No doubt it was allusions and extended metaphors such as Forbes’ love/war conjunction that prompted James Tulip to identify: “Forbes’ leaping irregular phrasings; [where] classical finiteness is displaced by a kinetic continuum of association” (*Poetry* 477). Through such an unlikely universe of homology, Forbes demonstrates that in the contemporary cultural climate of Australia, which leans towards a provincial attitude to the role of poetry, such measures represent “...his affront to the society which denies this vocation” (Indyk, 149). His critical

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<sup>16</sup> Baudrillard usefully classifies Western conflicts in Iraq as, fundamentally, expressions of the political impotence of the West: “...the stupidly military and technological war corresponds to a superimposition of the model over the event, i.e., an artificial stake, and to a dismissal; the war is a continuation of the lack of politics by other means” (*Spirit* 142).

accessory to such an affront is poststructural philosophy and Forbes certainly invites the obtuse vocabulary of these theories into his poetics, albeit couched in intense irony. In the relentless exchange of simulations in “Love Poem”, the only thing left to believe in is the simulacrum and Forbes’ narrator is a conscious citizen of this territory, relying on it for identity. This narrator accepts the hyperrealisation of the world in a similar manner to Baudrillard’s prognostic gloom; with a similar signature of defeat:

...Instead I watch the west  
do what the west does best

& know, obscurely, as I go to bed  
all this is being staged for me (158).

Even though it is the established links between love and war and their refusal to manifest the “real” that necessitate the simulation of desire (in the presence of lack), Forbes’ narrator locates the blame, as Baudrillard does, with the character of contemporary technology.<sup>17</sup> This narrator, however, is contextualised ironically within both the poet’s clever satire and the reader’s potentially resistant response. So, the seductiveness of the hyperreal can imply agency as much as dangerous complicity in Integral Reality. Ignoring the *cause* of simulations—the cultural/ideological progression from the original to the copy to the artifice, which culminates in a simulation of the “third order”<sup>18</sup>—“Love Poem” emphasises the *reception* of simulations (here, the locus of identity), in the narrator/citizen’s failure to take into account the problem of a lost agency underlying the *whole process*. Forbes structures this media saturation as part of his subject’s alienation, however. It is thus possible to separate the subject’s inactivity (which I am reading as emblematic of the hyperrealisation of the New World Order) from the poet’s and reader’s agency in deconstructing the hyperreal.

Depicting the loss of the historical “scene”, Baudrillard argues that under the omnipresence of the image during wars such as the Gulf War, the whole question of representation becomes redundant:

There isn’t even a need for “embedded” journalists any more; it’s the military itself that is embedded in the image; thanks to digital technology, images are definitively integrated into warfare. They no longer represent; they no longer imply either distance or perception of judgement. They

<sup>17</sup> Parodying *another* form of contemporary technology, Forbes alludes to the jingles of 1980’s and 90’s advertising in the internal and end rhymes in the first two lines.

<sup>18</sup> See *Simulacra* (6).

are no longer of the order of representation, or of information in the strict sense and, as a result, the question of whether they should be produced, reproduced, broadcast or banned, and even the “essential” question of whether they are true or false, is “irrelevant” (*Pornography* 24).

Analogously, Forbes draws attention to a culture of reception without question; of mediated sedation (especially by defining the subject as the ideal audience member for the performance of the Gulf War); where, *in lieu* of being an active participant in the “real”, the subject/viewer inculcates the virtual to perform (wars) in order to hide the *artifice* of the reality principle.<sup>19</sup> The ramifications of Forbes’ construction of Gulf War Australia are that, in such an advanced state of subjection to media—in the difficulty of the subject’s access to critical faculties—there is potentially an ensuing absence of personal, national or humanitarian responsibility for conflicts such as the Gulf War. Years later, with the advent of the War on Iraq, Robert Adamson’s poetry articulates this deficit of compassion, with an emphasis on a model of global citizenship.

### 3.2.2 Robert Adamson: Poets on the (Front) Line as the World Burns.

O sages standing in God’s holy fire  
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,  
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,  
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.  
 —William Butler Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium” (Jeffares 104).

Drawing on the well-springs of literary culture—which date back through Yeats to Byzantine days—Adamson appeals to the intellect and to a sense of cultural preservation in his Yeatsian “The Goldfinches of Baghdad” (Craven 67). His very elegant project is to resurrect the icons of Art itself and to have them stand up for the people of Iraq, in an extensive manoeuvre designed to illustrate the destruction of Iraq as an assault of mythical proportions. In his invocation of the Byzantine epoch, Adamson paints this destruction as potentially a “pure event” (even in its relegation to the status of “non-event” by the Western media) as he charts the denial of an historical scene for Iraqis, as well as simulating this destruction *against* its normalised simulation by the West.

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<sup>19</sup>Pam Brown chronicles this mediated sedation, drawing on the certainty of a public full of captive viewers in her reliance on the vehicle of the image in “March 2003”: “in the deep night / an image haunts sleep - / three soldiers / fallen in freeze-frame / onto dry ground, / ordinary street shoes / worn down and holey / on the feet / of dead men” (223).

Adamson employs the goldfinch as metaphor in this poem, reconfiguring the delicate connections between history, literature and art via this metaphor, as emblematic of individual vulnerability.<sup>20</sup> Representing the cadences of imperial luxury which fuel an inferno of gratuitous violence, Adamson's poem rearticulates its Iraqi context within the register of tragedy:<sup>21</sup>

A goldfinch with a slashed throat  
was the subject of a masterpiece painted by an artist  
in the sixteenth century on the back  
of highly polished mother-of-pearl shell:  
it burns along with the living caged birds  
in Saddam's palace tonight... (67)

"The Goldfinches of Baghdad" sighs with pathos, interweaving discourses of history, citizenship and art until their connections are multitudinous. The focus of this poem reaches from an anguished portrayal of the particular burden of the poet (Romantically conceived); to a complex argument for a *refashioned* cosmopolitan citizenship (particularly for Australians); to a measured analysis of the concept of empire.

Adamson beautifully constructs the gilded features that adorn empire, only to deconstruct our naive attraction to such trimmings. Wrought with the language of luxury, "The Goldfinches of Baghdad" initially appeals to a childlike appreciation of regal fairytales, with its precious birds in gold-plated cages, the "...living ornaments singing to rich patriarchs / in their deathbeds" (67). Here, however, the echoes of Yeats' lines from "Sailing to Byzantium"—"...set upon a golden bough to sing / To lords and ladies of Byzantium / Of what is past, or passing, or to come" (105)—take on both prophetic and morbid shades, as the living are threatened with death (and as the categories of life and death lose their opposition). Adamson is meticulous in his balance of critique and celebration, as his verses dance through the august intricacies of this palatial and bloody administration, with its "...polished mother-of-pearl" (67) and spare no disgust in condemning its ruin at the hands of another empire.

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<sup>20</sup> In his poem "Flag-Tailed Bird of Paradise", Adamson also aligns the metaphor of a bird with the victims of the War on Terror (Craven 64).

<sup>21</sup> Lisa Belleair also represents the individual injustices and suffering of Iraqis in her poem "Relentless till you die", where she adopts the voice of a victim: "No energy left to curse / no warmth of human kindness / who will bury my first born child / who will pray for his tormented soul?" (140).

In the face of the conquest of Iraq by the *new* Western empire, Adamson exposes the loss of the Iraqi imperium, with its cultural attributes figuring as the heralds of this tragic and unfathomable defeat. Whereas, for Yeats, Byzantium signified and questioned a desire for the elevation of art over mortality, Adamson's reworking of Byzantium as Iraq effectively removes the transcendence (the hint of a glorious afterlife) that washed over Yeats' work. Voicing the death rattle of Persia's rich literary and cultural heritage (the death of Byzantium), "The Goldfinches of Baghdad" unloads its grieving onto the shoulders of poets, in whom it appears that Adamson sees a universal suffering (and burden) for the fall of Iraq. This vocational sense of inheritance and universal lineage is quite significant to Adamson's ethic, as critics such as Nicolette Stasko have pointed out:

Adamson is acutely aware of those who have come before and those who will come after, both in a personal sense and in the sense of the poetic tradition to which he is heir (397).

This represents quite a different moment in Adamson's poetics from his satirical deconstruction of the Australian poetry scene in "Not a Penny Sonnets". This change suggests ambivalence on Adamson's part towards a cultural industry that he both champions and ironises; and an art that can be both tragically unheard and loudly activist.

By articulating the destruction of the erudite and the elite (whom the goldfinches represent, in part), Adamson amends dominant representations of Iraqis, opposing constructions of their ruling class as *purely* evil, or barbaric, or opportunistic. In a gesture of obituary, Adamson charts the horror of the devastation of Baghdad, with manifestly hellish touches:<sup>22</sup>

...Feathers and flesh,  
hands and wings burn; and as the sirens wail  
the tongues of poets and the beaks of goldfinches burn (67).

There is both a trace of the trope of martyrdom here, which also teases the verses of "Sailing to Byzantium"; as well as a devastating comment on the reciprocity of language and freedom. The demise of language and the usurpation of freedom find expression in the body parts in these lines. Significantly, there is no more flight for Iraqis (after the loss of their wings); no more oration (without tongues); no more debate (as the golden beaks burn); and no more humanity (after the

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<sup>22</sup> The visual landscapes of J.S. Harry's "On the Outskirts of War" and "A Sack" lend themselves well to Adamson's imagery here, as Harry also depicts a crumbling Iraq, full of broken monuments (51-9).



amputation of their hands). In the space of these three lines, Adamson reinscribes the familiar images of a burning Iraq (which were hitherto successfully associated with a unilateral, powerful defeat of “evil” by the Western media) with a narrative of unjust massacre. Adamson’s images thus resituate “reality effects” within the Western text of a clean war, an impersonal nullification of “evil”.

In subtly resurrecting the riches of Iraq’s literary heritage via the correlation between poets and goldfinches, Adamson undoes the West’s strategy to depersonalise the face of Iraq (made to stand for weapons of mass destruction and despotic regimes only). “The Goldfinches of Bagdad”, therefore, is not only a plea for a global responsibility for this war; it is also a statement about the transnational responsibility of poets and their ensuing moral imperative to be the singers of each other’s plights. Like Sykes and Birch, Adamson recognises the power of the culture of the “non-event” and attempts to reinstate the importance of an historical imaginary. Andrew Johnson charts Adamson’s refusal to acquiesce with regimes such as the New Empire, or indeed with an ideal of poetry as a-political—a stance which radically diminishes the distance between culture and politics: “Such poetry could also be understood to refigure the history of colonialism, occupation, dispossession and exploitation by an explicit acknowledgement of the poet’s ongoing complicity in that history” (39). Given this subtext of complicity (which obviously underscores Adamson’s moral inscription of poetry), Yeats’ intertext figures as an ironic reference to the way in which poets might acquiesce to imperialism (by singing to entertain imperial powers). Adamson’s poets, by contrast, redeploy their song, as a postcolonial strategy of anti-imperialism. Adamson’s “refiguring” of the history of the West’s occupation of Iraq can thus be read as working *against* the omnipresent propaganda of the New Empire, which (as Baudrillard argues) manipulates the virtual in order to manufacture a *palatable* war:

War has not escaped this virtualisation which is like a surgical operation, the aim of which is to present a face-lifted war, the cosmetically treated spectre of its death, and its even more deceptive televisual subterfuge (*Gulf War* 28).

There is an aspect of a call to arms in “The Goldfinches of Baghdad”, although in this case it is an appeal to the power of the pen and the voice. Injustice is characterised by Adamson as this religious war, where:

The ones who cannot speak burn  
 along with the articulate; the creatures  
 who are oblivious of prayer, along with the ones  
 who lament to their God... (67)

Again language (this time in spoken form) is the medium upon which Adamson measures the scale of the brutality of the occupation of Iraq. With the addition of prayer, however (and therefore the metaphysical), this brutality is transformed into the destruction of the sacred sites of a people who are importantly constructed as *both* pious and secular. Cleverly, Adamson avoids stereotyping Iraqis with the religious fundamentalism that has indiscriminately been associated with the Middle East in Western discourses.<sup>23</sup> Instead, his references to speech and prayer leave aside their simple *equation* in favour of a study of their *interaction* that ultimately results in an elaborate comment on the possible links between speech, sacredness, enunciation and political agency.

Adamson extends this massacre to the seemingly untouchable West, implicating all of us in the murder of Iraqis and the brutal colonisation of their civilisation. His requiem for the likes of "...Falcons on their silver chains / and the children of the falcon trainer..." who "smother / in the smoke of burning feathers and human flesh" ends on a note of archetypal revenge and karmic punishment: "We must sing or die. Singing death as our songs feed the flame" (67). Adamson's intertwining of concepts (and blackening of the face of the West) in this cryptic line, mimics one of Baudrillard's "deterrence machines", as Adamson exposes the war we wage on *ourselves*:<sup>24</sup> "For deterrence is a total machine (it is the true war machine), and it not only operates at the heart of the event...it also operates in our heads" (*Gulf* 68).

Extending Adamson's oeuvre to subjects beyond the boundaries of Australia, "The Goldfinches of Baghdad" is evidence of a strong impulse towards world

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<sup>23</sup> Bellel engages with these discourses in "Relentless till you die", objecting to the Western control of the sacred, the religious (to the point of its destruction of Other belief systems): "We will bomb until there is nothing / until you are dead dead dead. There / will be no more remorse or accountability / life and hope is vaporised—forget you / ever believed, worshipped some 'alien' / cause" (140).

<sup>24</sup> As Pam Brown has it, this war we wage on ourselves (this deterrence) figures as a campaign against humanity. Her "March 2003" universalises the plight of Iraqis (much as Adamson does), opening the violence they endure out onto the waiting public, who receive this message through the iconically virtual portal of television: "so, even the dead / aren't safe - / photographed then / pieced together / into transportable form, / remains / resembling human bodies / become / troublesome revenants" (223).

poetry within our protected shores. This emerging new school of transnational Australian poetry is one that can't resist addressing, as Adamson does, the labyrinthine ethical debate informing our international relations. Within the conscription to Integral Reality, poetry such as Adamson's resists the tradition of the "non-event" (even as it narrates this) by arguing for the resuscitation of the abandoned History principle and by engendering the "lucidity pact".

### 3.2.3 Jennifer Maiden: Recovering Ethics & Exposing the Abstractions of the New Empire.

In Jennifer Maiden's ten books of poetry, in her two published novels as well as in her reviews and essays there is a response to [the] challenge not to live a kind of ethical infantilism.

—Martin Duwell (*Ages* 254).

Increasingly throughout her career, Jennifer Maiden has committed to a political poetics, achieving an elegiac journalism by making it her prerogative to editorialise within her poetry. Her polemic of critical verse has been most recently concerned with Australia's involvement in international conflicts—especially where this involvement performs a distinctly *colonising* function. Maiden brings to her work an immovable social conscience, which fuels her constant reinforcement of an ethics of postcolonial responsibility. Critics such as Chris Wallace-Crabbe draw connections between Maiden's commitment to social and political critique and her local and globally-inflected position within this increasingly globalised epoch of Australian poetry and culture:

Maiden plainly dwells in the modern world of instant communications: she writes about the Gulf War, the Lockerbie disaster, Mandela, Dubcek, Tiananmen Square, the Kurds and Phil Cleary, all of them materially remote from her own life but important components of her compassionate imagination (381).

This delineation of the scope of Maiden's concerns also exemplifies how well her poetry lends itself to the conventions of "the news", as its subjects are so frequently newsworthy.

Equally allied to the editorial genre and to Modernist poetics of stream-of-consciousness writing, Maiden also doesn't entirely suspend the personal. In other words, her often diagnostic and strategic work *celebrates* the difficulties inherent in establishing or adhering to ethical standards, rather than attempting to

gloss over these aporia in favour of presenting a sound ethical platform from which to pontificate. Where this stylistic multiplicity becomes interesting in relation to her poetic responses to war is in Maiden's (entrenched) realist digestion and analysis of what appears to be the *loss* of the real. Adding a richer dimension to what is often a climate of dogmatic allegiances and/or the pervasive representational politics of Integral Reality, Maiden's work unexpectedly alters the boundaries of this political debate, by urgently interrogating the loss of the "real".

In "Intimate Geography ('Operation Iraqi Freedom')"<sup>25</sup> (*Friendly* 90-2), Maiden systematically undertakes an axiomatic and political analysis of the current politics of the New World Order. As part of her project to make sense of the slippages between reality and representation bound up in the *mise-en-scène* of this performance of occupation (and its human subjects), she turns her poetic lens on the Western media. Complex and rigorous, this poem tackles both the *nature* of hyperreal postmodernity and its increasingly pervasive structuring of the West's ideology. Congruently, the hyperrealisation of the Western world prompts Baudrillard to ask: "What happens then to the real event, when image, fiction, and virtual reality intrude everywhere on reality?" (*Spirit* 140). Maiden revisits Forbesian territory here, emphasising Australia as a site for an uncontested mediatised sedation—which Baudrillard refers to as "collective stupefaction" (*Gulf* 52)—adding cogent analysis of the tactics underlying this conservative effort to maintain a pliable audience.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning with a catalogue of recent events, Maiden achieves both an inventory of the lies about Iraq and a clear articulation of the poststructural tenet that dualities necessarily inhabit their binary opposites. Hers is therefore a much more theoretical praxis than Adamson's and, although similar in ideology to Forbes' work, is much more explicit in analysis. "Intimate Geography" establishes the rampant thirst for simulations of the "real" in the West, where everything must be sensationalised for effect—such as "...the 'column of tanks destroyed leaving Basra' / which was three tanks" and "the endless 'securing' of towns and cities / which aren't secure" (90)—as well as the "oddness" (92), the disturbing realisation

<sup>25</sup> Henceforth, this poem will be referred to as "Intimate Geography".

<sup>26</sup> Bruce Dawe acknowledges this "collective stupefaction", asserting with surety this ideology of voyeurism: "...Beyond Baghdad, / many millions will shrink back in living-rooms / and downtown bars, seeing the scene replayed" ("Giant's Arrow", *Sometimes Gladness* 259).

that we have passed into a realm *beyond* the real. With a characteristically enigmatic gesture, Baudrillard explains this “oddness” by a process of elimination, where he utilises the basic concept of deconstruction (the trace of the opposite in the concept) to demonstrate the progression of hyperrealist logic in reference to the Gulf War:

this war is not a war, but this is compensated for by the fact that information is not information either. Thus everything is in order. If this war had not been a war and the images had been real images, there would have been a problem. For in that case, the non-war would have appeared for what it is: a scandal (*Gulf* 81).

It is *this* realm beyond the “real”, which Maiden’s narrator labours to make sense of, and which feeds the desire for this war, as a strange kind of fantasy overtakes reality. Conversely, it is also this hyperreal that feeds the desire for a return to a “real”, which, for Maiden’s narrator at least, is another site of injustice associated with this war. As Maiden points out through her poem/editorial, this is not a war of tanks or bombs or artillery (or even “Weapons of Mass Destruction”), but a war between the reality principle and the fiction principle: between the “real” and the hyperreal.

As the poem proclaims, “Once / there were poems in inverted commas, this / is a war of inverted commas...” (90). By this proclamation, perhaps inadvertently, Maiden reveals the potent allegiance between poetry and power—where poetry houses the ability to transform, to allude, to encrypt. It is these generic traits which give the work of these Australian poets an advantage in combating the semiotic and discursive tricks involved in the representation of this “war”. The “complicity” of poets and poetry in these events is thus both an ethical and discursive problematic. Like contemporary hyperreal simulacra, poetry can generate its own symbolisms, its own orders. Moreover, as Maiden shows, poetry can also access a critical utility in its recognition and debunking of the merely propagandist. As a political genre, it is thus both powerful and complicit in its simulations and deconstructions of the hyperreal.

In harmony with Baudrillard’s dogged intellectual stance that reality is now irretrievable, Maiden also extends this thesis to the War in Iraq—the horrors of which would surely not only *verify* the reality principle, but *undermine* the hyperreal. However, as Baudrillard argues (and Maiden elucidates) the nature of this war—

taking place as it does well within our contemporary saturation in the image—is a textbook case for hyperreality:

An increase in violence is not enough to open up to reality. For reality is a principle, and it is this principle that is lost. The real and the fiction are inextricable, and the fascination of the attack is in the first place, the fascination for the image (the consequences, at the same time elating and disastrous, are largely imaginary). So, in this case, the real adds a bonus of terror to the image, like an additional thrill...It is something like an additional fiction—a fiction going beyond fiction. Ballard (after Borges) used to talk about reinventing the real as the ultimate and most frightening fiction (*Spirit* 141).

Here, therefore, Forbes' earlier prophecies are realised. Rather than suggestively metamorphosing the image together with the real via metaphoricity (as Forbes did in his "Love Poem"), there is now no way back from the simulacrum we inhabit—which has propelled us *beyond* a playful awareness of artifice, into the disguised intricacies of an artificial "real". As simultaneously the *reader* and *subject* of Ballard's "most frightening fiction" (quoted above), Maiden's narrator struggles vainly to retrieve the reality principle (or, at the very least, seeks to monitor its loss) even whilst comprehending the rise of abstraction in hyperreality.<sup>27</sup> The abstract, which manifests as the precedence of the image before the "real" in hyperreality, complicates any straightforward retrieval of the "real" for this narrator. In a mode of enforced compromise, Maiden reclaims the *partial* agency of the analyst, at the same time acknowledging the loss of agency in hyperreality.

Clinging to the fading memory of the real, Maiden monitors its inertness, as if watching a loved one under the influence of a coma. In what appears to be a desperate attempt to make sense of this crisis, Maiden makes a case for the kinship of poetry and this war, which is founded on their mutual investments in the hyperreal. As the narrator of "Intimate Geography" suggests, however, it is easier to apply logic to the obscurity of poetry than to the enigma of war (perhaps because of war's splintered and plural causal contingencies)—especially when these phenomena lose their moorings in the referential and exist instead in the simulacrum of the Symbolic:

in fact I meant that poems about poems

...

---

<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, Maiden's poetry complicates the division of real and hyperreal: "From time to time, Baghdad / seems to be part of my psyche" ("The Potted Plant in the al-Rashid Hotel Foyer" 146).

are not abstract because the abstract  
 in them works through to a deeper real. Will  
 this war work through to the deeper real  
 at last?... (91)

Exhibiting what Duwell refers to as “...her thoroughly contemporary fear of the incompatibility of ethics and language and its fictions” (*Ages* 257), Maiden walks us through the difficulties of marrying a realist ethics with the existential and ideological quandaries of this hyperreal postmodernity, both in poetry and in the Western rhetoric of war. Significantly, Maiden structures this as a kind of cognitive impasse that takes language as both its *specific* starting point (in poetry) and its *abstract* context (in the simulations of the symbolic). Hence, Maiden exposes the *fallacy* of the “real” in hyperreal times, where we are left clinging to the hope of (ironically) a “deeper real”, when even a comparatively *shallow* “real” has long since been lost or abandoned.

In “Intimate Geography”, the narrator drifts in and out of this realisation, moving from vague denial—

...it feels odd, this war. I have paid it  
 careful attention for almost a fortnight and what  
 I would note here is that singular oddness  
 of feeling it evokes... (91)

to cogent scrutiny—

the U.S. polls say yes: who want this so much.  
 Who know what they do and also that  
 they want those inverted commas...(91-2)

In attributing the blame to the U.S., Maiden underscores her left-wing critique with an articulation of the collective Western desire for war (which was so pertinent to Forbes’ construction of his subject). Moreover, in employing references to the device of inverted commas, as well as in displaying the narrator’s confusion, Maiden further strengthens an argument for the location of this lust for carnage (or supremacy) in the collective Western *unconscious*. Added to this, however, is the narrator’s subsequent realisation that these desires inevitably (and dangerously) work their way through to their drastic manifestation in the social (which is everywhere now only a mass of *simulations* of the real and hence a blueprint for the collective unconscious).

Amongst the confusions of this narrator's transient understanding, however, Maiden hits upon what is surely a perfect descriptor for both the desire for war and the situation of hyperreality "we" find ourselves in: "a greed for abstractions: for *the* abstract, rather"(92). Maiden's "intimate geography", so closely akin to Forbes' conception of war as analogous to romantic desire (or a lust for flesh, or a violent ideological narcissism centred around the need for possession of the Other) highlights the simultaneity of our simulated existence and the "animal / impossibility of communication" (92) which underlies it. The "greed for abstractions" is also a "deterrence machine" of sorts. The workings of deterrence in the collective psyche are what Maiden unearths through her poetry, even if a resuscitation of the "real" has become impossible.

Australian poets such as Maiden, Forbes and Adamson communicate their recognition of our advanced state of hyperreality (which informs the context of this war and others), but also communicate the distinctly *removed* relationship we have to global events—the "island consciousness" that necessarily issues from the contemporary Western culture of the image. As Maiden observes, due to some accident of geography and/or our dominant national and Western ideology, we always already deviate from the simulated world events that we enlist in:

...one is always  
 at a tangent to it somehow, albeit  
 with despair's edgy wit...  
 ...  
 and one watches the eros like watching  
 spiders breed: "It is what they do on this planet" (91).

Whilst this distance perhaps enables critique, the danger of such an identity construction is that we have become numb to these familiar images of war and terror—seduced by this voyeurism that taps into our collective desires. Of course, this voyeurism is not solely an Australian phenomenon, but a Western one. Nonetheless, this motivates the moral and ethical burden that these contemporary Australian poets carry, as they fix their poetic gaze outside of our protected borders. Far from being *only* voyeurs, these poets situate their voices on another tangent—the plateau of the analyst, a sideline space from which they achieve (through a degree of removal) their important criticism. In negotiating Integral Reality from the vantage point of Australia, their potential advantage is an awareness that Western subjectivity is always already problematised in this



(post)colony. With this marginally added distance from the “pure” West, Australia can both understand and communicate in the language of the hyperreal, but can also deviate from a total subsumption in its slight estrangement, “at a tangent”.

### 3.2.4 Disrupting Deterrence Machines in the Age of the Virtual Spectacle.

Despite the limits that Australian poetry negotiates—its readership, its cultural marginalisation, its tense relationship to hyperreality—these poets work against these restrictions. Their discursive realm is undeniably political and their activism is a powerful stand (in its simultaneous cooption and critique of the hyperreal) in what has become an era governed by representation.<sup>28</sup> Where effective critique and imagination seem to have been eradicated in the West (and replaced by the regime of the image), Forbes, Adamson and Maiden carve out a space for a critical and imaginative engagement with current events, as they manifest in the personal *and* national psyche. In their identification of both the neo-imperial, violent elements of the hyperreal (the virtualisation of wars, media saturation, the integral perpetuation of “dead history”) and their adoption of a hyperreal poetics (their semiotic simulations; their deconstruction of representations of the virtual and the “real”; their powerful critique of hyperreal political rhetoric; and their anguished and ethics-driven pursuit of a “scene” for the “real” and the historical) these poets combat mere passivity.

Through complex disruptions of contemporary “deterrence machines”, these poets articulate how our collective desires (specifically in the West) are shaped by our advanced hyperreality and how we therefore also call the virtual *into being*, whilst being simultaneously governed by it. The “fatal strategies” of these poet-activists are their criticisms of the West (from the West), by a simple extension of contemporary Western logic. They utilise the critical register as well as a hyperreal poetics, in an effort to rewrite the New Empire in antagonistic and subversive ways. They prophesy about our dangerous trajectory into the hyperreal future

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<sup>28</sup> In *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Baudrillard relies heavily on the metaphoric emphasis of the virtualised spectacle in defining our current epoch.

through the use of hyperreal forms. They chart the horrors of our “stupefaction” under the images of “war”, in what is surely the Age of the Virtual Spectacle.

## **Afterword.**

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As island, archipelago, colony, detention centre, psychological landscape and text, Australia appears in its contemporary poetry as situated within a unique postcolonial and hyperreal space. The distinctiveness of this Australian position as part of, but tangential to, the West—a position which is viewed in this thesis as both a limit and a limit-function—problematizes and extends the theoretical scope of postcolonial theory, hyperreality and Australian poetry.

If we accept the suggestions of contemporary Australian poets—whose work deconstructs unified models of Australian subjectivity as well as the limits of the “nation”—it would appear that the only consensus that can be reached is that the category “Australian” signifies an active and self-sustaining controversy. Perhaps, within this spirit of dynamic debate, what is articulated is a sense of the edges of a *hyper-republic*, albeit one which is predicated on the dissolution of the modern nation and which is cognisant of the unremitting ramifications of coloniality.

PART TWO: CONSTRUCTING A  
DIALOGUE

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**The Australian, *lo latinoamericano*, the  
Postcolonial & the Hyperreal.**

## Theory, theory, *teoría*: Postcolonial, hyperreal, *latinoamericana*.

### Foreword.

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If the Latin American no longer fits with the search for “identity” (essentialist nostalgia for the self as origin and being), neither does it fit submissively with the silhouette of difference, the merely functional marking of the postmodern rhetorisation of otherness. The Latin American empowers itself more as a demand to know why the identity/difference conflict continues to be arbitrated by the discursivity of the first world.

—Nelly Richard (*Cultural Peripheries* 221-2)

*Las características de los países colonizados con su estado sincrético no constituyen la teoría de la postmodernidad ni de la postcolonialidad, sino que presentan un punto de partida privilegiado para recodificar esa teoría, para habitarla en ese espacio y tiempo ambiguo de estar “entre-medio”.*

[The characteristics of colonised countries with their syncretic condition don’t determine postmodern or postcolonial theory, rather they present a privileged starting point for recoding this theory, for inhabiting it in the ambiguous space and time of being “in-between”.]

—Alfonso de Toro (39)

The complexity of Latin American post-colonial society, far from lending itself to the concept of some Latin American essence, provides the ground for an increasingly sophisticated understanding of post-colonial relations throughout the world.

—Bill Ashcroft (*Post-colonial Futures* 26)

Taking Australian postcoloniality (as it is represented in contemporary poetry) in the context of its *internalised* problematics—its “island consciousness”; its paranoiac nationalism; its psychosocial coloniality; its engagements with Integral Reality, the “hyperreal politik” and the New World Order—presents a range of illuminating limits to this condition, as I have argued. However, there are also a number of broader *theoretical* limits that present a challenge to settling for Australian postcoloniality on its own critical terms (and those it borrows from canonical postcolonial theory).

This chapter identifies these limits, as they are inscribed within postcolonial, hyperreal and Latin American theories. The analyses here are thus intended as

instances of border-crossing between these theoretical arenas, as much as instances of opposition and difficulty.

A major initiative of this dissertation is to introduce the context of Latin American poetry and theory into the reading of “Australia”—in order to attempt to view Australia from outside of its nationally imagined theoretical spaces; to interrogate discourses of Australian postcoloniality for their implicit omissions and assumptions; to provide comparative intertexts with which to rethink postcoloniality; and to investigate the limits of both the postcolonial and the hyperreal. Posing significant limits to postcolonial theoretical discourses, contemporary Latin American cultural and social theory manifestly *resists* the lexicon of postcoloniality, chiefly on the grounds that its theoretical legacy is a product of the Western metropolitan Academy, and that its frameworks are premised on a critique of English and French colonialism which neglects to trace colonialism back to the Spanish and Portuguese Empires.<sup>1</sup>

Although Australian postcolonial theorists have undertaken many comparative analyses of other postcolonial nations in recent years (most notably India, Canada, Africa and the Caribbean), there has been a wholesale reluctance to critically engage with Latin America as a site of postcoloniality. Whilst there is a scattering of chapters in postcolonial anthologies that present analyses of Latin America, these are either written *in situ* or by expatriates.

To date, Bill Ashcroft is the only Australian postcolonial literary theorist who has undertaken an analysis of Latin America in a postcolonial perspective.<sup>2</sup> His chapter “Latin America and post-colonial transformation” (*Post-colonial Futures* 22-35) presents an analysis of the Latin American context as an entry into postcolonial theory generally, rather than as a way of reassessing Australian postcoloniality. Ostensibly constructed in order to redress the criticism that Santiago Colás levelled at *The Empire Writes Back*—that this text omitted an

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<sup>1</sup> See Moraña (645-6), Moreiras (*Order of Order* 128), Colás (*Creole* 382-3).

<sup>2</sup> The only other visible record of such an undertaking is Bob Hodge’s recent publication *El hipertexto multicultural en México posmoderno* [*The Multicultural Hypertext in Postmodern Mexico*], co-written with Gabriela Coronado. Published in Mexico in 2004, this text is not, however, available in Australian libraries. Furthermore, this text doesn’t appear present a comparative postcolonial context.

analysis of Latin America in its charting of the postcolonial (*Creole* 26)—Ashcroft’s chapter engages with Latin American history and theory, albeit briefly. As part of his broader trope of “post-colonial transformation”, Ashcroft situates Latin America as a dynamic and fruitful addition to cultural and theoretical postcoloniality. In this sense, his analysis works towards the same ends as my own, in that he argues for the importance of the Latin American context to postcolonial understandings. His recommendation of the study of Latin America is not just cautiously affirmative, but urgently insistent:

Indeed, Latin America fundamentally changes our view of the post-colonial with its demonstration of a post-colonial future. The antiquity and character of its colonisation, the long-standing reality of its hybridised cultures, the “continental” sense of difference which stems from a shared colonial language, the intermittent emergence of contestatory movements in cultural production—all radically widen the scope of post-colonial theory (*Post-Colonial Futures* 26).

This enabling potential that Latin America represents is also one reason for its inclusion as a comparative framework here. However, to expand on Ashcroft’s more historical/structural position, this thesis also employs the context of Latin America for its hyperrealist theory and *tense* relationship to postcoloniality. Where Ashcroft cites the “demonstration of a post-colonial future” and the “antiquity...of its colonisation”, I focus on the ensuing temporal and epistemological deconstructions in Latin American poetry, and the ways in which Latin American social and cultural theory widens and complicates both contemporary notions of imperialism and discourses of national, regional and global identity. Hence, beyond offering another frontier for postcolonial theory to navigate (as in Ashcroft’s analysis), Latin America also represents a limit-space that often *resists* the postcolonial.

Thus, the “continental...difference” that Ashcroft attributes to Latin America is ironically offset by Richard (see epigraph) and refigured as a regionalist deconstruction of the *Western* formulation of difference. Furthermore, the most impenetrable limit that the Latin American context poses to Australian postcoloniality is its Spanish and Portuguese language inscriptions. The absence of Australian critical engagement with Latin America illustrates the English hegemony under which Australian postcolonial theory operates (even if its politics object to this), as well as its genesis in Commonwealth Literary Studies. The readings of Hispanic Latin American theory in translation in this chapter (and

those of Hispanic Latin American poetry in the subsequent chapter) therefore work towards a transnational, multilingual Australian scholarship, informed by the linguistic as well as cultural inheritances of postcolonial literatures.

Not only does the Latin American context work *for* postcolonial criticism, for Ashcroft's "sophisticated understanding of post-colonial relations" (see epigraph), it also works *to interrogate* the postcolonial by refusing its terminology and its theoretical heritage. As Colás outlines:

Although accepted in Asian and African area studies, the concept of postcoloniality, which is identified as a product of the United States and Europe, often faces resistance from Latin Americanists from whom it is one more in a long line of foreign imports tainted by imperial origins (*Creole* 382).

Despite their reticence to engage with the postcolonial *formally*, Latin American theorists nonetheless address a range of postcolonial issues, including (but not limited to) imperialism and cultural hegemony, oppression, hybridity, diaspora, Indigeneity and translation.

Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel's influential theorisation of hegemony and universalism (as they issue forth from Modernity) is thus introduced here as a model of counter-colonial criticism that departs dramatically from postcolonial theory in English. Perhaps the most influential practitioner of "liberation theology" in Latin America, Dussel is a philosopher, theologian and historian—interests that are evident in his regionalist and revolutionary theory. His postulation of "*transmodernidad*" [transmodernity] is analysed in dialogue with Baudrillard's construction of "the perfect crime" as an analogy for the symbolic program of the New World Order. My contention in this comparative analysis is that Dussel's critique sits *uneasily* in the camps of both postcolonial and hyperreal theory—as a productive limit to both schools of thought.

Néstor García Canclini's socio-anthropological study of hybridity, which he evaluates most specifically as a phenomenon of Tijuana, but also as a broader sociocultural phenomenon, is also read here for its relationship to Homi K. Bhabha's more discursive hybridity theory. The "border epistemologies" (Kraniauskas, *Hybridity* 116) of both theorists are evaluated in terms of their articulations of postcoloniality, their amenability to hyperreality, and the possibility of their comparison. As a demonstration of the *spectrum* of hybridity

theory across the North/South divide (and across disciplinary methodologies), this comparison is intended in the spirit of de Toro's "privileged starting point" (see epigraph). As the isolation of a nexus of theoretical trajectories—postcolonial and Latin American thought, anthropology and poststructuralism, the historical and the hyperreal—such a "starting point" enables ideological and theoretical departures from common models of Australian postcoloniality.

In sum, this chapter endeavours to establish some of the current limits of Australian (theoretical) postcoloniality, in the dual sense of its marked circumscriptions and its outlying reaches. These theoretical limits are proposed here as *productively ambivalent* sites for the exploration of contemporary Australian transnational postcoloniality.

#### 4.1 Hyperreality or *transmodernidad*? Reading the "New World Order" according to Baudrillard & Dussel.

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always behind the latest international slogan of the new, Latin America now becomes the precursor of the postmodernist simulacrum in the simulations and dissimulations already contained in the colonial signature that feigned obedience to the European code, while diverting its icons toward alternative messages.

—Nelly Richard (*Cultural Peripheries* 220)

What is at stake here is what I have called "transmodernity", a worldwide ethical liberation project in which alterity, which was part and parcel of modernity, would be able to fulfil itself.

—Enrique Dussel (*Europe* 473)

Although not an overt feature of Latin American theory, hyperreality nevertheless teases the discourses of *latinoamericanismo*—here, for example, appearing as the breaking of the European code (and its reinterpretation) and the realisation of "transmodernity" as an excessive abreaction to modernity. For Richard, the "New World" was *always already* hyperreal, offering Empire its "reality" through its simulation of otherness. For Dussel, it is this alterity which must be harnessed as the tool with which to combat hegemony, by mobilising otherness "against its own simulacrum" (*Intelligence* 126).



These theorists reveal the investment of Latin American theory in a philosophy, a *pensamiento* [a thinking] of hyperreality. As it is not a blatant claim of Latin American cultural theory, however, the hyperreal functions as a limit to the more prevalent ideologies of Marxism, liberation theology and regionalist anti-imperialism. Very rarely consciously or literally articulated, evidence of Latin American hyperreality can nonetheless be found in seemingly antipathetic loci—such as within the lines of the otherwise decidedly historicist and sociological work of Dussel.

Whilst he doesn't structure his critique in these terms, Dussel deals with the simulacrum basis of Western, "Eurocentric" modernity and the hyperreal configurations of the periphery. As I will demonstrate, Dussel's work functions as a blueprint of sorts for Baudrillard's schema, in that it discloses how the West *realises* itself via its periphery (which, for Richard, is encapsulated in the "colonial signature") and in its overabundance of simulations, estranging itself from reality. Dussel's texts also chart how the global can undermine the universal (by virtue of its paradoxical composition of singularities) in the manner of the programme that Dussel refers to as *transmodernidad*. Although syntactically dissimilar, the ways in which Baudrillard and Dussel imagine the New World Order can be read as ideologically harmonious.

#### 4.1.1 Theory/ *teoría*.

The perfect crime would be the elimination of the real world. But what concerns me, rather, is the elimination of the original illusion, the fateful illusion of the world.

—Baudrillard (*Passwords* 61)

The "realisation" of modernity no longer lies in the passage from its abstract potential to its "real", European, embodiment. It lies today, rather, in a process that will transcend modernity as such, a trans-modernity, in which both modernity and its negated alterity (the victims) co-realise themselves, in a process of mutual creative fertilisation.

—Dussel (*Eurocentrism* 76)

The perfect crime. That is precisely what the New World<sup>3</sup> gives evidence against, and hence disproves. As the site for the expurgation of Europe's surplus "reality"—where, as Dussel enigmatically points out, all of the simulations of "reality" under which Europe has disguised its *lack of reality* manifest—the New World ironically comes closer to "realising" modernity (albeit a very distinct modernity from that which Europe proffered) as its antithesis, as its "negated alterity". As Baudrillard argues, the perfect crime is an act of "totalisation", which he equates to a principle of "extermination" (*Passwords* 62-3). In other words, in generating excesses, where the universe "moves toward the extremes, and not toward equilibrium" (qtd. in Poster, *Jean* 185) Baudrillard contends that we execute a programme of "extermination", which, as he explains, means "to eliminate duality...to reduce everything to a kind of single principle—we might say a *pensée unique*—of the world" (qtd. in Poster, *Jean* 62).

If we take "the perfect crime" as the logic of Empire, this process of "extermination" works as the rationale of hegemonic power. Hence, by creating colonies and by functioning on the myth of domination—in Baudrillardian terms, its "single principle"—Europe demonstrated its investment in extermination (in both literal and metaphysical senses). As a *pensée unique*, colonialism thus amounts to the false simulation of a global order, in the face of many localised resistances to this. For Baudrillard, this is encapsulated in the dangerous and illusory belief in truth, which, as "the most fantastical of illusions" initiates extermination:

So, by eliminating every negative principle, we might be said to end up with a world that is unified, homogenised, totally *verified*, as it were, and hence, as I see it, exterminated. Extermination might be said, from this point on, to be our new mode of disappearance, the one we have substituted for death (qtd. in Poster, *Jean* 62).

In avoiding death (and replacing it with disappearance), the extermination principle can be used in the service of immortality and transcendence, arguably features of imperial mythology.

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<sup>3</sup> I use the term "The New World" with a sense of irony here, in order to attach what was a signifier of an antique mythology of Old Europe to the contemporary mobilization of the term "the New World Order", which is meant to refer to the current face of hegemony (the United States). I also use this term to underline Latin America's postcolonial status.

As a characteristic of “the perfect crime”, extermination (by way of the totality of imperial singularity) allows for a number of other features of this mythology of Empire, or, as Baudrillard asserts, “ways of *realising* those things that are dreams, phantasms, utopias” (qtd. in Poster, *Jean* 63). The grossly utopic lexicon of terms such as “the New World”, together with the dream of global supremacy and the (subconscious) phantasm of barbarity—all of which fall under the ideology of “the Old World”—are easily aligned to such a will to extermination (albeit one that is unconscious of Baudrillard’s sense of the term). To situate Dussel’s critique alongside Baudrillard’s, therefore—where both theorists demonstrate the *logic* of the “perfect crime” but also its simulacry impossibilities and its possible resistance—is to mark out one of Empire’s limits. In other words, where “the perfect crime” is a parable for the fictions implicit in imperialism, *transmodernidad* provides the script for an uprising, an other mode of thinking by the colonised Other.

Dussel’s insistence on the centrality of *alterity* in modernity (in the form of a repressed characteristic) works sardonically alongside Baudrillard’s emphasis on the obfuscated role of otherness in the perfect crime, where: “The perfect crime destroys otherness, the other. It is the reign of the same. The world is identified with itself, by exclusion of any principle of otherness” (qtd. in Poster, *Jean* 63). Baudrillard’s analysis of the New World Order and of terrorism (as discussed in Chapter 3) can also be traced back to this conceptualisation of “the perfect crime”. The “reign of the same” can thus be read as the logic for the West’s invention of aggressors such as Islam, as well as its obsession with universality.

Therefore, if we take the imperial program of Modern Europe as the initiator of the “perfect crime”, we can conclude that it not only instigated a process of extermination, it also gave rise to a cult of supposed homogeneity, sparking a number of attempted “copycat crimes” by the West, most notably the U.S. Faced with such a long (and devastating) tradition of hegemonic domination—principally, against alterity—it is no surprise that Dussel’s theoretical counter-offensive is what he calls the “reason of the Other” (*Eurocentrism* 75). The autonomy and distance implicit in Dussel’s terms signify a much more *anti-* or *counter-*colonial politics than the anxious (and often internalised) postcoloniality communicated in Anglo-Australian texts. Hence, as a comparative counterpoint

to Australian postcoloniality, Dussel's work often puts notions of progressive postcoloniality under duress. However, one contradictory locus of utopia in his framework is his "analectical solidarity", which represents the uprising of minorities against the singularity of Empire, but which is *dependant* on opposition to this singularity. Dussel situates this "analectic solidarity" within his concept of *transmodernidad*, which he explains as follows:

Transmodernity (as a project of political, economic, ecological, erotic, pedagogical, and religious liberty) is the co-realisation of that which it is impossible for modernity to accomplish by itself: that is, of an *incorporative* solidarity, which I have called analectic, between center/periphery, man/woman, different races, different ethnic groups, different classes, civilization/nature, Western culture/Third World cultures, et cetera (*Eurocentrism* 76).

This is an example of Dussel at his most utopic. Belying his association with liberation theology (of which he is a notable practitioner), "analectical solidarity" often seems to contradict Dussel's criticism of the omnipotence of modernity (for Latin America particularly). In its claims to a dissolution of the effects of modernity (a Hegelian synthesis of sorts), Dussel's discourse ironically re-simulates "the perfect crime" as the possibility of Baudrillard's "elimination of the real world". Hence, as a solution to the historical injustices of modernity—its "reality effects"—which, as "co-realisation", retain the features of modernity in order to override its hegemony, "analectical solidarity" engages in the same simulacrum as modernity. Hence, Dussel's work, whilst often overtly anti-colonial, here exhibits a moment of postcolonial consciousness that perhaps echoes Australian postcolonial anxiety, as well as a consciousness of coloniality often embedded in a narrative of progress. Thus, Dussel articulates the *necessary ambivalence* of the postcolonial "condition", in his oscillation between opposition and synthesis in *transmodernidad*.

As an oppositional reaction to the violence inherent in "the perfect crime" (or modernity, as Dussel refers to it), the "reason of the Other" relocates and undermines modern reason:

We do not negate reason, in other words, but the irrationality of the violence generated by the myth of modernity. Against postmodernist irrationalism, we affirm the "reason of the Other" (*Eurocentrism* 75).

Typically constructed in antagonistic terms, Dussel's conceptualisation of modernity necessarily characterises postmodernity as an extension of the disguised

irrationalism of modernity. Furthermore, his oppositional lexicon privileges a clear divide between projects of modernity on the one hand, and projects of counter-modernity on the other. Where hyperreality (even in its sympathetic imagination of the functioning of world orders) presents a limit to *transmodernidad* is thus in its potential “postmodernist irrationalism”. However, Baudrillard’s theories often operate via sober deconstructions of the logics of power, hegemony and representation, rather than a carefree irrationalism. Moreover, his analyses of contemporary neo-imperialism and globalisation share many of Dussel’s premises. The (often uneasy) juncture of *transmodernidad* and hyperreality therefore provides a demonstration of the *complication of postcoloniality* that can enhance readings of postcolonial Australia. In their analyses of modernity and imperialism, both Dussel and Baudrillard present ways of negotiating the boundaries of contemporary national mythologies.

Dussel makes clear his position *vis-à-vis* modernity, as the exponent of his *transmodernidad* and the advocate of an understanding of modernity as “genocidal reason” and “sacrificial violence” (*Eurocentrism* 75).<sup>4</sup> His counter-imperial promotion of *transmodernidad* relies on using the censored content of the mythology of modernity (such as violence) against itself, in a deliberate action of revelation and retribution. Hence, rather than elevating reason as the signifier of the modern epoch (as the previous quote demonstrates), Dussel prefers to associate modernity with violence: “*Es decir, por su contenido secundario y negativo mítico, la “Modernidad” es justificación de una praxis irracional de violencia.*” [That is to say, by its secondary and negative *mythical* content, Modernity is the justification of an irrational praxis of violence] (*Europa* 48).

Dussel’s *transmodernidad* can be further problematised by Baudrillard’s “fatal strategies”. Against the myth of extermination—or the reign of singularity—and thus against Empire, “The universe is not dialectical...it is devoted to a radical antagonism, and not to reconciliation or synthesis”, as Baudrillard argues (qtd. in *Poster Jean* 185). So, for Baudrillard, the same premises that inspire Dussel’s oppositional politics *negate* a straightforward dialectic. However, despite this,

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<sup>4</sup> As the poetry and theory in 5.2 will reveal, Australia and Chile have experienced genocidal histories under this modernity.

there are traces of a Bakhtinian heteroglossia (a departure, therefore, from synthesis) in Dussel's work—particularly in his imagining of a transnational response to European modernity as a *glocal* corollary. It is thus also the operation of a form of “radical antagonism” that Dussel encourages, under the guise of what he calls an “ethics of responsibility” (*Europe* 473).

Further bolstering the plurality of his ethics of transnational resistance, Dussel talks of the “extinction” of humanity under the dystopia of an Anglo-centric supremacy in accord with Baudrillard's thesis of “extermination”:

A humanity that only spoke in English and that could only refer to “its” past as an Occidental past would testify to the extinction of the majority of historical human cultural creativity. It would be the greatest castration imaginable and irreversible in humanity's world history! (*World* 237)

As perhaps the ultimate form of “cultural creativity”, Dussel opposes this monolithic model of imperialism with his emphasis on the heterogeneity of *transmodernidad*: “The future of ‘trans’-modernity will be multicultural, versatile, hybrid, postcolonial, pluralist, tolerant, and democratic (but beyond the modern liberal democracy of the European state)” (*World* 236). Whilst his prognoses are imprecise and idealistic and obviously offset Baudrillard's much more cynical theoretical posturing, Dussel also adopts hyperreal logic in his analysis of Eurocentricity.

Given that, according to Dussel, Eurocentric modernity is based on the symbolic realisation of myths, it follows that Europe's colonising mission sought to *add an excess reality* to those myths.<sup>5</sup> So, as Silviano Santiago outlines, Latin America (as the first external simulacrum for the circulation of models of Eurocentric reality) functions as the ironic and unexpected location for a demonstration of the hyperreal as a civilisational effect:

America is transformed into a copy, a simulacrum that desires to be increasingly like the original, even though its originality cannot be found in the copy of the original model, but rather in an origin that was completely erased by the conquerors. Through the constant destruction of original traces, together with the forgetting of the origin, the

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<sup>5</sup> The discussion of Eurocentricity in Chapter 5 furthers this assertion by demonstrating the difficulty of unified subjectivity in this hyperreal context.

phenomenon of the duplication establishes itself as the only valid rule of civilisation (29).

In its overemphasis of the motifs of extermination and originality, Santiago's argument appears much more essentialist than Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality. However, the explication of Eurocentric desire (which impotently simulates its own pure essence via a projected othering) sets up a hyperreal scene. Moreover, the way in which this myth of origin—which relies upon the “forgetting of the [other's] origin”—implodes under the counter-logic of simulation as duplication (which it facilitates) is highly applicable to Baudrillard's analyses of universal singularities.

The initiative to oppose this model of simulatory Eurocentricity explains both the frustrated crusade for origins that courses through Latin American literature and philosophy—specifically the identity discourses made famous by influential Latin Americanists, from the birth of regionalism in José Martí's now canonised “*Nuestra América*” [Our America]; to Ernesto (Che) Guevara's call to revolution; and even the literary-anthropological work of Ángel Rama in his *La Ciudad Letrada* [The Lettered City]—as well as how coloniality operates under the law of the image (and postcoloniality perhaps operates under its erasure). In this sense, the creation of the New World is a prototype of Baudrillard's *trompe l'oeil*.

As far as the existence of Latin America (and other colonised continents) exposes the fallacy of the “real” by presenting a case of the *erasure of all cultural origins* (the logical extension of Santiago's argument above), it behaves in the manner of the *trompe l'oeil*, a figure for simulation that Baudrillard extrapolated in his earlier work:

The *trompe l'oeil* does not seek to confuse itself with the real. Consciously produced by means of play and artifice, it presents itself as simulacrum. By mimicking the third dimension, it questions the reality of this dimension, and by mimicking and exceeding the effects of the real, it radically questions the reality principle (*Seduction* 63).

Hence, Latin America may be viewed as the artificial replication of the Eurocentricity of Europe and also as the proof of Europe as unreal—the proof of the attempt at “the perfect crime” and its annulment. By “mimicking” the “reality effects” of Europe, Latin America projected a believable likeness back to the imperium, which Dussel suggests was necessary to bolster the narcissism of the West. It is along these lines that Dussel argues that modernity began with the

conquest of the New World as the requisite act for a Eurocentrism that needed constant reinforcement:<sup>6</sup>

But modernity as such was “born” when Europe was in a position to pose itself against an other, when, in other words, Europe could constitute itself as a unified ego exploring, conquering, colonising an alterity that gave back its image to itself (*Eurocentrism* 66).

After this birth of modernity as coloniality, engendering the postcolonial era, a difficulty arises where the colonies don’t give back an appropriate image, or offer instead a form of resistance. The “unified ego” that Dussel speaks of is rapidly undone by counter-imperial movements such as *transmodernidad*—in which the world’s subjugated cultures produce a “reply” to the imperium, according to Dussel (*World* 221)<sup>7</sup>—and also by the increasing awareness of the simulated nature of hegemony. As Baudrillard points out, the virtual threatens to expose itself as the oppressor of the “real”, with its particularly vampiric requirement for “reality” as fodder. Thus, the more “reality” is produced, the more the virtual subsumes it:

it is reality itself which presents itself as spectacle, in which the real itself becomes a theme park. A reality transfusion, the way we speak of blood transfusions. Except, in this case, it is a transfusion of real blood into the bloodless universe of the virtual (*Screened* 151).

The virtual realm of Integral Reality thus comes after Guy Debord’s “society of the spectacle”<sup>8</sup> and, having dispensed with the duality of real/spectacle, power is characterised by a virtual manufacture of “reality”, an enlargement of the modern simulations of the world to a “contagious” hyperreal. This virtual sign of hegemony represents, in effect, the attempt at universality as the ultimate totality that Baudrillard speaks of as the “perfect crime”. Baudrillard declares that:

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<sup>6</sup> Dussel suggests that the narcissism of modern/colonial Europe was troubled, in that it couldn’t find a clear reflection of itself. Hence the need to justify itself with the replication of its erratic focus in the interplay between the universal and the global: “El ‘eurocentrismo’ de la Modernidad es exactamente el haber confundido la universalidad abstracta con la mundialidad concreta hegemonizada por Europa como ‘centro.’” [The ‘eurocentrism’ of Modernity is precisely the confusion of abstract universality with the concrete global hegemony exercised by Europe as ‘centre’] (*Europa* 48). Attendant to this construction of eurocentrism, however, is the singular and monolithic characterization of Europe. As a representation of hegemonic power, this singularity is a key feature of Baudrillard’s work also.

<sup>7</sup> There is an echo of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989) as intertext here.



This is the crime: we attain a perfection in the sense of a total accomplishment, and that totalisation is an end. There is no longer any destination elsewhere, nor even any “elsewhere” (*Passwords* 63).

As an initiative towards perfection then, colonialism attempts the simulation of the universal above the “real”.

Following Dussel and Baudrillard, therefore, the conquest of the “New World”, as an attempt at “the perfect crime”, follows a causal chain from sovereignty to universality, where Europe had to invent “the New World” as the reflection of its own image, in order to contain difference *within* sameness—or to deny the psycho-symbolic power of alterity in modern consciousness. To return to Baudrillard’s epigraph, then, in this analysis, Latin American and hyperreal theories uncover “the original illusion, the fateful illusion of the world”, or more specifically, the simulatory basis of Empire.

#### 4.1.2 Applied Theory/ *teoría aplicada*.

It is not a question, then, of a “clash of civilisations”, but of an—almost anthropological—confrontation between an undifferentiated universal culture and everything which, in any field whatever, retains something of an irreducible alterity.

—Baudrillard (*Spirit* 97)

*Si se entiende que la “modernidad” de Europa será el despliegue de las posibilidades que se abren desde su “centralidad” en la Historia Mundial, y la constitución de todas las otras culturas como su “periferia”, podrá comprenderse el que, aunque toda cultura es etnocéntrica, el etnocentrismo europeo moderno es el único que puede pretender identificarse con la “universalidad-mundialidad”.*

[If one understands European modernity as the deployment of possibilities that issue forth from its “centrality” in world history, and as the constitution of all other cultures as its “periphery”, one could understand that even though all cultures are ethnocentric, modern European ethnocentrism is the only one that can attempt to identify itself with “universality-globalism”.]

—Dussel (*Europa* 48)

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<sup>8</sup> According to Baudrillard, “we are no longer in the society of the spectacle, which has itself become a spectacular concept. It is no longer the contagion of the spectacle which alters reality, it is the contagion of the virtual which obliterates the spectacle” (*Screened* 153).

In their mutual analyses of discourses of globalisation and universalism, Baudrillard's and Dussel's work intersect. Both theorists organise their work around these phenomena, using these frameworks to explain the history and future of the contemporary world. In light of the active and often urgent ways in which Australian poets negotiate these effects—particularly in relation to the imperialism of the New World Order—a comparative analysis of Baudrillard and Dussel expands the lexicon of accessible critical responses. With the addition of these theoretical corpora, readings of Australian poetry can be informed by new and rigorous modes of interrogating and understanding universality and globalisation.

For Baudrillard and Dussel, universality is characterised by what becomes the “degree zero” of alterity (to employ Baudrillardian terms). Although their inflections are distinct, Dussel and Baudrillard chart the monolithic progress of Western modernity, which, for both theorists, leads inevitably to some form of myopic self-destruction. In describing contemporary Western universality, Baudrillard suggests that we have reached “degree zero” as another plateau of Integral Reality:

We believe the fate of every value is to be elevated to universality, without gauging the mortal danger that promotion represents: for rather than an elevation, that process represents a reduction, or, alternatively, an elevation to the degree zero of value (*Screened* 156).

As a description of the effects of incessant simulation (at one level), this “reduction” represents a characteristically Baudrillardian dystopia. The realisation of this dystopia depends on a *belief system*, however, as Baudrillard subtly argues. As such, the responses of poets and critics can work towards a *resistance* to the “banality” of zero degrees, and its attendant “mortal danger” (as the work of Sykes and Birch demonstrates). In this vein, Dussel's critique presents an acknowledgement of the dangerous and lasting effects of universality, as much as a theoretical mode of defiance that is predicated on an alternate belief system: *transmodernidad*.

Working from the basis of a Western modernity that used exclusion as its argument for a growing universality (*World* 232), Dussel posits *transmodernidad* as the takeover mechanism of “the other side” of this modernity—the peripheral

uprising.<sup>9</sup> Predicting a movement towards his “analectical solidarity”, by way of a “subsumption from alterity”, Dussel charts the evolution of this counter-imperial movement. He claims that the denial of alterity leads to an ironic *excess* of alterity: “*Se trata de una ‘Trans-Modernidad’ como proyecto mundial de liberación donde la Alteridad, que era co-esencial de la Modernidad, se realice igualmente.*” [It is about “Trans-Modernity” as worldwide liberation project wherein alterity, which was essential to modernity, realises itself equally] (*Europa* 50). This hyperreal structuring of alterity-as-excess is not dissimilar to the hyperrealism of coloniality as the carceral excess of Australian settlement. Hence, where Australian poets articulate a troubling excess of the colonial logics of detention, incarceration and surveillance, Dussel articulates the excess of the Manichean logic of opposition in his postcolonial climate.

Baudrillard expresses a similar sense of uprising to Dussel’s—in similarly politically obscure terms—as the replacement of totality with singularities. Universality, for Baudrillard, is about the representation of impossibility; the playing out of a thwarted logic—where the universal machine must run itself into the ground:

Every culture which universalises itself loses its singularity and dies away...the difference is that the others died of their singularity, which is a fine death; whereas we are dying from the loss of all singularity, from the extermination of all our values, which is an ignoble death. [...] At any rate, for us the mirror of the universal is shattered (we can, in fact, see this as something like the mirror stage of humanity). But perhaps this is fortunate, for, in the fragments of this broken mirror, all the singularities re-emerge (*Screened* 156; 157).

Morphing into an homogeneous monoculture, the West becomes for Baudrillard the absurd equivalent of its own logic. Thus, to raise its singularity to an excessive degree is to lose it altogether—to become prey to the forces of other singularities,

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<sup>9</sup> Included in this faction, according to Dussel, are the following subjugated groups: “*el mundo periférico colonial, el indio sacrificado, el negro esclavizado, la mujer oprimida, el niño y la cultura popular alienadas, etcétera (las víctimas de la ‘Modernidad’) como víctimas de un acto irracional (como contradicción del ideal racional de la misma Modernidad).*” [the colonial peripheral world, the sacrificed Indian, the enslaved black, the oppressed woman, the alienated child and popular culture, etc., (the victims of modernity) as victims of an irrational act (contradicting the rational ideal of modernity itself).] (*Europa* 49)

Dussel's "other side" of modernity. As evidence of this "other side", Baudrillard cites Islam as a potent singularity that reacts against the universality of the West:

Everything which constitutes an event today is done against the universal, against that abstract universality (and this includes the frantic antagonism of Islam to Western values: it is because it is the most vehement protest against this Western globalization that Islam today is public enemy number one) (*Screened* 158).

Whilst there is an implicit suggestion here that Islam shares a sense of universality with the West, for Baudrillard, the singular only becomes universal when it achieves a global hegemony, a worldwide military and political power. In this sense, the phrase "the other side" highlights both the mirroring and estranging effects of Islam on the West—Dussel's alterity problematic.

Inevitably, for Baudrillard, such totality must lead to a form of death (played out in the symbolic). Following his *penchant* for the metaphor of extermination, Baudrillard equates the universal with (symbolic) mortality, as the previous quote demonstrates. However, he does not merely deal with the abstract death of cultures—which we could also read as their demise—the "ignoble death" above); rather, he deals with the cultural and material manifestations of death under contemporary Western hegemony. His theses on contemporary manifestations of terrorism are thus important in that they establish the utility of hyperreal theory in conjunction with the palpable and global "reality effects" of neo-imperialisms. As such, his work on terrorism represents a *détente* between materialism and discursiveness, historicism and poststructuralism, highly appropriate to the potentially analogous function of contemporary Australian poetry—particularly in its hyperreal evaluations of the New World Order. Arguing that the West "cannot operate on the terrain of the symbolic challenge and death...since it has erased it from its own culture" (*Spirit* 15), Baudrillard suggests that the act of terrorism (particularly the destruction of the Twin Towers) represents the uprising of a singularity against the totality of "omnipotence" (*Spirit* 7).

Under the stress of terrorism, which engenders “an excess of reality” (*Spirit* 18), the universal system “can only plunge further into its own logic of relations of force”<sup>10</sup> (*Spirit* 15). Ironically, this produces an extreme “reality effect”, where the West simulates terror (in response to terrorism) to such an alarming degree that it produces an excess of the same, or in Baudrillard’s language, “It simply carries things to the extreme, to the point of paroxysm” (*Spirit* 58):

To the point that the idea of freedom, a new and recent idea, is already fading from minds and mores, and liberal globalisation is coming about in precisely the opposite form—a police-state globalisation; a total control, a terror based on “law and order” measures. Deregulation ends up in a maximum of constraints and restrictions, akin to those of a fundamentalist society (*Spirit* 32).

The violence associated with universality, which leads to this “police-state” ideology, is endemic to the character of hegemony, according to both Baudrillard and Dussel. As such, Baudrillard’s analysis of contemporary neo-imperialism and its terroristic opposition provides a grotesque exaggeration of the logic of colonialism: in claiming universality, and in simulating this so strongly, hegemony *invites its own (auto)implosion*.

For Dussel, this violence is a requirement of the mythology of European modernity, which depends upon a valuing of progress contingent on sacrifice. As Dussel argues:

*Esta dominación produce víctimas (de muy variadas maneras), violencia que es interpretada como un acto inevitable, y con el sentido cuasi-ritual de sacrificio; el héroe civilizador inviste a sus mismas víctimas del carácter de ser holocaustos de un sacrificio salvador (el indio colonizado, el esclavo africano, la mujer, la destrucción ecológica de la tierra, etcétera).*

[This domination produces victims (of extremely varied sorts), violence that is interpreted as an inevitable act, and in the quasi-ritual sense of sacrifice; the civilising hero invests his victims with the character of being offerings [holocausts] of a saving sacrifice (the colonised Indian, the

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<sup>10</sup> Quite scandalously, Baudrillard has suggested that the Twin Towers committed suicide in response to the suicides of the terrorists. He charts the progression of the logic of universality to this ultimate demise, arguing that: “Very logically—and inexorably—the increase in the power of power heightens the will to destroy it. And it was party to its own destruction. When the two towers collapsed, you had the impression that they were responding to the suicide of the suicide-planes with their own suicides... The West, in the position of God (divine omnipotence and absolute moral legitimacy), has become suicidal, and declared war on itself.” (*Spirit* 6-7). This is obviously an extension of Žižek’s analysis of this event, but nonetheless accords with Žižek on the centrality of cultural desire to hyperreal politics.

enslaved African, woman, the ecological destruction of the land, etc.]) (*Europa* 49).

For Baudrillard, a similar logic operates. However, in his analysis, this violence doesn't just issue forth from the modernity or the West, but is ultimately a form of the West's self-destruction. He claims that the West, as superpower "fomented all this violence" and is the large-scale representative of "that (unwittingly) terroristic imagination which dwells in all of us" (*Spirit* 4-5). So, in Baudrillard's texts, we find a much more extended and explicit analysis of the subconscious logic of imperialism. His deconstructive premises, however, are nonetheless shared by Dussel in his ideological analyses of modernity.

In the end, for both theorists, it is the (re)emergence of the Other that brings Western modernity to its logical limits. In the form of a resistant-yet-acquiescent globalisation, the periphery (appropriately) encircles the centre, and for both critics this uprising underlines the subtle distinction between globalisation and universalism. Therefore, in what might be a Dusselian "transmodern" future, "the central gives way not to the local, but to the dislocated. The concentric gives way not to the decentred, but to the eccentric" (Baudrillard, *Spirit* 90). In this sense, the "singular", *glocal* cultures of the periphery can employ globalisation as a transformational medium, in order to access the site of universality and to resist its hegemony. Dussel structures this also in geographical terms, declaring that:

"trans-modernity" affirms "from *without*" the essential components of modernity's own excluded cultures in order to develop a new civilisation for the twenty-first century. Accepting this massive exteriority to European modernity allows one to comprehend that there are cultural moments "outside" of modernity (*World* 224).

When applied to Australia, with its ambiguous postcolonial identity politics, *transmodernidad* and hyperreality, as the vehicles of transformational *glocalisation*, enable a negotiation of universality and global hegemony that is powered by (rather than constricted by) "peripheral" cultures. As I will demonstrate in Chapter 5, the counter-imperial, trans-modern and anti-colonial discourses embedded in Dussel's and Baudrillard's work offer ideological exits from the ways in which Australian (post)colonialism is experienced as culturally and individually circumscribing. The variety of responses from Australian and Latin American poets to the imbricated problematics of the colonial, the modern, the universal

and the global attest to the currency of deconstructive theories such as those of Baudrillard and Dussel.

To read the contemporary world with the aid of Baudrillard's and Dussel's analyses is to resist a Eurocentric or Occidental bias in favour of an apprehension of the New World Order informed by postulates of alterity that aren't subsidies of superpowers or branches of an already exhausted modernity. Whilst Dussel and Baudrillard represent new theoretical terrains for postcolonial criticism, the amenability of their work to postcolonial contexts also derives from the complex engagements with postulates such as alterity and resistance already encompassed by postcolonial theory. As an exploration of such connections between postcolonial, Latin American and poststructuralist thought, the following section evaluates the viability of a comparative analysis of contemporary discourses of hybridity.

## 4.2 Hybridity/ *hibridez*: In-between Bhabha & García Canclini; or, A (Hyperreal) Utopia in the Borderlands.

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Chakrabarty's image of a "border-land of temporality" is especially apposite, for both García Canclini and Bhabha not only visit borders in their texts—indeed, their work meets and overlaps at one such border, the very particular border between the United States of America and Mexico—but also develop border epistemologies.

—John Kraniuskas (*Hybridity* 116)

The hybrid is almost never something indeterminate because there are different historical forms of hybridisation.

—Néstor García Canclini (*The Hybrid* 79)

How are subjects formed "in-between", or in excess of, the sum of the "parts" of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc)?

—Homi K. Bhabha (*Location* 2)

The illustriousness of Homi Bhabha in contemporary Western scholarship, which ensues from his status as one of the "holy trinity" of postcolonial theorists (along with Spivak and Said) is shadowed by the relative obscurity of his Latin American counterpart, Néstor García Canclini.

Although, as Kraniauskas observes, their work appears in distinct disciplines,<sup>11</sup> these two theorists confront the ideologies of colonialism, liberal humanism and globalisation with their individually fashioned theses on hybridity. When read contiguously, the unexpectedly shared narratives embedded in the texts of Bhabha and García Canclini are those of cultural excesses, the ubiquitousness of the present and a fascination for *both* the quixotic and the untenable.

As Kraniauskas, García Canclini and Bhabha articulate in different ways (in the epigraphs above), their “borderland epistemologies” rely on that classic positioning of the theorist—on the axis of divergent discourses (for Bhabha, colonisation and decolonisation; for García Canclini, globalisation and workable democracy). As is also obvious in the epigraphs above, however, the work of Bhabha and García Canclini diverges at the border of historical specificity—crucial to García Canclini’s work and crucially obscured in Bhabha’s—and discursive deconstruction. This division opens up an evident subtext of their work (and of my analysis of it here), which is the *other* border that their texts approach (and that mine transgresses)—that of the demarcation between “Western”<sup>12</sup> and Latin American theory. Another way of naming this border is as that between the North and the South; or as that between the (entrenched) traditions of cultural studies (in the West) and the social sciences (in Latin America); and it is all of these intersections that are of pivotal interest to this chapter.

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11 Kraniauskas evaluates their theoretical positioning as follows: “Homi Bhabha and Néstor García Canclini, who, to simplify, we may take as representing the two halves of this hybrid interdisciplinary whole: the psychoanalytic and the literary on the one hand (Bhabha), and the anthropological and the sociological on the other (García Canclini). Their work also traverses the field of cultural studies from both postcolonial criticism (Bhabha) and Latin Americanism (García Canclini), which each have transformed considerably” (*Hybridity* 116).

<sup>12</sup> Although it is clearly a loaded and debatable term to use with reference to Bhabha’s work, I would argue that by virtue of his situation within the elite echelon of the U.S. academy, as well as his predominantly Western readership, there is a sufficient case for Bhabha to be read as a Western Academic (albeit one whose work is concerned with minority cultures insofar as it presents a *critique* of Western discourses). In his own estimate, Bhabha refers to his situation as one of privilege and cosmopolitanism, and as one that was made possible via a specific trajectory of elite education in predominantly Western contexts: “My postcolonial provenance includes a middle-class cosmopolitan intellectual experience—Bombay, Oxford, London and the U.S.—and it would not have been possible for me to think postcoloniality without thinking through Marxism or semiotics or psychoanalysis, or feminism or socialism or poststructuralism” (*Speaking* 24).



Though they interpret modernity as comprising different emphases, (due to their disciplinary differences as much as their regional affiliations), Bhabha and García Canclini demonstrate that hybridity discloses the *impurity* inherent in the modern (colonial) project itself. This is perhaps the reason why the spectre of modernity harasses their work and why they cannot help but construct modernity as at least difficult, if not irresolvable or obdurate. In this sense, their critiques become both documents constantly overshadowed and interrupted by modernity and documents whose *function* is to constantly overshadow and interrupt modernity.<sup>13</sup> Both register the transience of modernity, as a slippery temporal/ideological episteme and both situate their hybrid subjects (appropriately) on the borders of modernity *and* within it—that is, as the *excess* of modernity. In their deconstructions of modernity, Bhabha and García Canclini thus share Dussel’s politics, notwithstanding their methodological distinctions. For all three theorists, the postcolonial cannot be claimed without a necessary engagement with the modernity that underwrites coloniality.

A somewhat contradictory revisiting of Enlightenment thought (albeit in a muted fashion) is involved in Bhabha’s construction of a monolithic, singular modernity, against which his hybrid subjects exercise their identarian/political choices. A modernity structured with a teleological temporality informs his work, as is evident in his reclamation of this epoch as the *altered form of itself* in his suggested reinscription of liberalist modernity as postcolonial utopia:

It is the conviction that being colonial or postcolonial is a way of “becoming modern”, of surviving modernity, without the myth of individual or cultural “sovereignty” that is so central a tenet of liberal individualism and its sense of serial progress or cultural evolution (*Speaking* 24).

It is concerning here that the discarded elements of liberalism—“individual sovereignty” and “serial progress”—are in fact reinvoled in the call to modernity (for what kind of modernity exists without its metadiscourse of progress? And how are we to imagine modernity without the sovereign subject?). An imagining of postcolonial subjectivity that is premised on the resurrection of a recuperated

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<sup>13</sup> The critique of modernity is arguably a premise of García Canclini and Bhabha’s work, as many critics, including themselves, attest. See Bhabha (*Culture’s in-Between, Location, Nation*), Kraniuskas, García Canclini (*Hybrid Cultures*), Beverley (*Subalternity*) and Moreiras (*Hybridity*).

modernity (without liberalism but evidently with residues of its legacies) presents dangers in being not so much a deconstruction of modernity, as a revision that employs parts of its agenda. In this regard, Bhabha's project resembles Dussel's utopic "analectical solidarity". However, Bhabha replaces Dussel's generality with his specific citations of progress, sovereignty and liberalism.

Hence, where subjectivity is inscribed in Bhabha's formulation with what appear to be similar privileges to that of the liberal humanist subject (or, indeed of the neoliberal capitalist consumer), and where modernity appears as a universal force, whose effects are flattened out across a globe that *can't* be uneven, it is as though hybridity issues forth from an overgeneralised modernity. Within this context, hybridity is postulated as the ultimate challenge to modern liberalism; as the psycho-social diagnosis of its subconscious;<sup>14</sup> and, most troublingly, as the ready (and uncomplicated) solution for its internal inconsistencies (which figure here ironically as its foundational postulates, such as secularity, rationality and progress):

It is from the interstices of this paradoxical situation that the postcolonial perspective emerges. It unsettles the ubiquity, the ordinariness of those orders of common sense, those polarities of perception, that modernisation has bequeathed on the rest of the world. So, for instance, postcoloniality is open to the contingent and hybrid articulations of the sacred-in-the-secular, psychic fantasy as part of social rationality, the archaic within the contemporaneous (*Speaking* 24).

Modernity as a universalising program (akin to Bhabha's monolithic modernity) is invoked by García Canclini, in his citations of specific historical instances where modernity (as the "expansive", "renovating", "democratising" project, to use his words) has had to confront the interruptive modernities of Latin America:

it is necessary to understand the sinuous Latin American modernity by rethinking modernisms as attempts to intervene in the intersection of a semi-oligarchic dominant order, a semi-industrialised capitalist economy, and semitransformative social movements (*Hybrid Cultures*54).

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<sup>14</sup> Exhibiting this subconscious element, Bhabha claims that "Liberalism may well be regulative of difference and minorities—assimilationist and appropriative in the best and worst senses—but it is now troubled, anxious, even exhilarated (in unequal measures) about what it sees as the 'new diversity'" (*Liberalism* 38).

Multivalent, Latin America is here posited as the hybrid site of “intersections”, so it is no surprise that none of the global ideologies gestured at here—imperialism, capitalism, industrialisation—are completely achieved. The *partial* completion of these ideologies—emphasised repeatedly in the quote above—points to the credibility of “border epistemologies” such as García Canclini’s for a Latin America that is experienced as a matrix of ideologies and cultural movements. Bhabha’s claim to an interstitial postcoloniality which deconstructs modernity is problematised by García Canclini’s thesis that modernity (as already experienced in Latin America) is both omnipresent and rhizomatic:

The cultural reconversions that we analysed reveal that modernity is not only a space one enters into or from which one emigrates. It is a condition that involves us, in the cities and in the countryside, in the metropolises and in the underdeveloped countries. With all the contradictions that exist between modernism and modernisation—and precisely because of them—it is a situation of unending transit in which the uncertainty of what it means to be modern is never eliminated (*Hybrid Cultures* 268).

Perhaps a function of Latin America’s “uneven modernisation”,<sup>15</sup> the inability to override modernity (by harnessing Bhabha’s agential hybridity for example) signifies this exilic modern landscape of “uncertainty” and “contradictions”.

Whether stimulated by a modernity overshadowed by European colonialism, or by the unevenness of global (cultural) politics, hybridity emerges in the work of Bhabha and García Canclini as the obvious by-product of their *particular* understandings of modernity. In both cases, it is clear that hybridity is not only a border *condition*, but an expression of the liminality of modernity itself, as well as the name of the transgressive agency necessary to negotiate these borders. My inclusion of this discussion of the prerequisite deconstruction of modernity for postcolonial cultural theory is thus intended as evidence of the structural relevance of the limit-space to postcoloniality. Given that modernity facilitates colonialism (as Dussel establishes) and is a liminal and unstable system, it follows that its liminal character charges postcoloniality with the necessity of border-crossings.

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<sup>15</sup> García Canclini states that: “The most re-iterated hypothesis in the literature on Latin American modernity may be summarised as follows: we have had an exuberant modernism with a deficient modernisation” (*Hybrid Cultures* 41).

In Baudrillardian terms, hybrid identities are constructed by Bhabha and García Canclini as the excessive reproduction of modernity—not only the product of the negated “other”, but the monstrous progeny of modernity’s principal mechanism of control (and central image of virility): colonialism. As García Canclini remarks at the outset of his *Hybrid Cultures*:

The first hypothesis of this book is that the *uncertainty* about the meaning and value of modernity derives not only from what separates nations, ethnic groups, and classes, but also from the sociocultural hybrids in which the traditional and the modern are mixed (2).

Hence, with the onset of modernity (as well as the uneven spread of modernisation that García Canclini refers to), hybridity emerges as a prominent tool for establishing the instability of this system—how it engenders its own deconstruction. In other words, hybridity takes the logic of modernity to its extremes, by fusing the many borders that it sets up. Therefore, be they technology, imperialism, capital, or temporality, the discourses of modernity are reproduced and deconstructed—reprogrammed—by the kinds of hybridity that Bhabha and García Canclini imagine. The motifs of reproduction and representation are thus vital to their critiques.

Across disciplinary lines (and these academic traditions are observable in their work), Bhabha and García Canclini articulate a reciprocal project of dismantling modernity, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

The “subalterns and ex-slaves” who now seize the spectacular event of modernity do so in a catachrestic gesture of reinscribing modernity’s “caesura” and using it to transform the locus of thought and writing in their postcolonial critique (Bhabha, *Location* 246).

Modernity, then, is seen as a mask. A simulacrum conjured up by the elites and the state apparatuses, above all those concerned with art and culture, but which for that very reason makes them unrepresentative and unrealistic (García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures* 7).

As “seized and reinterpreted” spectacle or “conjured” mask, modernity assumes the properties of the simulacrum, as García Canclini points out. The recognition of the pivotal nature of representation to modernity is important to both Bhabha’s psychoanalytic deconstruction of colonial logic and to García Canclini’s sociological analysis of the contemporary Latin American cultural matrix. The dissolution of the “real” that follows modernity—for Bhabha, the *break* or limit implied in the “caesura” that becomes instead a *pause* in the reality illusion; for

García Canclini the “unrealistic” and “unrepresentative” hegemony whose power is simulacrum—ties modernity to hyperreality and its deconstruction to hyperreal theory. Whether an event that can be “reinscribed” or a simulacrum that is “unrealistic”, it is clear that the symbolic weight and cultural legacy of modernity is hence difficult to dispense with for these theorists.

#### 4.2.1 Cultural Diagnosis or Utopia? : Approaching the Limits of the Material, the Discursive & the Hyperreal.

My use of poststructuralist theory emerges from this postcolonial contramodernity. I attempt to represent a certain defeat, or even an impossibility, of the “West” in its authorisation of the “idea” of colonisation. Driven by the subaltern history of the margins of modernity—rather than by the failures of logocentrism—I have tried, in some small measure, to revise the known, to rename the postmodern from the position of the postcolonial.

–Bhabha (*Location* 175)

My own focus on *narratives* of multicultural crisis in an age of globalisation as well as my *empirical research* on how multiculturalism plays out in cities and communications processes speak to the relevance of working in both modalities.

–García Canclini (*Consumers* 6)

As their testimonies imply, both Bhabha and García Canclini are acutely aware of current arguments about discursive and materialist critiques. Their need to defend their work perhaps partly derives from the sometimes fierce debate around the political utility of hybridity theories. As another site where postcoloniality negotiates discursive and materialist practices, Australia (and its poetry) confronts this debate also. In the texts of contemporary Australian poetry, it is possible to witness a similar co-presence of discursiveness and materiality. Particularly in its hyperreal poetics, this poetry confronts the slippages and crossings between these ideological and methodological arenas. As an agonistic condition/effect, hybridity becomes the logical site from which to approach and explain the border problematic of the postcolonial era, most specifically in its marginality.

Importantly, in the epigraphs above, both Bhabha and García Canclini emphasise the magnitude of significant epochs (modernity and globalisation, respectively) and of specific methodologies (poststructuralist theory and a combination of

storytelling and empirical research, respectively) to their strategic development of hybridity. For Bhabha, poststructuralism is not simply discursive, but an ideological counterpoint to modernity. By implication, he connects the poststructural with the subaltern, positing them both on “the margins of modernity”, which results in a questionable allegiance for some critics. Voicing the most common complaint against Bhabha’s work—that it lacks a specified politics—Peter Childs and Patrick Williams subtly accuse Bhabha of supporting the hegemony of colonialism by default. They assert that:

in Bhabha’s writing there is no text that can answer colonialism back, and while all discourse is resistant, because ambivalent and hybridised, there is no discourse of resistance (145).

Ien Ang accords with Childs and Williams in finding Bhabha’s work deficient in respect to the urgency of a counter-imperial political activism. Ang diagnoses Bhabha with “liberal hybridism”, suggesting that his theories are almost totally divorced from the struggles “on the ground” (*Speaking* 195).

However, as Bhabha clearly indicates, his work operates at the level of the “idea”, and his project is one of “renaming”, and “reinscribing” the West (and colonialism) and is therefore discursive (and theoretical) by definition, rather than anthropological or sociopolitical. In this sense, to criticise his work on the basis of its discursive qualities, or to suggest with incredulity that it lacks a (materialist) politics, is a redundant manoeuvre. As though pre-empting these kinds of critiques, García Canclini signals (and traverses) the divide between discursive and empirical criticism quite markedly. Given the *extant* critique of cultural studies by Latin Americanists—where they read this discipline as Western and as a feature of U.S. imperialism<sup>16</sup>—García Canclini’s choice to sample from this tradition *as well as* from social theory, or, as he puts it “working in both modalities” (*Consumers* 6)—is in itself a hybridising strategy. However, the distinctions between discursive and sociological critique are strongly drawn by many theorists, who clearly separate the work of García Canclini and Bhabha. As George Yúdice argues, for example:

there is a significant difference in García Canclini’s approach when compared with Bhabha’s. Whether or not hybridity can discursively

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<sup>16</sup> See John Beverley (*Beyond* 330).

subvert Western reason is less important than its usefulness in pointing to practices that help democratise hierarchical and authoritarian societies both culturally and economically (*Consumers* xiii).

If it is a question of methodology, many critics find it easy to demarcate their fields (Kraniauskas, *Hybridity* 123; Yúdice, *Consumers* xiii). However, what is potentially *more* interesting, is to attempt to chart the shared strategies of these theorists, and/or how their regional and disciplinary distance may have engendered a conversation across (academic) cultures conducted via a complex sort of translation (or via multiple translations), but that is nevertheless a function of hybridity also. As voices in this conversation, Bhabha and García Canclini nevertheless betray their often distinguishable allegiances to differing schools of thought.

Bhabha's hybridity, for instance, is articulated in terms of its semiotic role:

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative. Hybridity represents that ambivalent "turn" of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification—a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority (*Location* 113).

As "the effect of colonial power" (*Location* 112) and a "problematic of colonial representation" (*Location* 114), hybridity is rather like an ideological effect, a free-floating signifier, or, as Moreiras has it, a "reification" in Bhabha's discourse. In this context, Moreiras warns of the dangers of a purely discursive polemic:

Arguing for hybridity against the reification of cultural identities as some kind of recipe for perpetual flexibility overdoes its usefulness once it is made clear that hybridity can also produce a form of conceptual reification (*Hybridity* 377).

This "third term", which Moreiras sees as "a code word associated to a large extent with hegemonic politics" (*Hybridity* 388), is for Bhabha the only effect capable of deconstructing the dangerous polarities of colonialism.

Where Bhabha tends towards the abstract—particularly in claims such as the hybrid "process of iterative 'unpicking' and incommensurable, insurgent relinking" (*Postcolonial Criticism* 451), García Canclini provides a welcome contrast for some critics, in his often explicitly socio-historical mapping of hybridity:

Hybridity has a long trajectory in Latin American cultures. We remember formerly the syncretic forms created by Spanish and Portuguese matrices mixing with indigenous representation. In the projects of independence and national development we saw a struggle to make cultural modernism compatible with economic semi-modernisation, and both compatible with persistent traditions (*Hybrid Cultures* 242).

Often working as a much more scientific analysis, García Canclini's work establishes hypotheses and evidence,<sup>17</sup> and uses "empirical research" from border zones such as Tijuana as sites of data.

What this amounts to, when compared with Bhabha's work, is a method of analysis which works *from* an established hybridity (sociologically speaking), rather than *towards* an ethic of hybridity, such as the one that Bhabha formulates from his analysis of colonial logic (an elusive and contingent assessment in its generality, even though specific sociological situations can be applied to it). To clarify, García Canclini's usage of hybridity as a cultural descriptor (based on his specific and historically contextualised "empirical research" of border communities straddling the Mexico/United States divide) works from an understanding of these Latin American border cultures (and of course, by extension, *latinoamericanismo* also) as *always already* hybridised. As such, García Canclini doesn't invoke hybridity as the ideological solution to systems of dominance or hegemonic orders. Rather, he works from the *basis* of an existing socio-cultural hybridity to extrapolate his analyses of the trajectory of both *latinoamericanismo* and globalisation. He exercises a distinctly *a priori* reasoning, positing globalisation *long after yet contemporaneous with* hybridity, as:

this era of globalisation in which it becomes more obvious that ethnic and national identities are hybrid constructions, asymmetrically interdependent and uneven. Indeed, it is in this unavoidable relation to hybridity that each group must defend its rights (*Consumers* 11).

Following this prescription, globalisation appears as the extension of modernity itself—a fractured, hybrid and unstable phenomenon.

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<sup>17</sup> García Canclini's approach is often methodical and always quite structured, as is obvious in the opening paragraph to his essay "Hybrid Cultures, Oblique Powers". Here, he sites "three key processes for explaining hybridisation: the breakup and mixing of the collections that used to organise cultural systems, the deterritorialisation of symbolic processes, and the expansion of impure genres" (*Hybrid Cultures* 207).



Bhabha, like García Canclini, formulates hybridity as an ideological weapon to use against hegemonic systems. For Bhabha, however, this struggle is projected against the colonialism of the past, and the postcolonial inequalities and neocolonial manifestations in the present. Where his usage of hybridity differs most prominently from that of García Canclini, is in the generality of his references to culture(s). The particularly discursive and theoretical nature of Bhabha's hybridity thus posits hybridity as a *desired* state, as well as an historical phenomenon. With utopic overtones (or at least a revolutionary call-to-arms) that are hard to ignore, Bhabha expresses hybridity in a subjunctive register, as an *a posteriori* theoretical possibility that is limited by its status as a paradigm. Hence, he proposes:

that the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualising an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is from the "inter"—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *in-between* space—that comes the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of "the people". And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves (*Location 39*).

The inductive reasoning here, coupled with a strangely universalising discourse—the most potent example being the assertion that "it is from the 'inter'...that comes the burden of the meaning of culture"—seems to be the catalyst for some critics' disdain for Bhabha's approach. Even though he allows for a plurality which suggests the possibility of national and cultural nuances (in his gesture to "histories"), his generalising manoeuvres prompt acerbic criticism such as that of Brett Nichols, who argues that: "What we have before us is the articulation of a site, which, despite its fluidity, claims to be able to "contain" the question of culture itself" (20). Not only does Bhabha's site "contain culture", it also conveniently annuls "the politics of polarity" in its striving towards a hybrid utopia. Where García Canclini emphasises the importance of "unevenness" and disjuncture to the position of hybridity, Bhabha reverts to his "third space" rather than attending to the details of the turbulent space of the social.

As their formulations of hybridity demonstrate, Bhabha and García Canclini not only share a common figure for contemporary (postcolonial) identity, they also present complex and detailed articulations of the intersections of epistemologies,

ontologies and methodologies, such as the border-crossings between the frontiers of postcolonial theory, cultural studies, Eurocentrism and hyperreality. To read these two theorists in terms of the way their cultural theory or sociological thought registers and interprets the premised existence of hyperreality, is to depart from predictable and exhausted comparisons of their work (or comparisons of similarly representative work) which take the more obvious problematics of regionalisms and disciplinary/methodological affiliations as their starting points.

Most strikingly, it is in their formulations of hybrid subjectivities that these theorists adopt the theoretical terrain of hyperreality. As the deconstructed and menacing referents of the social, Bhabha's hybrid subjects undo essences, initiating this "crisis" by embodying a mutation of originality—its erasure, the loss of the right of the sign to signify—within the strongholds of colonial (and, by extension, imperial and discursive) authority. In Baudrillardian fashion, therefore, the subject becomes object, or as Bhabha puts it: "the people are now the very *principle* of 'dialectical reorganisation'" (*Location* 38, my emphasis). Fundamentally removed from a "real" genealogy, and representative of the annihilation of all referents, Bhabha's hybrid subjects become what Baudrillard calls "floating values"<sup>18</sup>, and hence morph into theory.

One possible extension of Bhabha's deconstructive (and hyperreal) logic is to push the hybrid subject to its farthest extreme: the excessive overabundance of itself. In a rare departure from the dictates of liberal subjectivity (which, as I have argued, is predominantly the basis of Bhabha's understanding of individual and collective subjectivity), Bhabha underwrites the hybrid, postcolonial subject with a narrative of its own collapse. The implosion of the hybrid subject (which can also be read as the implosion of the liberal subject<sup>19</sup> and/or the genesis of the hybrid

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<sup>18</sup> In "Symbolic Exchange and Death", Baudrillard describes the simulacrum in the following terms: "The entire strategy of the system lies in this hyperreality of floating values. It is the same for money and theory as for the unconscious. Value rules according to an ungraspable order: the generation of models, the indefinite chaining of simulation."(qtd. in Poster, *Jean* 122).

<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Bhabha at times questions the hegemony of liberalist individualism, even though much of his work fails to discard this ideology altogether: "How does agency come to be specified and individualized, outside the discourses of individualism? How does the time lag signify individuation as a position that is an effect of the 'intersubjective': contiguous with the social and yet contingent, indeterminate, in relation to it?" (*Postcolonial Criticism* 450). In this essay, therefore, he seems to recognise the trap he sets for himself within the dominant discourses of liberalism and modernity.

subject) comes about by virtue of the obesity of its investment in itself—an extension of modernist logic perhaps?—where it exceeds the limits of subjectivity by so wide a margin that its prime use becomes interrelational (or interstitial). As Bhabha suggests: “The subject is always in excess of itself, supplementary to its selfhood and it is this ‘excess’ or liminality that becomes the basis of the intersubjective relation” (*Speaking* 32).

When read as a *simulatory* excess, the surplus value of hybridity that Bhabha signals in his texts can be viewed, not just as a type of universalism, but as a counter-liberal *post*-modernity. As a conscious deconstruction of the discourses of modernity in which it is still imbricated (such as liberal humanism and colonialism), hybridity can also therefore be an *antagonistic* subjectivity, as Moreiras argues:

Hybrid subjectivity, through its very undecidability *qua* hybrid, pre-empts the closure of any discursive position around either identity or difference. Hybrid subjectivity, at its limit, does not sometimes allow for identity and sometimes for difference, but rather simultaneously undermines by identarian and differential positions, which are driven into aporia. More than the site for ambivalence, as diasporic ground or abyssal foundation for subjective constitution, is a non-site or ambivalence itself. It is therefore not a place for subjective conciliation. On the contrary, it points to the conditions of possibility for the constitution of the socio-political subject as at the same time conditions of impossibility: because the subject, through its constitutive, hybrid undecidability, is always already split (*Hybridity* 396).

The “limits” of hybrid subjectivity, as ventured by Moreiras here, provide another border between the work of Bhabha and García Canclini. Obviously, the ambivalence and division in hybrid subjectivity, as well as the aporia engendered by the existence of these subjectivities, are present in Bhabha’s work. However, the dismissal of subjectivity here, which Moreiras also calls “savage hybridity” (396)—an adoption of Bhabha’s terminology, interestingly—is perhaps not as successfully achieved in Bhabha’s work as it is in García Canclini’s. In his *a posteriori* formulation of hybridity, therefore, Bhabha exhibits the desire for the complete undermining of subjectivity, but relies on liberal discourses such as agency (even a curious *mélange* of individualism and universalism) as the *hybrid subjectivity* which is ironically supposed to represent the deconstruction of subjectivity also. In clinging to a doctrine of subjectivity, Bhabha thus renders his critique a measure short of “savage”.

Conversely, both the *a priori* formulation of hybridity and the particular embrace of a deconstruction of “pure” identity make García Canclini’s work more convincingly a form of Moreiras’ “savage hybridity”. Taking his cue from hyperreality, García Canclini subsumes his hybridity within artifice, recognising the omnipresence of simulation as he nihilistically charts the impossibility of identity-as-ontology:

When the difference between reality and the symbolic, and the question of the legitimacy of representations are abolished—when everything is a simulacrum—there is no place for a reasoned confrontation of positions, nor for change, not even for negotiation. The struggle for identity disappears because there is no discourse that positions itself in relation to a reality of one’s own. There is only an unordered succession of images, as in the video game, without external references to the visual pseudonarration (*Consumers* 148-9).

As always an errant and contingent fiction, pure identity, within this doctrine, is also that which is *always already* hybridised. The “story” of a single modernity, like identity, is also presumably exposed as fiction, replaced with the multimedia spectacle of García Canclini’s “interruptive modernities”. Insisting on the mutability of identities, García Canclini argues for identity as a contested claim.

García Canclini’s earlier work—particularly his *Hybrid Cultures*—amounts to an analysis of culture (by virtue of its progressed hybridisation) as not sustaining the realisation of the fictional concept of individuality. His articulations of contemporary community identities are also premised on deconstructions of an unadulterated essence. As such, García Canclini’s *Hybrid Cultures* can be organised around the following intersections of person, nation and representation: the changing urban sphere; the mediatisation of the public; the role of monuments in the flux of Latin American cities and their relation to historical memory; the resultant championing of his own terminology of contemporary urban critique, including most prominently “decollecting”, “disarticulation” and “deterritorialisation” (*Hybrid Cultures* 223); technological development and the cultural currency of the video, the video game and graffiti (and their counter-hegemonic and hybrid status); migration, nationalism and regionalism; border communities such as Tijuana as “along with New York, one of the biggest laboratories of postmodernity” (*Hybrid Cultures* 233); transcultural journals,

changing public rituals, (contested) sites of tourism and community, bilingual advertising; and finally, “postmodern visuality” (*Hybrid Cultures* 243).<sup>20</sup>

Rather than privileging individual subjectivity, García Canclini also shifts his focus to urban hybridisation—or how the social (un)maps itself in the aesthetic:

The lack of urban regulation, and the cultural hybridity of buildings and users intermix styles from various eras in a single street. The interaction of the monuments with advertising and political messages situates the organisation of memory and visual order in heteroclitite networks (*Hybrid* 224).

Reprogramming the social here, García Canclini also formulates a vocabulary of hybridity. His “heteroclitite networks” replace the communities of the past (and often displace notions of nationhood also), renegotiating liberal notions of subjectivity and individuality by the paralysing effects of the constant disintegration of secured truths.

#### 4.2.2 Hybridity in the Simulacrum.

Inevitably, as with Bhabha, the postulates of hybridity in García Canclini’s work lead back to his suppositions about modernity. In *Hybrid Cultures*, this results in a particularly spatial emphasis in thinking contemporaneity, which provides a fitting landscape for a hyperreal imaginary. García Canclini endorses what could be read as an approval of Baudrillard’s work—*vis-à-vis* the fractal exchange of cultural-symbolic models:

The most radical inquiries into what it means to be entering and leaving modernity are by those who assume the tensions between deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. With this I am referring to two processes: the loss of the “natural” relation of culture to geographical and social territories and, at the same time, certain relative, partial territorial relocalisations of old and new symbolic productions (*Hybrid Cultures* 228-9).

Situated by his language of precipices—entering and exiting modernity, the territorial split between geographical and symbolic realms, the departure from reality as “the natural”—García Canclini’s hybrid subjects (whose own individual

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<sup>20</sup> These theoretical interests require much deeper analysis (particularly from the Western Academy). However, as space and context do not permit this here, I hope that a brief survey will suffice.

demarcation is similarly impossible) must contend with the frenzied redistribution of signifying practices. Like Baudrillard, García Canclini suggests the virtual as the current scene of this “deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation”. His analysis of sociological effects in Latin America charts the recent trends in the hybridisation of Latin America as a detailed form of “asymmetry” issuing from the virtual:

the decentralisation of corporations, the planetary simultaneity of information, and the adaptation of certain international forms of knowledge and images to the knowledge and habits of each community. The delocalisation of symbolic products by electronics and telematics, and the use of satellites and computers in cultural diffusion, also impede our continuing to see the confrontations of peripheral countries as frontal combats with geographically defined nations (*Hybrid Cultures* 229).

The (un)mapping of cultural space is here explained as a renegotiation of the characters of knowledge, technology, economics and geographical landscape, where the chief organising system is a virtual symbolic.

Where García Canclini’s conception of hybridity thus becomes “savage” is in its reiterated relation to crisis, catastrophe, chaos and the virtual—features of Baudrillard’s “fractal” fourth order of simulacra. Critics have been avid in pointing to the importance of chaos to García Canclini’s work. According to Raymundo Mier, García Canclini’s hybridity foment chaos, in the fractal and random distribution of sites of cultural meaning that it promotes:

To me, the idea of hybrid cultures, then, seems extraordinarily suggestive, because it permits the imagination of social morphologies, fields of singularised regularity, designations of catastrophe, but a catastrophe that is not a limiting border, a mere point of singularity, the space of a fracture (qtd. in García Canclini, *The Hybrid* 78).

Mier’s commentary here suggests a catastrophe that opens up borders as transgressive zones, rather than as linear limits. This is akin to mapping an international border onto a hyperreal terrain—and hence sacrificing the border to the vicissitudes of flux and the multiple, multidimensional simultaneities in the

matrix of the simulacrum.<sup>21</sup>

Hybridity as intersection—as “zone of effects” and as errant and rhizomatic potentiality—leads to what might be called a hyperreal analysis of García Canclini’s work by other critics. For the likes of Margarita Zires and Alfonso de Toro, hybridity exhibits itself as relentlessly “nomadic”, and in this sense, equates rather well with Bhabha’s emphasis on hybridity as excess. For Zires, the hybrid signifies impermanence (qtd. in García Canclini, *The Hybrid* 78), whereas for de Toro, it opens up a diasporic process by *stepping in* in the place of chaos:

*Fundamental es—en nuestra propuesta—que categorías tales como “hibridez”/ “heterogeneidad” son de un carácter altamente nómada. “Nomadismo”, “hibridez” y “heterogeneidad” se muevan dentro de diversos sistemas que además han sido cuestionados o que son constantemente relativizados. Es decir, al nomadismo, a la hibridez y a la “heterogeneidad” les precede (e implican) una conceptualización, una teoretización, un acto intencional sin lo cual obtendríamos de hecho una absoluta arbitrariedad...el caos...*

[It is fundamental—in our proposition—that categories such as “hybridity”/“heterogeneity” are of a highly nomadic character. “Nomadism”, “hybridity” and “heterogeneity” themselves move within diverse systems that have been subsequently questioned or which are constantly relativised. That is, nomadism, hybridity and heterogeneity are preceded by (and imply) a conceptualization, a theoretisation, an intentional act without which we would obtain in fact an absolute otherness...chaos...] (qtd. in García Canclini, *The Hybrid* 55)

The slipperiness of these ventured explanations of hybridity attests to its multivalent potentiality. The inability of theory to *catch* this slippery object of hybridity—or, of theory itself—which de Toro attempts to explain above, works as yet another demonstration of the nomadic, fractal and liminal nature of hybridity. As García Canclini suggests, hybridity is also always *virtual*, predominantly due to its fractal manipulation in the simulacrum.

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, Mier goes even further, describing this kind of hyperreal frontier as a “zone of effects”, the site of traces, in a rhizomatic imagining of this space. As is apparent in the colourfulness of his adjectives, this space could also be the visualisation of the aftereffects of Baudrillard’s “pure event”: “The hybrid is the name of a material without identity, of an evanescent condition...In this marginality with regard to taxonomies, the hybrid permits only an oblique analysis, a zone of effects, of detachments. It can be understood, but only through the traces of its anticipated or confirmed disappearance” (qtd. in García Canclini, *The Hybrid* 77).

García Canclini (as well as other critics) highlights the virtualisation of hybridity—and of Latin American and/or transcultural identity—by emphasising the loss of the “real” in contemporary society:

Perhaps the greatest interest for politics in taking into account the symbolic problematic lies not in the sure efficacy of certain goods or messages but in the fact that the theatrical and ritual aspects of the social make evident what there is of the oblique, the simulated, and the deferred in every interaction (*Hybrid Cultures* 262).

His “oblique” vision of border cultures—which is importantly both opposed to and aligned with politics here—is also a strategy of undermining the imagined security embedded in the terms “individual”, “culture” and “nation”. In other words, his hyperreal manoeuvre is the *exposé* of the inherently simulated—and virtual—nature of culture which belies the impossibility of culture itself. For Latin American cultural critics, García Canclini’s critique mimics the hyperreal hybridisation that was *always already* entrenched in Latin American (anti)subjectivity.<sup>22</sup> It is no surprise that, for some of these critics, this notion of anti-subjectivity should be inseparable from a critique of modernity.<sup>23</sup> Hence, as Kraniauskas explains:

The point is, of course, that not only is hybridity a feature of García Canclini’s design for a “transdisciplinary gaze” (that is, interpretation), but it is a feature of modernity in Latin America itself (the object of such interpretation): a transdisciplinary gaze for transcultured worlds (*Hybridity* 124).

Via his fractal ordering of such transculturation, García Canclini invites the “savage” into his hybridity, specifically by relentlessly deferring identity in the same way (and for the same reasons?) that he relentlessly defers modernity—by initiating chaotic deconstructions.

As a model of the second and third orders of simulacra, Bhabha’s “Third Space” facilitates the deconstruction of binaries, ushering in an era of simulation, where

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<sup>22</sup> For example, de Toro suggests that “‘Heterogeneidad’ e ‘hibridez’ son términos centrales y denominadores comunes en la teoría de la cultura latinoamericana que además comparten muchos autores.” [“‘Heterogeneity’ and ‘hybridity’ are central terms and common denominators in the theory of Latin American culture that many authors share.”] (48).

<sup>23</sup> Renato Rosaldo demonstrates the uneven modernity that engenders Latin American hybridity: “These states regard themselves as caught between traditions that have not yet gone and a modernity that has not yet arrived” (*Hybrid* xi).



the foundations of the real are undermined by the generative determination of ceaseless simulations:

It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricised and read anew (*Location* 37).

Where meaning is put under intense pressure in Bhabha's "Third Space" (particularly due to its recycling as reinscription and translation), García Canclini's description of cultural manifestations in Tijuana demonstrates a complete disposal of meaning, in favour of a conscious hyperreality:

Where the borders move, they can be rigid or fallen; where buildings are evoked in another place than the one they represent, every day the spectacular invention of the city itself is renewed and expanded. The simulacrum comes to be a central category of culture. Not only is the "authentic" relativised. The obvious, ostentatious illusion—like the zebras that everyone knows are fake, or the hiding games of illegal migrants that are "tolerated" by the United States police—becomes a resource for defining identity and communicating with others (*Hybrid Cultures* 236-7).

The importance of representation, which is also crucial to Bhabha's analysis of "the 'global' text" as it interacts with "a new international space of discontinuous historical realities" (*Location* 217), is essentially a recognition of the simulatory nature of temporality (and, by extension, of nationhood), with which García Canclini accords. Like Bhabha, García Canclini describes a promiscuous simulacrum of time-spaces, wherein simulations of nationhood and culture must interact:

Especially in complex societies, where the cultural offering is very heterogeneous, there coexist various styles of reception and understanding, formed in unequal relations with goods deriving from cultured, popular, and mass cultural traditions. This heterogeneity is accentuated in Latin American societies by the coexistence of historical temporalities (*Hybrid Cultures* 100).

The matter-of-factness of this summary discloses the deep history of hybridity in Latin America to which García Canclini makes reference.

However, García Canclini includes an obligatory warning against reducing this complex temporality to classificatory regional stereotypes, an argument which bolsters the complexity of the simulacrum also:

Neither the “paradigm” of imitation, nor that of originality, nor the “theory” that attributes everything to dependency, nor the one that lazily wants to explain us by the “marvellously real” or a Latin American surrealism, are able to account for our hybrid cultures (*Hybrid Cultures* 6).

In other words, the hybridisation of temporality that García Canclini describes cannot be explained as a *mythical* effect of Latin American culture, nor can it be accounted for as merely a delayed version of European time in the periphery. As he makes stridently clear, Latin American hybridity plays on the relations between the real and the simulated, but cannot be separated from its vorticular modelling and remodelling in the simulacrum.

In order to arrive at any understanding of contemporary national and/or cultural affiliations, Bhabha and García Canclini thus both rely on the instrumental position of (a constantly simulated) temporality, utilised as a way of allowing for a hybrid version of the concept of “newness”—as the irruptive, transhistorical breach of the code of homogeneous nationalism. Via the medium of temporality, both theorists posit the deconstruction of hegemonic time as both a discursive *and* materialist mechanism.

As a political poetics,<sup>24</sup> the discourses of Bhabha and García Canclini therefore prefigure a great challenge to nationalisms. As *border thinkers*, both theorists employ a spatial register in order to convey this challenge, reconfiguring the national so that it stands in relation to new axes of significance. Embracing the matrix, both Bhabha and García Canclini dispense with “horizontal” and “vertical” articulations of national spatio-temporality, in favour of “ambivalence”, “chiasmatic intersections” and “decentred” plateaus. Bhabha declares that:

we shall find that the space of the modern people is never simply horizontal. Their metaphoric movement requires a kind of “doubleness” in writing; a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a centred causal logic... We need another time of *writing* that will be able to inscribe the ambivalence and chiasmatic intersections of time and place that constitute the problematic “modern” experience of the Western nation (*Location* 141).

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<sup>24</sup> Gerry Smyth sees Bhabha’s work in these terms, suggesting that: “This, then, constitutes the nature and the challenge of hybridity, a concept which functions as a history, a politics and an aesthetics of decolonisation” (47).

Similarly, for García Canclini, there is a great necessity in redefining culture in terms of hybridised spatio-temporalities:

Starting from what we have been analysing, a key question returns: the cultural reorganisation of power. It is a question of analysing *what the political consequences are of moving from a vertical and bipolar conception of sociopolitical relations to one that is decentred and multidetermined* (*Hybrid Cultures* 258).

The simulacrum, in its “beyond” of History and departure from spatio-temporal “realities”, presents a viable mechanics for Bhabha’s and García Canclini’s calls for a new context within which the temporal, the cultural and the political can be “deterritorialised and reterritorialised”.

For both theorists, the dissolution of the ideology of nationhood is a necessary prerequisite to their “border epistemologies”—and their focus on the *frontiers* of nations (and hegemonic ideologies) is *also* a necessary prerequisite to the dissolution of nationhood. Their *gesturing towards* the hyperreal as a productive new scene for the personal and the national, as well as their demonstrations of hyperrealist theory in their constructions of hybridity, further support the efficacy of Australian approaches to hyperreal borders. Following Bhabha and García Canclini, there is some sense it seems, in pursuing postcolonial, regional and global problematics in the simulacrum.

## Afterword

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As representations of some of the *productively ambivalent* theoretical limits to Australian postcoloniality, the work of Dussel, García Canclini, Bhabha and Baudrillard re-establishes the scope of the postcolonial as a transnational and *hypernational* condition. As Bhabha demonstrates, conventional postcolonial theory is *already* engaging with hyperreality and as Dussel and García Canclini suggest, the “New World” can be read as the chief simulation of modernity and Empire. In this respect, Australia can be undertood as a Baudrillardian *trompe l’oeil*, in its simulation as an antipodean solution for the British Empire.

The deconstructions of modernity in the criticism here—where it is read as the fictional claim to “the perfect crime”; as the unstable foundation for ensuing hybridity; as the false postulate of unified identity—provide theoretical exits from Australian postcoloniality in its relation to colonialism. *Transmodernidad* and

hybridity, as instances of sites “beyond” modernity, are also in many ways analogous to the possibilities of being “beyond History” in Integral Reality, as represented by Sykes and Birch. Moreover, the ways in which these theorists reveal the simulatory foundation of modernity shed light on the similar simulations of neo-imperialisms, particularly *vis-à-vis* the New World Order. Hence, to position these theories as *at the limits* of Australian postcoloniality is to provide constructive ways in which Australian subjects can engage with globalisation, resituate alterity as agential, and critique coloniality.

Finally, the inclusion of these Latin American and postcolonial theorists in this dissertation is intended as a way of reinstating the importance of translation and the Latin American context to postcolonial theory, in the face of what stands as a large oversight, particularly in Australian postcolonial criticism.

## Post-Colonial, Post-Occidental & Post-Dictatorial Poetry in Australia & Latin America.

### Foreword: Towards Comparative Analyses.

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The postcolonial question in Latin America shall be reframed in terms of post-Occidentalism and postdictatorship. This is one of the significant parallels and differences, between decolonization in Africa and Asia and in Latin America.

—Walter D. Mignolo (*Local* 336)

In a comparative analysis of contemporary postcolonial Australian poetry and *poesía latinoamericana*, this chapter initiates the kind of “reframing” that Mignolo advocates above. Of critical importance to this dissertation is *how Australian postcoloniality is and might be understood*, particularly as it is inscribed in contemporary poetry. As an investigation into this question, *poesía latinoamericana*, as well as current *pensamiento latinoamericano* [Latin American thought] are presented as comparative contexts through which to re-view and re-evaluate Australian poetics and postcoloniality. My contention here is that Latin American contemporary sociological and cultural theory, as well as *poesía latinoamericana*, provides new critical frameworks, as well as a different historical imaginary and a new vocabulary with which to test both Anglophone postcolonial theory and particularly the Australian postcolonial context. As such, this chapter therefore presents an extension of the project of broadening the limits of Australian postcoloniality initiated in the previous chapter, through a discussion of specific poetic products.

In addition to the challenging ideas of Dussel and García Canclini, the new critical frameworks employed here are those of “post-Occidentalism”, a term favoured by Mignolo which he borrows from Cuban writer Roberto Fernández Retamar (*Local* 94-5), and “post-dictatorship”, which commonly refers to the period after the end of dictatorial regimes in the Southern Cone of South America and is most

commonly associated with the work of Nelly Richard and Idelbar Avelar. These geographic and temporal terms, which designate specific postcolonial legacies, are related here chiefly to Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano's work on Eurocentricity, as well as to Dipesh Chakrabarty's formulation of "subaltern pasts" and "minority histories" as postcolonial theoretical concepts.

The first section of this chapter looks at how Australian poetry and *poesía latinoamericana* narrate complex negotiations with Eurocentricity, as well as how modernity is inscribed with a Eurocentric agenda and a colonial imaginary. As I will demonstrate, postcoloniality (as it is underwritten by Eurocentricity and coloniality) problematises unified subjectivity to the point that identity is reduced to radical alterity. The narcissism inherent in Eurocentric coloniality imbues postcoloniality with a fractured and distorted self-image—a condition which pre-empts the postcolonial "ghost subject" as well as an attendant aesthetics of distortion. Here, the implosive potentiality of postcolonial subjectivity, as a legacy of Eurocentric modernity, therefore adds to the discussion of modernity as a false postulate for unified identity in Chapter 4. Moreover, the extended analysis of alterity here builds on the postulation of this subject-position as one of agency.

The second section of this chapter compares the recent histories of Australia and Chile as "genocidal societies". Linking Indigenous-authored Australian poetry with *poesía chilena* via narratives of dispossession and disappearance, this analysis compares the Pinochet dictatorship and Australia's "Stolen Generations" as postcolonial contexts in their manifestations of neo-coloniality, and as "subaltern pasts" in Chakrabarty's formulation in their tense relation to official (national) History. Here, "post-dictatorship" thought, in conjunction with postcolonial critique, illuminates the ways in which these experiences of oppression under very different regimes are connected via the complicity of coloniality and liberal democratic agendas. Australia's colonial imprint (already introduced in the poetry analysed in Chapters 1, 2 and 3) is mapped here as exhibiting a genocidal effect. A major argument posed in this section is that Australia and Chile haven't yet embraced political vocabularies with which to articulate genocidal histories and as such, are officially limited in their ability to counter semantic as well as political oppression. Poetry is thus an apposite medium through which to respond to and

represent these neo-colonial human rights abuses<sup>1</sup> and is posited here as an alternative historical archive.

As I will demonstrate, Australia and Latin America share a contemporary positioning *at the limits* of postcoloniality. In their relation to modernity, Eurocentricity and coloniality, these postcolonial sites demonstrate personal and communal experiences that do not always answer to the paradigms of existing canonical postcolonial theory. A comparison of their poetics demonstrates the need for postcolonial studies to extend its reach into other disciplines of anti-imperial and anti-colonial thought such as *teoría latinoamericana*, as has already been demonstrated via the work of García Canclini and Dussel.

## 5.1 Gazing into the “Eurocentric Mirror”: Australian & Latin American Postcolonial Distortions.

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Frantz Fanon’s cry “Let’s abandon Europe,” is nothing but a sentence. It is impossible to abandon what is already ingrained in the creative personality of the Americas, in its mental structure of hierarchy and value.  
—Ángel Rama (qtd. in Mignolo, *Local* 165).

How to “abandon Europe”? The oxymoronic quest to semantically or ideologically discard the *signs* of that which signifies modern thought and historical rationality in Europe’s colonies is dismissed by Rama (above) as futile. However, when the postcolonial relations of “peripheries” to the European “centre” are examined, the engagements between the colonies and Europe are not characterised by straightforwardness either. Whilst complete abandonment may not be possible, neither is complete affiliation. As such, postcoloniality can still be seen as a liminal state in its ambivalent positioning between an originary Europe and a derivative periphery.

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<sup>1</sup> The effectiveness of poetry to engage with contemporary postcolonial representational politics is presented here in a similar spirit to the argument in Chapter 3 that poetry, in its hyperrealist sympathies, has become an effective site of political activism. However, the risk of its public image and potentially marginal readership in Australia particularly are acknowledged here also as the factors that limit its public and political power.

My project here, therefore, is to investigate the evidence for *postcolonial distortions* of Eurocentricity—distortions that can be found in the texts of contemporary Latin American theory as well as in contemporary Latin American and Australian poetry. To re-emphasise these discourses of complex and agonistic analyses of Eurocentricity for canonical postcolonial theory is to re-problematise modernity and coloniality in the lexicons of postcolonial studies, as well as to broaden the scope of these studies, both historically (back to the fifteenth century) and geographically (to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies). Eurocentric histories also provide another connecting point between Australia and Latin America, and an investigation along these lines further underlines their affiliation. Eurocentricity, as a limit to postcoloniality, is incompletely mapped in contemporary postcolonial studies, particularly in relation to its potential transnational and comparative, non-Anglophonic usage.

In his influential essay “*Colonialidad de poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina*” [“Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America”], Quijano argues that:

*La globalización en curso es, en primer término, la culminación de un proceso que comenzó con la constitución de América y la del capitalismo colonial/moderno y eurocentrado como un nuevo patrón de poder mundial.*

[Globalisation is, in the first place, the culmination of a process that began with the constitution of America and the constitution of modern/colonial Eurocentered capitalism as a new pattern of world power] (201).

Quijano’s position on imperialism is thus one that structures modern power as a function of colonialism and that reads capitalism as the extension of the systems of racial classification and domination endemic to colonialist reason. For Quijano, modernity was coterminous with the colonisation of America (*Modernity* 212)—an argument that parallels that of Dussel, who asserts that “Modernity is, in fact, a European phenomenon, but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content” (*Eurocentrism* 65). Modernity, then, is a global phenomenon in its reach into capitalism, but is also manifestly colonial in its engagement with the dialectic of self and other. In the work of Quijano and Dussel, modernity is extended both historically and ideologically, and is much more strongly tied to European colonialisms than in the work of García Canclini and Bhabha.



According to both Quijano and Dussel, modernity originated in what Quijano terms the “violent encounter between Europe and America at the end of the fifteenth century” (*Modernity* 202). Against accounts of modernity as coexistent with the Enlightenment (or, more broadly, a phenomenon of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), this analytical position further fortifies the connection of modernity and colonialism, rather than seeing modernity as linked principally to rationalism or scientific progress. In other words, where modernity and modernization are elsewhere conflated, Quijano emphasizes their temporal and ideological singularity, as well as their post-Enlightenment allegiance. Hence, after the Enlightenment, according to Quijano:

The age of “modernization” had begun: that is, the transformation of the world, of society, according to the requirements of domination and control, specifically domination of capital, stripped of any purpose other than accumulation (*Modernity* 206-7).

Where this lengthened history of modernity is useful here, is in the ways in which Eurocentrism is understood (particularly in regard to the ideological links between the colonial and postcolonial imaginaries).

The relationship between colonialism, Eurocentrism and postcolonialism—as features and legacies of this modernity—is usefully summarized by Argentinean postcolonial theorist Walter D. Mignolo, via his concept of “the colonial difference”:

By “colonial differences” I mean...(and I should perhaps say “the colonial difference”), the classification of the planet in the modern/colonial imaginary, by enacting coloniality of power, an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values. If racism is the matrix that permeates every domain of the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system, “Occidentalism” is the overarching metaphor around which colonial differences have been articulated and rearticulated through the changing hands in the history of capitalism (Arrighi 1994) and the changing ideologies motivated by imperial conflicts (*Local* 13).

Mignolo pursues Quijano’s temporal links between modernity, colonialism and capitalism, but importantly replaces “Eurocentrism” with “Occidentalism”. Clearly working from the legacy of postcolonial critique such as that of Said, Mignolo’s implicit suggestion in the duality occident/orient is not only of the power dynamic in this opposition, but also the complicity of current Western powers such as the U.S. in Eurocentric (and thus colonialist) ideologies.

For Mignolo (as in his analysis of Quijano's work): "Eurocentrism becomes, therefore, a metaphor to describe the coloniality of power from the perspective of subalternity" (*Local* 17). Further complicated by the potential "coloniality of power" in the periphery—which threatens to further imbricate occident and orient, metropole and subaltern—negotiating a position of subjectivity within postcolonial modernity is, according to these theorists, necessarily a project that traces otherness in sameness. Hence, Dussel situates Latin America as the distorted reflection of Empire—a site for the deconstruction of Manichean logic: "*América Latina entra en la Modernidad (mucho antes de Norte América) como la 'otra cara' dominada, explotada, encubierta*" [Latin America enters Modernity (long before North America) as the 'other face'—dominated, exploited, concealed] (*Europa* 48).

Burdened with the postcolonial problematic of relating to the imperium within such liminal modulations of both similarity and difference, Quijano employs the symbolism of the mirror as a way of negotiating Eurocentrism and postcoloniality. To gaze back towards Empire (or *into* Empire), according to Quijano, is to encounter a logic of distortion that frustrates unified subjectivity and cultural cohesion. Quijano's claim, in this regard, is that distortion is a colonialist mechanism, but one that is inevitably refracted onto and counter-refracted by the colonised. In his words:

*la perspectiva eurocéntrica de conocimiento opera como un espejo que distorsiona lo que refleja...De ahí cuando miramos a nuestro espejo eurocéntrico, la imagen que vemos sea necesariamente parcial y distorsionado.*

[the Eurocentric perspective of knowledge works as a mirror that distorts what it reflects...Consequently, when we gaze at our Eurocentric mirror, the image we see is necessarily partial and distorted] (*Colonialidad* 226).

In accord with Dussel's postulation of colonial Europe as ethnocentric to the point of claiming "*universalidad abstracta*" [abstract universality] (*Europa* 48), and narcissistic to the point of "colonising an alterity that gave back its image of itself" (*Eurocentrism* 66), Quijano's analysis of Eurocentricity as imbued with a narcissistic gaze fuses postcoloniality to coloniality in a critique that problematises subjectivity as one vital site of anti-imperial politics.

After Quijano, postcolonial subjectivity can be understood as a process of deconstructing the Liberal Humanist tenets that underwrite colonialism and modernity, by countering the Eurocentric gaze with the distorted and distorting

visions of the peripheries. In contemporary Australian and Latin American poetry, the thwarted narcissism of (post)coloniality is expressed as a frustration of the unified subject, where any entry into the Symbolic is perverted by the *partiality* of subjectivity. In these texts, the alienation effects in postcolonial subjectivity (and the attendant and difficult engagements with the “Eurocentric mirror”) reveal the ghostliness of postcolonial subjects, who, unable to realise a reflection, slip through the looking glass, haunting both the Empire and the post-colony. In relating to the “Eurocentric mirror”, this poetry presents investigations into the “coloniality of power”; postcolonial subjects whose being is phantasmal; narratives of the refusal and inability of the “New World” to reflect the “Old World”; traces of the colonial signature in postcoloniality; and maps of the colony and nation as sites of distortion, where the pervasiveness of Eurocentric narcissism and the impossibility of unified subjectivity produce overwhelming unhomeliness. Beyond the mapping of ghostly postcoloniality undertaken in relation to Dransfield’s poetry in Chapter 2, this chapter thus presents an historical contextualising of this expression of postcolonial subjectivity, specifically through the lens of Latin American critique. Also, as further context for Dussel’s *transmodernidad* (discussed in Chapter 4), this chapter traces the Eurocentricity in modernity that prompts such anti-imperial projects.

### 5.1.1 Legacies of Coloniality, Legacies of Modernity.

What we observe, rather, is that modernity, as a differentiated experience in the capitalist world, has a centre, which radiates a zone of marginal and dependent peripheries where this same modernity creates and re-creates a cultural heterogeneity, which, in turn, in all of its fragments, breaks, folds, collages, and displacements, continues to be tied to the hegemonic centre. The very identity of these peripheral zones is partially constructed with the image of this other, in the same way that its culture is elaborated with fragments of this other culture.

—José Joaquín Brunner (52)

To read around Brunner’s statement is to reach Quijano’s conclusion also—that modernity (and hence coloniality) necessarily engineers a *fractured* heterogeneity, represented contradictorily as a *concrete* otherness. However, this construction of postcolonial subjectivity as “fragments of this other culture” also relies heavily on the colonial imaginary and Quijano’s “coloniality of power”. Fortified as a

singular ideology of supremacy and control, but based on precipitating what Brunner calls a “plurality of logics” in the periphery, coloniality exhibits the implosive mechanics that Baudrillard sees in the West—the imaginary of a system that cannot *realise* itself. For Brunner, the “birth” of Latin America from this colonial imaginary renders it penumbral, specifically in its ephemeral, transient reproductions of Eurocentric ideologies, as: “Latin America: the project of echoes and fragments, of past utopias whose present we can only perceive as a continuous crisis” (53). In the half-light of its own postcolonial identity, Latin America thus stands (for Brunner at least) as the pale and fissured reflection of Empire. As a tangential adjunct to canonical postcolonial theory, Latin American social and cultural theory also occupies a penumbral position, from which it faces the shadows of coloniality, but also (somewhat antagonistically) addresses what light postcolonial theory might shed on its other(ed) discourses of anti-colonialism and regionalism. Given that the verbal phrase “to give birth” is most commonly replaced in Spanish with the phrase “*dar a luz*” [to give light], its penumbral postcoloniality has some cultural currency.

It is Brunner’s dynamic of colonial domination and peripheral/postcolonial crisis that Mexican poet Gaspar Aguilera Díaz narrates in his poem “*Al fin después de tantos años Hernán Cortés declara*” [“Finally after so many years Hernán Cortés declares”] (J. Acosta 16-19)<sup>2</sup>. The time-lag implied in the title is taken up as emblematic of a coloniality that engenders complex forms of miscommunication and misinterpretation—delays, therefore, in the materialisation or fruition of its imaginary. In formal as much as thematic manners, this poem plays on enunciation as one of the most contested and difficult terrains of coloniality. As such, the reinscriptions of Hernán Cortés’ declaration are multiplied out through texts (both primary and secondary), narrators, and finally the poet, translator and reader. Ostensibly written to fill the historical gap left by the loss of Cortés’ first letter to Charles V after conquering Mexico, this poem sutures Cortés’ historical texts (his letters) to the ambiguous character of Cortés himself, who is understood as variously murderous tyrant and benevolent administrator.<sup>3</sup> On various levels,

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<sup>2</sup> Translated by John Oliver Simon.

<sup>3</sup> See Pagden and Díaz de Castillo for accounts of the conquest of Mexico.

Aguilera Díaz inscribes and reinscribes coloniality, chiefly as violent possession (overtly sexualised) or civilising *and* evangelical mission (overtly ironised). Underneath the evident ruse that both disguises and reveals these contradictory representations of coloniality, however, is the argument that coloniality *requires*, or is *only accessible through* an interlocutor.

Significantly, the epigraph opens with the words: “*El capitán habla con el intérprete*” [The captain spoke through an interpreter] (16-17), but by further degrees of removal, is attributed to Hernán Cortés, whose voice the poet appropriates. Coloniality, in this poem, not only produces Brunner’s “plurality of logics” but also produces a plurality of voices and discourses, all pretending at authority—“declaring”, as in the title—but marked by otherness, distance and the insularity of monolingualism as *the voice that speaks to itself*, producing not translations, but (mis)interpretations.

Brunner’s domination/crisis dynamic is both communicated and negated via the colonialist voice (and its reinscriptions). There is thus a continual interplay between declaration: “*yo vine aquí—lo juro en el nombre de dios y de la/ reina*” [I came here—I swear it in the name of God and / the queen] and negation: “*yo no vine aquí a estas tierras vírgenes / por el oro la plata y las piedras preciosas*” [I did not come to these virgin lands / for gold silver and precious stones] (16-17).<sup>4</sup> Quijano’s “coloniality of power” is keenly traced in this poem, where even the epigraph presents Empire as self-obsessed, hungry for domination: “*teníamos / por señores a los mayores príncipes del mundo*” [our lords were the greatest princes of the world] (16-17)<sup>5</sup>. Colonisation is represented as an unambiguously sexual act, the violence of which is continually refuted by the narrator, who allegedly didn’t come “*a buscar la mujer morena que se enredó / a mi cuerpo*” [to seek the dark woman who clung / to my body] because “*(lo sanguinario me vino de muy atras)*” [(the blood-lust

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<sup>4</sup> Such interplay between nobility and violence is also satirised in Dransfield’s ‘lamentations’, in which he labels Australia “this country of savages”, an enigmatic reference to both colonisers and ‘colonial poets’ with “their proficiency of pen and sword / their sameness / their repertoire of bestialities” (*Streets* 41).

<sup>5</sup> The sense of Eurocentric narcissism here (as a colonial inheritance) is similarly invoked by Dransfield in ‘a difficult patriotism’, which argues that: “Europe lures away our idealists with / mythologies” (*Streets* 57).

came to me long before)] (16-17).<sup>6</sup> Underwritten with violence, coloniality is also teased with the seduction of exoticism, the lure of a mythological landscape imbued with metaphysical presence:

*yo vine aquí...*  
*porque una noche un pájaro monstruoso de voz dulce*  
*me habló excitado me conmovió me susurró al oído*  
*de un extraño país*  
 [I came here...  
 because one night a monstrous bird with a sweet voice  
 spoke to me passionately moved me whispered in my ear  
 of a strange country] (16-17)

Presented as prophetic and preordained, colonisation thus allows the entry into “fertile” places “*donde los reyes eran poetas y adivinos / ordenaban con suaves maneras y eran / expertísimos amantes*” [where the kings were poets and warlocks / who commanded with elegant manners and were / expert lovers] (16-17). The princes of the epigraph are thus replaced with these kings, who represent Brunner’s “past utopias” and Dussel’s exploited “other side” of modernity.<sup>7</sup>

For Mónica de la Torre and Michael Wieggers, colonial Mexico represents a spiritually excessive landscape, both exotic and dangerous (and hence linked to Cortés’ “blood-lust”):

Mexico, before Cortés, with its rare contacts with the outside world, was a kind of Australia of cultural evolution: a strange case of what isolated people could become, with its mass human sacrifices, obsession with time and the stars, once-readable glyphs, and pantheons of gods... (7).

As the obverse of Empire, the Mexican colony, with its “fertile earth” (17), “girdled tenderly by the blue-green sea” (19), stands in contradistinction to the rational, bureaucratic landscape of colonial Spain.

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<sup>6</sup> In light of Cortés’ many mistresses and subsequent children fathered in Mexico, as well as his being charged with the murder of his first wife, the attribution of this “blood-lust” is significant.

<sup>7</sup> For El Salvadorian poet Manlio Argueta in his “Post card” (57-60), Dussel’s “exploitation” coexists with the “strangeness” that Aguilera Díaz describes in the periphery, which Argueta presents satirically as both exotic and dangerous, thus emphasising colonialist stereotypes: “*Mi país, tierra de lagos, montañas y volcanes, / pero no vengas a él / mejor quedas en casa. / Nada de mi país te gustará. Los lirios no flotan / sobre el agua. / Las muchachas no se parecen a las muchachas / de los calendarios.*” [My country, land of lakes, mountains and volcanoes, / but you’d better not come here / stay home. / You won’t like it here. No water lilies float / on our lakes. / The young women don’t look like bathing beauties](58). (Translator unknown).

For the narrator, the colony represents an escape from systems of domination:

*también llegué aquí*  
*enloquecido por el orden            la razón progresiva el gobierno*  
*incestuoso*  
*siempre la misma gente soldados navegantes y jueces*  
*inquisidores en las calles todo el día*  
 [I also came here  
 because order was driving me crazy            progressive reason  
 incestuous government  
 always the same people soldiers navigators and judges of  
 the Inquisition in the streets all day] (18-19)

As these initially compartmentalized, but increasingly breathless lines belie, this imperial logic of order and rationality *and* a desire to escape such order, was also the blueprint for and precipitator of colonisation.<sup>8</sup> Enmeshed in this confused logic, the narrator conflates missionary and colonialist zeal (as is evident in the relation between epigraph and poem, as two distinct “declarations”). In doing so, he justifies Quijano’s diagnosis of modernity, where: “The association between reason and liberation was occluded” (*Modernity* 206). Therefore, when deliverance is superseded with (but also signified as) dispossession, as Quijano argues, modernity is hence “seen almost exclusively through the crooked mirror of domination” (*Modernity* 206).

Thus, colonisation is justified by dint of the self-prescribed oppression and exile of the narrator *and* his spiritual awakening, both of which are communicated in the final lines:

*y sobre todo vine*  
*porque sin conocerlo mi pobre corazón sentía*  
*en su pecho*  
*un ruido de atabales*  
*un sonar triste de tambores llamando*  
 [and above all I came  
 because without knowing it my poor heart in its  
 ribcage heard  
 a rattle of drums

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<sup>8</sup> Jordie Albiston represents coloniality as precisely this form of bureaucratic rationality in “Botany Bay Document”, which catalogues the “Headcount” of a convict ship in an overtly numerical and compartmentalised fashion (Leonard 11).

a sad sound of wooden drums calling] (18-19)<sup>9</sup>

The co-presence of rationalist, imperialist systems of domination (to be promulgated *and* escaped from) and zealous evangelism constitutes, for Mignolo, the “double edge” of colonialism. As he argues:

The Christian mission was predicated on the conversion of the planet to Christianity, while the civilising mission was entrenched with the secular concept of reason, with the rights of men and of citizens. Civilisation understood as civilising mission then has a double edge (*Local* 281).

This “double edge”, further reinforced by the necessary (and multiplied) interlocutors in “Finally after so many years Hernán Cortés declares”, inevitably leads to an inability to communicate. The final image of “*un desfalleciente mensajero desnudo sin mensaje alguno*” [a naked dying messenger without any message] (18-19), though hauntingly cryptic, works as a description of this declaration as a futile discursive quest. The irresolvable nexus of the poem is therefore in the desire for (colonising) possession, as a *response* to the call of the “New World”, where ironically, the narrator cannot engage in fruitful communication either.

For Brunner, it is the manifest disjunctures between European rationality and the “cultural heterogeneity” of the peripheries that produces the “relative malaise with modernity in Latin America” (39). Cortés’ frustrated communication can thus be read as an early effect of this *malaise*. The multiple inscriptions, effacements and reinscriptions of the colonialist voice (and what is arguably a loudly silent subaltern reply) work as distortions of Eurocentricity—rendering it incommunicable, unspeakable and indecipherable. As fragments of Empire or distorted and impossible reflections—as in Brunner’s analysis—(post)colonial discourse and the satisfaction of Eurocentricity in the periphery thus results in discursive oppression.

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<sup>9</sup> The opposition of Empire and colony along the lines of rational and spiritual worlds is explored by Colombian poet William Ospina in “*Canción de los dos mundos*” [Song of Two Worlds], where these worlds are signified as “North” and “South”: “*Al norte está la razón estudiando la lluvia, descifrando los truenos. / Al sur están los danzantes engendrando la lluvia, al sur están los / tambores inventando los truenos*” [To the north is Reason studying the rain, deciphering thunder claps. / To the south the dancers engendering the rain, to the south the / drums inventing thunder claps] (193).



The legacy of the “coloniality of power” as a feature of modernity is also present in Michael Dransfield’s poetry, where the pervasiveness of the colonial imaginary (this narcissistic ideology represented by Aguilera Díaz) is traced into “postcolonial” times. To read against the dominant critique of Dransfield’s work as “drug poetry” or neo-Romantic 60’s liberationist verse,<sup>10</sup> I maintain that his *oeuvre* presents a catalogue of the ravages of (post)coloniality as well as complex unravellings of subjectivity. In many of his poems (as discussed in Chapter 2), the colonial imprint is retraced on Australian landscapes (both material and psychosocial), but his—like Díaz’s—is not simply a straightforward derision of coloniality. In pursuing coloniality into postcoloniality, Dransfield’s work problematises the narratives of progress associated with the “post”,<sup>11</sup> but also gives a sense of the colony as often a cloudy reflection of Empire, akin to Brunner’s “project of echoes and fragments” (53). Literature and nation are bound to the same mechanisms in his poem “Colonial Poet” (*Inspector* 56), where he sets up the context for Eurocentrism as well as for narcissism, both of which issue from the condition of coloniality. This poem materializes on the page like a casual swathe of colour on canvas, informal and tactful in its taxonomy of the intellectual contours of this colonial poet figure. It begins with a benign aside, sighing out from the dullness of the character:

today he will write some verses, his schedule  
allows for a poem on his travels, or  
roses, or  
a mythological topic (56).

This apathetic poet, who arbitrarily “selects the past” because “the day is hot” functions as the epitome of colonial bureaucracy and Eurocentric sensibilities, with his filing cabinet muses, “topical allusions” and “measured cadences”, his French records and toy soldiers (56). Moreover, the nonchalant impotence of his selecting “dryads, a god or two from the filing cabinet / of his head” (56), places this poet in what Mignolo might call: “the extreme Occident as the “empty” continent where Europe extended itself” (*Local* 106). Empty of European

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<sup>10</sup> See L. Armand, Plunkett (*Haunting*) and L. Dobrez for analyses of Dransfield’s work within these frameworks.

<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Dransfield’s “a difficult patriotism” is representative, particularly in its communication of the indelibility of coloniality in Australia, where “we cannot / change it with our verses and kisses and years, / nor succumb. Perhaps evolve” (*Streets* 57).

mythological landscapes, this continent also produces in the poet an emptying of imagination. The *gestalt* of Dransfield's postcolonial critique arrives, however, after this character and his poetic landscape have been sketched, in what becomes a most pregnant pause, in the colonial poet's moment of potential self-critique:

he pauses, reviewing what is written. for him the parentheses  
     ripple outward  
 pleasingly, and he sees in the still pool of his verse  
 a clear reflection of himself as god (56).

In this image, coloniality is inscribed with an iconic narcissism, but in aesthetically recreating the "pool" in these wavering lines, Dransfield also implicates poetry in both narcissism and coloniality. The danger in Dransfield's poetics, in this case (usually attributed to his hallucinogenic escapes), is instead couched in his critique of poetry, which threatens to attach itself to his own verses. Debunking and/or satirizing prescriptions of his poetics as *uncomplicatedly* neo-Romantic here, Dransfield sets up (Australian) literary culture as elitist and self-obsessed, writing poems to itself. Whilst his quasi-natural landscape recalls those formative terrains of Romantic sensibilities—and the constructed deity that Romantic texts appropriate—his fusion of nature and text, where the natural is sublimated to the textual, renders all of these Romanticist allusions subject to literary critique.

Known for his derision of established literati, and contradictory belief in the cult of his own poetics,<sup>12</sup> Dransfield assesses literature as feeding off the same power that fuels colonial legacies, but also as charged with a responsibility to ethically address coloniality, even if ironically. For a poet who devoted many lines to exposing the pathos and decrepitude of the Australian poet figure, to dress this "colonial poet" with a self-congratulatory narcissism is to establish poetry as also imbued with a power dynamic and a potentially hegemonic politics.

In this poem, Dransfield ascribes a colonial signature to poetry (and to Australia more broadly) and this is crystallised in the central narcissistic image, particularly in the parentheses. These parentheses, which allude to the colonial signature in

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<sup>12</sup> As Kinsella has it, Dransfield's scepticism of literary elites was directly related to his positioning in the "Generation of '68": "Dransfield is often discussed as being the vanguard of the sixties counter-cultural revolution—as one who challenged the literary status quo and overwhelmed it with sheer talent" (*Michael Retrospective* xiii).

their embrace of the colonial imaginary, infer that colonial thought is not a humble search for knowledge, but a self-gratifying act. It is in their narcissistic register that these parentheses become doubly fortified as the pivotal image in this poem, in that they enable the image pond *and* the poem (*and*, by extension, the nation) by allowing the colonial imaginary to “ripple outward”. For critics such as Quijano, it is precisely this kind of insidious extension of coloniality that characterises modernity. According to Mignolo:

For Quijano “coloniality” does not belong so much to historical periods or particular forms of domination...as to what he calls the “imaginary” of the repressive side of modernity (*Local* 210).

Whilst Mignolo’s suggestion of a-historicism in Quijano’s work is somewhat refutable, his reading of Quijano’s analysis of the colonial/modern imaginary is revealing for its applicability to the psychosocial register of Dransfield’s poetry (as already discussed in Chapter 2).

What begins in Dransfield’s poem as a celebratory image of a writer’s hope for the unwritten potential in their text—those parentheses rippling outward—is associated so strongly with a colonial signature that it precipitates other immediate colonial associations, most notably a symbolic representation of the parentheses placed around Australia in its colonisation. Dussel’s insistence on narcissism as a Eurocentric trait—a thesis that Quijano’s texts build from—is thus encapsulated in Dransfield’s “colonial poet”. The inevitable confrontation between selfness and alterity involved in this colonial dynamic of narcissism is, for Dussel, endemic to European subjectivity, where (peripheral) alterity is subsumed in identity:

This other, in other words, was not “dis-covered” (*descubierto*), or admitted, as such, but concealed, or “covered up” (*encubierto*) as the same as what Europe assumed it had always been (*Eurocentrism* 66).

As a monstrous ego, “Europe”, represented by Dransfield’s “colonial poet”, relies on the exaggerated alterity of its subjects—“his gods and little people”—an otherness which is reduced in direct correlation to the narcissistic growth of the ego until “these tiny people / come to life for him, obediently...as the toy soldiers of his childhood” (56).

### 5.1.2 Postcoloniality; or the Impossibility of Unified Subjectivity.

Writing out of the charged postcolonial moment of Australia's Bicentenary, Philip Salom takes up Dransfield's postcolonial pathos, as well as the trope of colonial narcissism. In its emphasis on *post*coloniality, Salom's poem "Bicentennial—Living Other Lives" (Leonard 46-7) takes up Quijano's Eurocentric mirror as a tool with which to reflect and refract national mythologies until their shards of historical, personal and fictional light ricochet around his poem.

As his epigraph below argues, Salom focuses on how Australia's Bicentenary built up a narcissism for national mythologies, but also exposed the distorted reflections of Empire and nation in the colony. Writ in a language of imperial intonations, this epigraph narrates the following allegory:

At a time when the ruler was troubled by the problems of his subjects, a wise man came to court. He ordered a large bowl filled with water and told the ruler to plunge his head into it. The ruler dreamt of many lives in many places, where justice and riches were plentiful. When he lifted his head from the water, only seconds had elapsed (46).

Salom's "other lives" function as templates for national identity overwhelmed with alterity, and also work as reinscriptions of official History. His "others" are both familiar and anonymous, ranging from Ned Kelly and Burke & Wills, to Albert Facey, Trugannini and King Billy, to "a murdered woman" and "children".<sup>13</sup> Within the watery edges of the ruler's "bowl", these stories overlap in their mutual ambiguity, in the fluid boundaries between self and other in the nation. In his concentration on the mythological topographies of Australia as the "New World", Salom initiates various resurrections of his dead and haunting subjects, redressing injustices and bringing back "soldiers from the mud" as "riotous and a bloody insult to Empire, thank God. / And now awake to that naïve willingness to founder for the British" (46), as well as Aborigines who "pick out the shot that has sizzled there / like ancestral gravel" (46).<sup>14</sup> Although these

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<sup>13</sup> In his increasing emphasis (during the length of this poem) on marginalised public figures, and constant emphasis on the *voicelessness* of all of these mythologised characters, Salom echoes Adamson's project in "The Goldfinches of Baghdad", in explicitly addressing the politics of voicelessness.

<sup>14</sup> The irony undercutting these statements, however, can be read as another demonstration of those individuals and groups who are constructed within the historical discourses of Integral Reality as 'non-events' (often, indeed, by virtue of the absence or infrequency of such discourses as debate).

distortions, refracted back from, or at, the Eurocentric mirror, mount a decidedly postcolonial critique, these resurrections of the *new* “New World” are eventually nullified in the defeated conclusion:

There is no new world. They are refugees, heart-people  
from the subtle lands of history. They cannot shock-start  
suddenly in a tea room, the cup nearly at their lips; or in the Ford;  
or the next brick laid; a desk of inventions for watering lawns (47).

In this *mélange* of colonial and postcolonial images—from the British “tea room” to the Ford; to the Americanized suburban neurosis for watering lawns—a resurrection in the form of historical cleansing is impossible for these diasporic and dispossessed subjects, as illusory as the phantasmal visions in the Persian tale in Salom’s epigraph.

As much as it is desired and simulated at the beginning of the poem—particularly in the promising instigation “Which lives shall emerge from the waters? (46)”—the *new* “New World”, reinitiated by the Bicentenary and glimpsed in the Persian tale, is ultimately interpreted as a neo-colonial fantasy. Following Salom, to gaze into Echo’s pond—in fact, to submit one’s consciousness to this level of dangerous narcissism—is to believe in unitary national subjectivity. National narcissism (encapsulated so strongly in Australia’s Bicentenary) even when associated with potentially revisionist histories, is, as Salom diagnoses, an impotent “wish for a whole identity” (47). Even postcolonial retribution is impossibly complicated in this diagnosis, where “The impulse of justice is almost / a new colonisation, the latter century under a pith helmet”(47) and every Australian is implicated in this potential neo-colonialism: “In each of us there is the exercise of justice”(47). Rather than reverting to the illusory “whole identity”, the impossible reflection of a unified subject (*always already* under the helmeted influence of Empire), the poem proposes instead the possibility of a republic as a pluralist and *partial* response to colonisation, a response which colonisation is, in a sense, predicated on: “the gritting tilth of republic / in all these lives” (47)—perhaps the earth to which Salom’s deceased bodies return.

This republic of “other lives” (in their subjective landscape of alterity) must necessarily be preserved in ghostliness, “put back gently / into death. Where they

have felt past rage, indignity, dishonour” (47).<sup>15</sup> In preserving their haunting, spectral presence (as a distortion of unified subjectivity) as well as these injustices, Salom refuses to give back the image of Empire to Empire (particularly under the influence of Dussel’s “covered up” alterity as sameness). Instead, Eurocentrism must drown in its narcissism: “as finally as Holt beneath the waves” (47).

### 5.1.3 Narcissism & the Postcolonial Ghost Subject.

Mexican poet Verónica Volkow presents an anatomy of a postcolonial ghost subject, akin to Salom, in her poem “*El círculo*” [The Circle] (J.Acosta, 220-1).<sup>16</sup> Beginning with the nomenclature of identity “I am”, like its title, the poem circles around this subject, moving from physical description—“*Soy como el círculo*” [I’m like a circle]—to metaphysical analogy—“*Como hecho de tiempo / hecho sin mí cas?*” [Like a fact in time / enacted almost without me] (220-1)—to the ensuing erasure of the subject—“*soy casi transparente / y tengo que estar continuamente muriéndome*” [I’m almost transparent / and I have to be always dying] (220-1). This ghost subject, trapped within the impossibility of its existence, is both “always dying” and “always being born” (in an analogous way to the attempted resurrections of Salom’s subjects and the moribund characterisation of Dransfield’s subjects in “Psyched Out”)—thus justifying its circular nature.

To read this subject as a (post)colonial product of Quijano’s distorted Eurocentric narcissism is to trace the ways in which the colonial imaginary—so beautifully encapsulated by Dransfield—results from the sublimation of alterity. As Quijano’s colleague, Venezuelan sociologist Edgardo Lander asserts:

We could assume a different perspective on the so-called crisis of the subject if we were to conclude that the extermination of natives, transatlantic slavery and the subordination and exclusion of the other were nothing more than the other face, the necessary mirror of the self, the indispensable contrasting condition for the construction of modern identities (*Eurocentrism and Colonialism* 525).

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<sup>15</sup> For Dransfield, such immaterial subjects represent an *other* “reality”, elevated to a state close to martyrdom in “Esais”, a subalternised identity with its own power of: “speaking within, / making no utterance, disclaiming titles, / becoming real as skeletons are real; / bones robed no more in flesh; asceticism;” (*Streets* 64).

<sup>16</sup> Translated by Iona Wishaw & Nancy J. Peters.

Taking on this postcolonial haunted subject, the transcendence of Volkow's character becomes a form of dispossession, an *unheimliche* effect, as in the statement: “*no tengo ningún sitio realmente / no sé estar*” [I don't have a real place / I don't know how to exist] (220-1).<sup>17</sup> However, the following afterthought “*pero dibujo los caminos*” [but I draw roads] situates this unhomeliness as part of the agency of a reterritorialising subject who is, to some degree, empowered.

There are other distortions of colonial legacies in this poem, most notably the deconstruction of “freedom”. As a litmus test (within the larger narrative of the poem) for a deconstruction of liberal humanist subjectivity, the characterization of freedom as living “*sin futuro*” [without a future], “*sin la ausencia presente de los sueños*” [without the absence present in dreams], as the fickle “*se puede nacer en cualquier sitio / se puede vivir del instante*” [you can be born anywhere / you can live in the moment] (220-1) is both a *critique* of the ahistorical, outlandish and universalist claims of liberal humanism and colonialism (in which freedom is implicated) and a postcolonial distortion, where this “freedom”, even with its lack of subconscious and productive absences, can be co-opted into the reterritorialising agency of this transitory ghost subject. These last two lines, almost a couplet, are thus double-edged. They are fickle (as I mentioned) and gesture at the iconic slogans of multinational capitalism—“you can be born anywhere / you can live in the moment”—but they also represent an empowerment of the (post)colony—the distorting gesture of a diasporic *glocalisation*, the possibility of reinscribing origin as transhistorical and transgeographical rebirth.<sup>18</sup> In this, the circularity of postcolonial phantasmal subjectivity is achieved, and the identity claim in the statement “I am” hints at its potential to alter the mirage that is the Eurocentric mirror.

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<sup>17</sup> This exiled and dispossessed identity is narrated also by Colombian poet María Mercedes Carranza in “*La Patria*” [The Motherland], where home is equated with unhomeliness and life with death: “In this house the living sleep with the dead... flesh and ashes get mixed up in the faces, / words are jumbled up with fear in the mouths. / In this house we are all buried alive” (par. 2-3; translated by Nicolás Suescún). Similarly, in Dransfield's ‘birthday ballad, Courland Penders’, the nation is reduced to the house, where its displaced subjects ruminate: “but now so far from Europe / so absent from your century / you pace the halls disquieted / the house itself an alien / your body an encumbrance...” (*Streets* 76).

<sup>18</sup> It is this kind of discursive claim that could be allied to Dussel's project of *transmodernidad*.

However, the declaration “I’m a circle” could also be read as “where I begin, I end”, thus alluding to the merely transitory existence of the immaterial ghost, or its repetition of the universalist individualism of Eurocentricity.

Chilean poet Enrique Lihn’s “*La vejez de Narciso*” [Narcissus, in old age] (A. Calderón 238) narrates the effacement of the subject in the act of seeking its reflection, an extended performance of Lacanian logic. The “partial and distorted” reflections that Quijano advocates are the stuff of this poem’s characterization of the subject, evident in the poem’s narrative progression:

*Me miro en el espejo y no veo mi rostro.*

*He desaparecido: el espejo es mi rostro.*

*Me he desaparecido;*

*Porque de tanto verme en este espejo roto*

*he perdido el sentido de mi rostro*

*o, de tanto contarle, se me ha vuelto infinito*

*o la nada que en él, como en todas las cosas*

*se ocultaba, lo oculta,*

*la nada que está en todo como el sol en la noche*

*y soy mi propia ausencia frente a un espejo roto.*

[I look at myself in the mirror and I don’t see my face.

I’ve disappeared: the mirror is my face.

I’ve made myself disappear;

Because, seeing so much of myself in this broken mirror

I’ve lost the sense of my face,

or, after counting it so much, it’s become infinite for me

or the void in it, as in all things,

was hiding and concealed it,

the void that’s in everything like the sun in the night

and I am my own absence in front of a broken mirror] (238)

Proposed as an effect of chronic narcissism, where, upon reaching its maturity, the vain subject dissolves into the looking glass, this effacement is further complicated by Lihn’s construction of the subject as mirror, indeed *broken* mirror. Hence, where Volkow’s subject doesn’t know “how to exist” and hence can’t realise a reflection, Lihn’s subject is instead effaced via its *internalisation* of the mirror.



Lihn constructs the phantasmal disappearance of the subject as *intrinsic* to subjectivity (especially subjectivity based on the unified, un-fractured subject). His narrator's admission "*Me he desaparecido*" [I've made myself disappear] locates subjectivity as underwritten with the dangerous allure of narcissism. The mirror itself is broken and perilous, contributing to the subject's loss of reflection. Lihn's alignment of the subject with this broken mirror forces a reflection of the *mirror* (and thus a critique of the gaze) in the place of a reflection of the subject: "*Porque de tanto verme en este espejo roto / he perdido el sentido de mi rostro*" [Because, seeing so much of myself in this broken mirror / I've lost the sense of my face] (238).

"Narcissus, in old age" works out a logic of its own as its lines progress, and in that sense is like a thought-process. Implied in this representation of logic—with its obvious steps: "*Me miro...He desaparecido...Me he desaparecido*" [I look at myself...I've disappeared...I've made myself disappear] (238)—is a comment on Eurocentric logic. European ethnocentrism, charged with the "claim [to] universality" that Dussel recognises, is here re-enacted in the form of the subject whose mirror is itself (much like Aguilera Díaz's representation of the voice that speaks to itself). In an extension of Eurocentric logic, alterity is here found within the self, rather than being repressed and displaced onto an external other, as in colonialist logic.

In the end, however, it is the void, the negative space of reflection that is offered back to the subject, as the nothingness that hides itself in everything (similar to Volkow's "absence present in dreams") which eventually refracts onto the subject—or was always already there—the alterity that is the endpoint of subjectivity: "and I am my own absence in front of a broken mirror"(238).

#### 5.1.4 "Simultaneity & Sequence".

This tensile relationship between past and present, simultaneity and sequence of historical time, and the note of duality in our sensibility, could not be explained apart from the history of domination of Latin America by Europe, the copresence of Latin America in the initial production of modernity, the split between liberatory and instrumental rationality, and the eventual hegemony of instrumental rationality.

—Aníbal Quijano (*Modernity* 212)

The fractured and distorted legacies of colonialism articulated by Quijano, whilst specific to Latin America, are nonetheless applicable to Australian postcoloniality also. Thus, in the interplay between sameness and alterity and in interacting with a modernity translated from Europe, yet dependent on coloniality and the otherness of the peripheries, postcolonial subjectivity becomes impossibly problematised. Under the pressures of postcolonial modernity, the links between history, progress and identity are severed, as the time of postcoloniality (with its Eurocentric burden) is experienced, as Quijano describes, as “simultaneity and sequence”.<sup>19</sup>

In these Australian and Latin American contemporary poems, and with the aid of Latin American social theory as a much overlooked yet useful body of postcolonial theory, it is possible to interrogate postcolonial subjectivity anew and to rethink the importance of coloniality and Eurocentricity in the identity discourses of postcoloniality. If we accept Quijano and Dussel’s propositions particularly, such an interrogation of postcolonial subjectivity—which, for them, is premised on the Modern distortion of sameness by alterity—is vital to any informed engagement with a globalization that results from this Modernity. As this poetry demonstrates, postcolonial subjectivity *always already* approaches radical alterity—an otherness that can be fruitfully negotiated via the trope of the ghost subject as the deconstruction of both Eurocentric narcissism and modern colonial subjectivity.

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<sup>19</sup> The notion of postcolonial historical progress, in a lineal framework, is criticised and rejected by Argentinean poet Olga Orozco in “Variations on Time”, where time is interchangeable with Empire, complete with a narcissistic quality: “Time...you have put on a crown made of shattered mirrors / and tatters of rain; / and now you chant babble about the future / with melodies dug up from yesteryear / while you wander in the shadows through your starving slag, / like the mad kings and queens” (92). (Translator unknown). Similarly, in Dransfield’s “goliard” (the title itself a reference to satirising Empire), postcolonial progress is exposed as a deconstruction of tradition which is both anti-imperial and dependent on a pathetic Eurocentrism: “Progress erodes tradition. When that’s gone / nothing is left but fashionable landmarks / marooned by emptiness, and carved into / a vandal’s library of huge initials” (*Streets* 39).

## 5.2 Poetry at the Limits of Postcolonial Critique: Remembering Chile under Pinochet, Remembering Indigenous Australia.

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Not a leaf stirs in Chile without me moving it.

– General Augusto Pinochet, 1981 (qtd. in Collier & Sater, 359)

Are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there ever were aborigines in Australia?

– A.O. Neville, 1937 (qtd. in van Krieken, 299)

As postcolonial nations, Australia and Chile exhibit the legacy of coloniality in relation to the complication of subjectivity by radical alterity (as already demonstrated in the work of Dransfield, Salom and Lihn), but they also evidence a profound frustration of claims to *progressive* postcoloniality in their recent investments in neo-colonial campaigns. Despite their manifestations of postcolonial independence—their national traditions, their economic stability, their autonomous membership of the Pacific Region—both countries' recent histories are shadowed by the spectre of oppression in the form of genocidal regimes. As national models, Australia and Chile therefore present formidable *limits* to postcolonial studies, in the dual sense of revealing political contexts potentially beyond its current scope, but also by stretching the theoretical ground of the postcolonial.

In the face of the magnitude of destruction left in the wake of such oppressive regimes—the human rights abuses, the irreparable cultural fractures, the annihilation of lives—there has been a substantial effort to refute the regime logic of absolute tyranny by *writing back* to injustice; *re-inscribing* the social text; supplanting supremacy for oppression, governance for autocracy in the lexicon of national memory. This is one discourse that contemporary Indigenous-Australian and Chilean poets enter into, as they re-negotiate the vinculum of language and power in response to two very different political regimes. At one level, theirs is a politics of semantics, a terminological and symbolic activism. As a repository of memory and a site for dialogue, poetry becomes an *alternative* historical archive; an answer to the ritualized denial and repression that are the signature modes of

domination. This dynamic archive facilitates, at best, the possibility of retrospective analysis; an elaborate compendium of evidence; and, by virtue of its poetic structure, a discourse that is generically and ideologically *opposed* to the official, legitimizing and rhetorical manoeuvres of the governmental regimes. Where 218 years of colonial rule in Australia and 17 years under the dictatorship of Pinochet in Chile have resulted in irreversible discontinuities in ancestral lineage and recent histories of loss and oppression, this poetic archive privileges personal and community memories over official History, and interpretation over propaganda.

However, in their representational interplay with the nation, these poetics occupy the ambiguous position of historical record as memory, testimony and construction. In the face of the national “forgetting” of Indigenous histories in Australia and the impediments to legitimising testimonies of disappearance and torture in Chile, however, this poetry also risks its own devaluing, particularly where the maintenance of liberal democracies obstructs this kind of historical imaginary. As a medium that discursively engages with both art and politics, poetry is thus a complicated site of “post”-regime history, overburdened by its associative reach yet capable of communicating a range of personal and communal effects.

Given the situation of this poetry *at the limits* of the postcolonial, as well as its representations of often denied if not occluded national histories, its engagement with postcolonial theory is most productively understood with the aid of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s formulation of “subaltern pasts”. Rather than simply documenting the histories of subaltern peoples (as these terms suggest), Chakrabarty’s “subaltern pasts” refer to “pasts that resist historicisation” (18). As Chakrabarty explains, “subaltern pasts” have more to do with a postcolonial politics of representation than with local or global marginalized groups and their particular histories:

“Subaltern pasts”, in my sense of the term, do not belong exclusively to socially-subordinate or subaltern groups, nor to “minority” identities alone. Elite and dominant groups can also have subaltern pasts to the extent that they participate in subordinated life-worlds (18).

My use of Chakrabarty’s concept of “subaltern pasts” is thus intended as a strategy for bridging the representations of oppressive regimes in Australian and

Chilean poetry, especially as this poetry represents “subordinated life-worlds”. Chakrabarty’s construct also allows for a discussion of the obstacles that this poetry necessarily confronts in its antagonistic relation to historicisation.<sup>20</sup>

The “resistances to historicisation” in Indigenous-Australian and Chilean poetry occur most overtly in their generic allegiance to “storytelling” and *testimonio* [testimony]. As what Chakrabarty might call “minority genres”, these forms of narrative exist as an adjunct to traditionally “historical” texts, although they are being imported into official History with more and more frequency.<sup>21</sup> The difficulty with which testimonial narratives (or, more broadly, memoir) are incorporated into the realm of the historical immediately becomes an issue of voice and silence (i.e. another subaltern problematic of representation) for the subjects represented by this poetry. As Kay Schaffer establishes, Indigenous Australians are excluded from the “privilege” of adequate historical representation in what manifests as a discursive strategy of power: “Not being heard is part of the process by which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been erased and effaced in the nation’s history” (*Stolen* 9). Similarly, Ignacio López-Calvo traces Nelly Richard’s work on post-dictatorship victim narratives in Chile, where she demonstrates the effacing of these testimonies under the influence of a global capitalist market that markets history as consumable:

*Según la autora, tanto la democracia neoliberal de Chile como la globalización general han contribuido notablemente a disipar el valor de la historicidad y del recuerdo de la terrible experiencia de la dictadura de Pinochet. Poco a poco, el mundo del mercado y de la publicidad están borrando y anulando la amarga memoria de la injusticia y de la impunidad de los asesinos, como bien saben los detenidos-desaparecidos y sus familiares.*

[According to the author, both neoliberal democracy and common globalisation, have contributed notably to dissipating the value of the historicity and memory of the terrible experience of Pinochet’s dictatorship. Little by little, the world of the market and of advertising is erasing and annulling the bitter memory of the injustice and of the impunity of the assassins, as is well known to the detained-disappeared and their relatives] (182-3).

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<sup>20</sup> As was demonstrated in 3.1, this becomes particularly important when minority histories are further subordinated under Integral Reality.

<sup>21</sup> Of particular relevance here is the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s *Bringing them Home Report*, which relied on the testimonies of members of the Stolen Generations (See Schaffer, *Stolen* 15).

From these sites of silencing (which, as I will argue, are functions of both countries' "transitions" to liberal democracy), Indigenous-Australian and Chilean poets negotiate the politics of history in the formation of a poetic archive of their "subaltern pasts".

### 5.2.1 The Limits of the Archive as a Memorial Device.

*Lo que solía llamarse "periodismo interpretativo" en tanto relación empírica de los hechos puede señalarse como una frontera, con límites ambiguos, entre el discurso testimonial y el discurso histórico.*

[What was once known as "interpretative journalism" insofar as it offered an empirical account of the facts, can be referred to as a border, with ambiguous limits, between testimonial discourse and historical discourse.]

—Rossana Nofal (par. 22)

The archives thus help bring to view the disjointed nature of our own times. That is the function of subaltern pasts. A necessary penumbra of shadow to the area of the past that the method of history successfully illuminates, they make visible at one and the same time what historicizing can do and what its limits are.

—Dipesh Chakrabarty (24)

As an "ambiguous" border "between testimonial discourse and historical discourse" (such as Nofal's understanding of post-dictatorship journalism), poetry, as an alternative historical archive, signals the limits of historical discourse, whilst it appropriates an historical position. Following Chakrabarty then, to posit poetry as a "subaltern" or "minority" archive is to recognise its subordinated position *vis-à-vis* official History, but also to witness the ways in which it "shadows" the discourses of history.

Though the figure of the archive as a Western invention is arguably not culturally significant to Australian Indigenous imaginaries, within the limits of this analysis of Indigenous-authored English language poetry it functions as a potentially useful metaphor for the meetings of myth, tradition, history and memory within the problematic of contemporary Australian Indigenous postcoloniality. Whilst useful, however, the archive metaphor needs to be registered in this context as particularly *difficult*. Notwithstanding the substantial amount of archival work that is now underway in various Indigenous communities across Australia, the mobilization of archival ideology (overlaid as it is by its legal genesis) risks posing

too simple an answer to the complex politics of (community) survival, and in turn potentially buttresses the colonial discourse of the “dying race”. The least desirable use of the archive, therefore, in the context of Australian indigenous communities, would be as a suitably “politically correct” casket for the maintenance and documentation of Indigenous histories as though they were museum artefacts. As Chakrabarty warns:

When we do “minority histories” within the democratic project of including all groups and peoples within mainstream history, we both hear and then anthropologise (22).

The coincident utility and danger of an archival poetics are carefully recognized by Jack Davis et al in their introduction to *Paperbark: a collection of Black Australian writings*:

Aboriginal writing can often be seen as a community gesture towards freedom and survival, rather than the self-expression of an individual author. These examples are closely related to *the petition*, for which the ultimate aim is often land rights. [...] In that sense, putting an oral culture into books is like “embalming” it for posterity, and even this book enters into that paradox (paperbark is also a material used for shrouds in some parts of Aboriginal Australia) (3-5).

The editors’ invocation of “the petition” here, as one motivating framework for Aboriginal writing, is reminiscent of the legal foundations of the archive, where it developed within the history of Europe (and its colonies) under the rubric of legal entreaties and compensatory claims. It is also within this context of judicial origin that leading critics of Latin American literature, such as Roberto González Echevarría and Ángel Rama, explain the character of contemporary Latin American literature and the cultural eminence of its authors—via the history of the colonization of Latin America—as the legacy of the literate elite in what Rama has termed “*La Ciudad Letrada*” [The Lettered City] (*passim*). Hence, for Latin American poets, writing (as fundamentally an expression of power) owes its cultural significance and many of its stimuli to archival productions. In this sense (and this can be applied to Indigenous-Australian poetics also), it can represent the *most appropriate* vehicle for retribution in cases of injustice, by virtue of its inherent appeal to the law. As an historical artefact, poetry-as-archive thus potentially responds to the silencing of Indigenous and dictatorship experiences in Australia and Chile, which Schaffer and Richard lament.

As a response to Pinochet's dictatorship of Chile, a poetic archive contributes to the wider process of the recognition and documentation of the countless human rights abuses suffered by Chileans under this regime. The urgency of projects of national memory in Chile has prompted much support for archival endeavours, which Louis Bickford argues are endemic to the future satisfaction of justice, as they represent what he calls "The Archival Imperative...in human rights discourse as an important strategy in the future struggle for human rights" (1107).

As a *difficult* site for collective records, the archive can therefore either represent a regenerative process, cultural objectification, or the officialdom of authority. What is certain, however, is that it will always remain an inherently *colonial* and *colonising* construct. As such, the archive represents a limit to postcoloniality in its mutual co-presence as both colonial and anti-colonial device. The sense in which the figure of the archive is perhaps most appropriate to these poets' endeavours, is as a *reactionary machine*—not only a problematic record, but an historiographic challenge to "truth" and a reconceptualizing of civilizations. As González Echevarría helpfully describes:

The Archive...stands for writing, for literature, for an accumulation of texts that is no mere heap, but an *arché* [sic], a relentless memory that disassembles the fictions of myth, literature and even history...The order that prevails in the Archive, then, is not that of mere chronology, but that of writing; the rigorous process of inscribing and decoding...of cancellations and substitutions, of gaps (*Myth* 23-4).

My intention here is to present a new comparative analysis of contemporary Indigenous-Australian and Chilean poetry, by tracing the contributions of these poets to such an archive. Here, poetry is understood as a "minority" archive of "subaltern pasts". This poetry constitutes a transnational forum for narratives of genocide, dispossession, disappearance and brutality—practices that the otherwise seemingly disparate histories of Australia and Chile share. Hence, rather than a divisive political comparison of models of postcoloniality, citizenship or "democracy" (which would surely posit Australia and Chile as distinct), I propose instead a literary analysis of shared poetic refrains of injustice via the common tropes of homelessness and loss. González Echevarría's "relentless memory", when applied to Chilean and Indigenous-Australian poetries, allows the



reinscription of the future onto the conquered past and the decoding of the nomenclative colonisation of terms such as “nation,” “*patria*” and “community.”

### 5.2.2 Australia & Chile as “Genocidal Societies”.

In the last decade, a series of writings, centred on the term “post-dictatorship”, have articulated knowledges that are irreducible to the framework of “democratic transition”. This irreducibility should not be confused with exteriority pure and simple, but displays a *supplementary* character in the strongest sense of the word: the transition does not emerge as such until it represses and excludes from its field that which makes it possible.

—Idelber Avelar (253)

subaltern pasts are like stubborn knots that stand out and break up the otherwise evenly woven surface of the fabric.

—Chakrabarty (22)

Both Australia and Chile can be classified as what Tony Barta refers to as “genocidal societies,” in that their citizenry have inherited historical “relations of genocide” (Moses, *Genocide* 26). The Australian case has been defined by historians Raymond Evans and Bill Thorpe as “Indigenocide” (Moses, *Genocide* 26-7) due to its racial/colonial program of extinction and/or dispossession; by A. Dirk Moses as a history that produced “a ‘genocidal effect’ on Aborigines” (*Antipodean* 90); and by Simone Gigliotti as an incidence of “genocidal mentalities and moments” (165). Now very much a recognized, though still contentious, term in the context of Australian politics and public discourse—particularly following the well documented “History Wars” of recent years—“genocide,” though still rejected by conservative critics, is arguably part of the national popular vocabulary. However, the reticence of Australian political leaders to use this term is evidence of the problematic position of “subaltern pasts” in that, as Avelar argues, these experiences are necessarily “irreducible” and

“supplementary” to democratic transition and hence represent Chakrabarty’s “stubborn knots” in the fabric of official History.<sup>22</sup>

Concomitantly, the lexical efficacy of the term “genocide” and its attendant references to a gross breach of universal human rights law, has been, to date, only harnessed as an *accusation* against Pinochet,<sup>23</sup> rather than as a sanctioned legal conviction. Given the definition of genocide in Article II of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide of 1948, the *politically* motivated torture exercised under Pinochet’s regime doesn’t fit the internationally recognized requirements of the term (Moses, *Genocide* 23).

Alongside these regulatory restrictions sits the evidence of a vast annihilation which, though not technically “genocide,” still represents the mass killing and “disappearance” of a significant proportion of the Chilean population during the Pinochet years. As Samuel Totten expresses, there is a sense of a denial of the right to rely on international human rights law for Chile, where the UN Convention and its strict parameters stand in the way of achieving a universal recognition of the scope of the slaughter during Pinochet’s dictatorship. In other words, without the right to use the word “genocide,” Chilean survivors risk a potential devaluing of their testimonial trauma narrative. As Totten claims:

If “political groups” had not been eliminated—due to unseemly compromises—from the earlier versions of the UN Convention on Genocide, the charge of genocide against Pinochet may have stuck. Indeed, there is no doubt, and ample evidence corroborates this assertion, that Pinochet and his cronies, intentionally and systematically, set out to exterminate those groups that they considered enemies (174).

In the place of the contested term “genocide,” then, we could enlist alternative terms, which potentially carry with them an appropriate measure of symbolic effect—the effect that Gigliotti calls “the weight of history invested in public utterances of ‘genocide’ and the word’s attendant criminality” (Gigliotti 165).

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<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Chakrabarty’s analysis is aligned to Avelar’s in that he argues for the supplementarity of “subaltern pasts”: “Subaltern pasts—aspects of these time-knots—thus act as a supplement to the historian’s pasts and in fact aid our capacity to historicise. They are supplementary in a Derridean sense—they enable history, the discipline, to be what it is and yet at the same time help to show forth what its limits are” (27).

<sup>23</sup> According to Frances Webber, Pinochet was accused of “torture, murder, hostage-taking and conspiracies amounting to genocide and terrorism” (43). However, he has not yet been convicted of the crime of genocide.

Perhaps, then, in the blank space left after the necessary erasure of the term “genocide” in the texts of Chilean history, we could insert the term “policide” (to refer to the killing and/or destruction of the *polis* as well as to a specifically *politically* motivated destruction). Or, possibly a more appropriate linguistic/semantic solution would be to invoke the (invented) Spanish term “*gentecidio*” (which would refer to the destruction of the people —“*la gente*”—and which echoes and therefore refers to the Spanish word for genocide: *genocidio*). What these lexical experiments characterize is, at the least, a recognition of the representational obstacles posed by such gross abuses of human rights. This kind of struggle within language (for a useful discourse of recognition, memory and justice) is what contemporary Indigenous-Australian and Chilean poets often articulate. As such, poetry represents a border to politics and justice in these postcolonial contexts, where it exposes the limits of official discourse in communicating collective “minority histories”.

### 5.2.3 The Representational Politics of “Subaltern Pasts”.

The task of producing “minority” histories has, under the pressure precisely of a deepening demand for democracy, become a double task. I may put it thus: “good” minority history is about expanding the scope of social justice and representative democracy, but the talk about the “limits of history”, on the other hand, is about struggling, or even groping, for non-statist forms of democracy that we cannot yet either completely understand or envisage.

—Chakrabarty (23)

The frontier violence and the forced removal of Indigenous children in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Australia are the historical precedents which led to the official recognition of our genocidal history in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission’s (HREOC) *Bringing Them Home Report* (Moses, *Genocide* 5-48). In order to declare the existence of *distinctly* genocidal policies in Australia, however, the HREOC relied on Article II(e) of the UN definition, using its research into the “stolen generations” as evidence of the forcible transference of children from one group to another.

Not all public discourse on Indigenous-Australian genocide measures itself against the UN definition, however. Importantly, as Moses points out, even the singular

emphasis of the term “genocide” is limiting in the Australian context, as it fails to address the diversity of Indigenous peoples affected. As Moses argues, for “the approximately 600 Indigenous cultural-linguistic groups” in Australia, “many genocides took place...rather than...a single genocidal event” (*Genocide* 19). Here, therefore, is a manifestation of Chakrabarty’s “double task” in that, in its inclusion in “democratic” frameworks of progress and justice, the recognition of genocide nonetheless *limits* democracy.

As is articulated in Moses’ syntax above, Indigenous-Australian literary criticism stresses the manifestly *cultural* genocidal strategies of Australian settler colonialism, particularly in relation to Indigenous languages. The undertaking of this symbolic violence has resulted in vehement antagonism by some Indigenous poets within and against the English language—a practice that is foreshadowed by the demise of Indigenous languages into what Colin Johnson describes as “broken collections of words falling haplessly into English language structures” (*Guerrilla* 47).

In Kim Scott’s “Wangelanginy” (98-100), Indigenous languages are mourned with the lament of the narrator’s “funeral song” (99). This elegy documents the death of these languages, using the tongue as both pun and metaphor; but also importantly preserves the remnants of these lost tongues—dual imperatives that are clear from the outset:

Was it that the old people  
 each thinking himself herself the last,  
 and feeling their tongues shrivel,  
 their sound not returning...  
 Was it that each offered their tongue  
 in, say, the way of frog or reptile?

Tongues which flickered,  
 were snatched, twisted in the wind  
 until, thinning, drying,  
 they became...What? Something  
 like strips of cast-off snake skin,  
 like parchment curling in a fire... (98)

In these last two lines, there is an acknowledgement of both the permanence of what Johnson appropriately calls the “deliberate policy of language genocide” (*Guerrilla* 47) and the imposition of European colonialism, which engenders the

hybridity of snake skin and parchment as cultural/textual artefacts. The “old people”, potentially representing Indigenous nations, prophesise the immanent loss of languages (and language groups) and thus offer “the tongue” as a reptile would—in flickers. In dealing with the loss of Indigenous languages in Australia, Scott interprets Australian history as chiefly assimilationist, as John Fielder observes:

His writing “takes on” neocolonialist or assimilationist discourses—discourses that underpin the still prevalent desires of non-Aboriginal Australians for Aboriginal people to accept compliantly their destiny and to become assimilated into the dominant European culture”(Country par.16).

Where Scott’s mode is grief, Lionel Fogarty, in his poem “Stranger in Cherbourg Once Knew” (51) confronts the logic of the regime with a poetics of ultimatums. Fogarty is recognised as arguably one of the most *overtly* political Indigenous-Australian poets of recent times. In 1999, John Kinsella claimed that Fogarty, by virtue of the potency of his political agenda and the force of his poetics, was the most noteworthy contemporary Australian poet:

For me, the most significant voice to emerge in the latter years of this century is that of the Murri poet Lionel Fogarty. Fogarty has managed to use English as a weapon against its own colonizing potential. He has created a positive hybrid that undoes the claim of linguistic centrality, and registers the primacy of the oral tradition. It is an integral part of the song cycle’s development (*Landbridge* 16-17).

As Kinsella points out, Fogarty’s linguistic and political mode can be read *vis-à-vis* hybridity, which opens up a space for a nuanced critique and demonstration of both the cultural-linguistic hegemony of English and the cultural genocide which has necessitated his utilization of English. Syntactically strategic, Fogarty overturns conventional sentence structure in “Stranger in Cherbourg Once Knew” (51) with his deliberate reordering of lexical clauses. The poem promises a menacing future, which is emphasised in lines such as “Never I cast out oppression” and “White regime I will expose—are you afraid? Yes, afraid” (51). Blatantly, this poem directs its force at colonial genocide, supporting Bickford’s “archival imperative” (1107) in its confessions of a *writerly* activism: “I’ve now taken to writing the unknown confusion / You always let by / Of dying in a white regime” (51). Fogarty’s repetition of “white regime” flanks whiteness with tyranny—in a similar way to Wagan Watson—painting white civilization as *nothing*

more than a *continuum* of regimes of oppression. There is also an implicit suggestion of the argument that colonialism and genocide share mutual interests, or, to put it more strongly, derive from the same logic.<sup>24</sup> The opposition of writing and silence (carefully poised between the two lines quoted above), amounting to a writing *against* silence, is evidence of the operation of the “archival imperative” in Indigenous poetics, as a complex strategy of difference and resistance.

Pinochet’s dictatorship of Chile, from 11 September 1973 until 1990, was, from the outset, a cultural (as well as a military) coup. Cultural genocide accompanied the torture and killing of more than 4000 Chileans, as books were burnt and “complete editions [...] guillotined” (Montealegre, 31). Poetry and language were inextricably bound to persecution under this regime, as strict censorship exterminated the publication of resistance poetry, and, as Jorge Montealegre claims, “Intellectual life during the dictatorship became synonymous with *cultural blackout*” (32). Without a public forum for their poetry, nor opportunities to publish it (until many years later or occasionally overseas) Chilean poets writing within the years of this dictatorship became known as “Generation NN” or *Non Nomine*.<sup>25</sup> As Montealegre explains, the work of these poets both responded to and mirrored the atrocities of silencing and disappearance that surrounded it, hence the appropriation of the Latin term for an unidentified corpse:

In general, it’s about beginning to write poetry under the dictatorship, whether 60 or 15 years old, who were dispersed inside or outside Chile: a generation of the Diaspora or internal exile, condemned to live in anonymity and at the margins; to disappear metaphorically, when other fellow-citizens disappeared physically (37).

Although articulations of “*gentecidio*” wash over contemporary Chilean poetry (especially poetry produced by “Generation NN”), there is also a narrative of clandestine resistance, which is often expressed as an abiding creativity. As Chilean poet Ariel Dorfman argues, this creativity is a strong response to dictatorship:

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<sup>24</sup> This is an argument that Moses reads in Lemkin’s canonical definition of (and scholarship on) genocide also (*Genocide* 27).

<sup>25</sup> For useful discussions of such writing, see W. Rowe (*passim*).

Just as important is the fact that people tend to realise, in defeat, and in the struggle against a dictatorship, that culture is essential, more than an adornment or a propagandistic aid. The repressive tactics of authoritarianism play a paradoxical role, by revealing to those muzzled the value of their expressive inventory (*Some* 135).

The communication of “minority histories”, in its creative register, is therefore, as Chakrabarty argues: “about struggling...for non-statist forms of democracy” (23). Juan Cameron’s “*La hora señalada*” [The Signalled Hour]<sup>26</sup> (S. White, 123) ends with an argument for creativity as the only mode of survival—where, after personal History suicides, only imagination lives: “*La hora señalada se dispara en la sien / Sólo puertas mentales se nos abren ahora*” [The signalled hour shoots itself in the head / Only doors of the mind open for us now] (123).

For Aristóteles España, a student activist poet held at one of Chile’s many concentration camps, the physical space of torture cannot imprison the power and relentless insistence of the figurative and the metaphysical. In España’s “*Más allá de la tortura*” [Beyond Torture] (S. White, 209),<sup>27</sup> the prolific metaphors invoke the eminence of the metaphysical, even as they imitate the physicality of the narrator:

*permanezco sentado  
como un condenado a la cámara de gas,  
Descubro  
que el temor es un niño desesperado,  
que la vida es una gran habitación  
o un muelle vacío en medio del océano.*  
[I remain seated  
like a person condemned to the gas chamber.  
I discover  
that fear is a desperate child,  
that life is a great room  
or a deserted dock in the middle of the ocean] (209)

The reductive quality of metaphors here imposes a sequence of contained “discoveries” as controlling mechanisms, in the otherwise unpredictable context of torture. However, although imagination is a liberty of the condemned man, language is a double agent, employed by the enemy as part of the machinery of state-sanctioned brutality. The following juxtaposition of words, weapons and

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<sup>26</sup> Translated by Steven White.

<sup>27</sup> Translated by Steven White.

torture encapsulates this threat, which lurks around the corner of each of España's lines: "*Hay disparos, ruidos de máquinas de escribir, / me aplican corriente eléctrica en el cuerpo*" [Gunfire / sounds of typewriters, / they apply the electric current to my body] (209).

The complex bargaining with language required under such conditions—where torture is *associated with* language, just as it is *limited by* language—is examined by Dorfman, whose poetry rehearses the changing roles of poet/interlocutor in the context of torture. In Dorfman's poem "*Primer Prólogo: Traducción Simultánea*" [First Prologue: Simultaneous Translation] (*In Case 2-3*),<sup>28</sup> the exchange of language and torture—poetry—becomes the exchange of physical pain for meaningful enunciation, thereby allowing the replacement of destruction with creation (even where this is accompanied by an awareness of the traps of the Symbolic):

*y lo único verdaderamente increíble es que a pesar de nosotros  
a pesar de mi río de interpretaciones y giros lingüísticos  
algo se comunica  
una porción de aullido  
un matorral de sangre  
unas lágrimas imposibles  
la humanidad algo ha escuchado  
y se emociona.*

[and the incredible thing is that in spite of us  
in spite of my river of interpretations and turns of phrase  
something is communicated  
a part of the howl  
a thicket of blood  
some impossible tears  
the human race has heard something  
and is moved] (2-3).

However, despite the liberatory function of poetry *after the fact*, there remains the unrelenting context of torture, which threatens the subjects and narrators of these verses. Dorfman's "incredible thing," which at first appears to be the transcendence of language *despite* torture, can also be construed as the stultifying

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<sup>28</sup> Translated by Ariel Dorfman & Edith Grossman.



of language *beneath* torture. So, as Cristhian Espinoza Navarrete ventures, “Generation NN” can be read strangely as the generation of Chilean poets who had to suffer their own abnegation through their texts, as:

*una línea de poetas chilenos unidos por un rasgo casi medieval, pero evidentemente propio de nuestra época: la disolución del sujeto. El poeta, sujeto lúcido y sensible a las transformaciones de la época, se ve enfrentado a un mundo en desintegración. En el contexto de la realidad histórica de Chile durante la dictadura militar, este proceso de disolución marca todas las esferas culturales: el silencio se impone como una norma de sobrevivencia.*

[a line of Chilean poets united by an almost medieval feature, but evidently belonging to our era: the dissolution of the subject. The poet, a lucid subject who is sensitive to the transformations of the era, sees themselves confronted by a world in disintegration. In the context of the historical reality of Chile during the military dictatorship, this process of dissolution marked all cultural spheres: silence imposed itself as a norm of survival] (par. 7).

This silence can also be seen as an effect of the *impossibility to represent* dictatorship experience. Analogously, Avelar argues that torture itself inherently defies representation:

In confronting the problem of the translation of their experience into language, the testimonies of political prisoners who had been subject to torture also make manifest the limits of all representability (254).

The intermingling of creative, transcendental language and the language of power under Pinochet—so chillingly encapsulated in both España’s and Dorfman’s poems—is a legacy of this dictatorship that Chilean poets still work through. Perhaps due to the complex coexistence of censorship, regime rhetoric and an underground movement of prison poetry, the morality of language itself in Chile has become hugely problematized. Hence, there is now an impasse at the juncture of language and progress, as Chilean poet Raúl Zurita explains:

It is no longer a question of not being able to speak of something through fear of possible punishment (most analyses of censorship stop here), but of how speaking as such, simply using the language, is already a punishment. That is where the regime replicates and subverts its own guilt; the guilt enters the public domain in such a way that everyone is guilty although without knowing of what (qtd. in W. Rowe, 297).

In this atmosphere of post-dictatorship suffering, where the social conscience (according to Zurita) is preoccupied by the moral politics of language, a sentiment of loss writes itself into the national poetry. This bereavement can also be read in Indigenous-Australian poetry, which, through a very different politics of language

(one that is attended by an awareness of continued *cultural* genocides) registers loss at the levels of country, community and self.

### 5.2.4 Registering Loss at the Junction of the National & the Personal.

The manifest declaration of Chilean and Indigenous-Australian poets of genocidal histories is the most obvious evidence of their archival work. Their entries into the historical record—albeit as “minority histories”—chart loss on a mythical scale as they invoke the spiritual as the only plane on which to describe humanity’s fall from grace. In Cameron’s “*La Hora Señalada*” [The Signalled Hour], this fall figures as the human condition, which the narrator treats with a defeated forgiveness:

*Está bien el paraíso lo perdimos por precario  
comodato de ángel guardián era la hora  
desalojados fuimos lanzazos a besos  
mejor dicho he armas (no quiero herir a nadie)  
Nos han vedado el cielo ya el infierno  
Es el limbo estamos donde estábamos  
nos cobijan aquí es la verdad  
pero eso es todo*  
[Fine so we lost paradise because  
of some guardian angel’s broken lease it was time  
We were evicted at spear-point nudged out  
at gunpoint I mean (I don’t want to hurt anyone)  
They’ve banned heaven and hell too  
It’s limbo we’re right where we were  
they give us shelter it’s true  
but that’s all it is] (123)

Quite deliberately it seems, the arms of the regime reach out from the law, as every loss in these lines is registered in legal terms—the broken lease, the eviction, the ban—yet the human subjects are not just denied their legal status as citizens (and their statutory rights), more crucially, they are denied salvation. Such disenfranchisement therefore starts from the official/legal sphere and moves outward, until it threatens the boundaries of the individual (particularly the intangible boundaries of spirituality). William Rowe reads this religious angst in Chilean poetry as an expression of the incommensurability of human suffering and redemption, or as a projection of the fallen world onto eternity—a narrative which he locates as emanating from the Chilean cultural-colloquial register:

The common and popular senses of *penar* as haunting and pain open out the Catholic notion of the torment of souls in purgatory to include any exclusion from paradise, if the latter is understood in its widest possible projection as counteraction to unacknowledged and unnecessary suffering, wastage, and death (282).

The vocabulary of damnation required for Cameron's work, as well as the sense of detainment in Rowe's limbo (evoked syntactically in pauses) is echoed in the words of Fogarty. Though his subject is at once the human and the land (both of which bear the force of colonisation), Fogarty writes his narrative through the same causal links between legality and condemnation, yet always with the inflection of a colonialist *imposition*, rather than dictatorial *denial*:

Laws they inhumanly pushed  
to dehumanise our Aboriginality  
Brutally downed land  
Sorrowfully realising  
the Hell  
is now contained (51).

Significantly, in the context of Indigenous-Australian poetry, Christianity is invoked as the referent of the spiritual where the State is aligned with metaphysical punishment. For both Cameron and Fogarty, in these instances, the genocidal trajectory (figuring here as *cultural annihilation*) is unambiguously linked to a Christian narrative. The marriage of the Law to Christian dogma (though this is managed in distinct ways by these two poets) underlines the immorality of dispossession as it locates both a sense of the loci of responsibility for tyranny and the stimuli for its ideology.

Zurita, committed to exposing the *continued* trajectory of dispossession after Pinochet's dictatorship (especially in relation to the disjunctures in the role of language and the social contract) is explicit in ironically pursuing the difficulties of maintaining an *evangelical* sense of nationalism, particularly when Religion and the State get in the way:

*Chile está lejano y es mentira  
no es cierto que alguna vez nos hayamos prometido  
son espejismos los campos  
y sólo cenizas quedan de los sitios públicos*  
[Chile is far away and is a lie  
it isn't true that we ever took our vows

the countryside is a mirage  
and only ashes remain of the public places] (“VI”, S. White, 152-3)<sup>29</sup>

There is something of a ritualized Last Rights enacted for Chile in these lines, even as fundamental elements of Christianity are forcibly renounced—the lost faith, the denial of vows, the dematerialization of the rock—as Zurita marks the nation with ash, which signifies suffering and death as much as an ironic inversion of resurrection.

This desire for consecration and burial is never far from the narratives of contemporary Chilean poetry, which documents the collective mourning for the thousands of disappeared. In this sense, the following lines from Dorfman’s “Trámites” [“Red Tape”] (*In Case 4-5*)<sup>30</sup> are emblematic, especially in regard to the expression of entanglement in religious routine:

*y todo  
para poder  
enterrar tu cuerpo,  
tener un lugar  
donde tu madre  
puede ir a dejar  
flores  
—te gustaban los crisantemos  
pero están muy caros—  
los domingos  
y el primero  
de noviembre.  
[just  
to be able  
to bury your body,  
to have a place  
where your mother  
can go with  
flowers  
(you like chrysanthemums  
but they cost so much)  
on Sundays*

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<sup>29</sup> Translated by Steven White.

<sup>30</sup> Translated by Ariel Dorfman & Edith Grossman.

and All Souls'  
Day] (4-5).

Interestingly, Zurita interprets this grief as symptomatic of Latin American postcoloniality, and seemingly unresolvable. He suggests that:

apart from our modern disappeared, all this history is a history of disappeared people, human beings who have not been buried, peoples, cultures who have not had that right. They all permanently haunt the language at its foundation (qtd. in Rowe, 282).

As a community archive and a measure of social cohesion, poetry addresses that unresolvable desire by providing a revolution of modes: from howl, to elegy, to lament, to memorial. What emerges from these poetic landscapes of dispossession and damnation is a narrative of internal exile, as the subjects of these poems are displaced from country and/or nation.

### 5.2.5 Testimonies of Disappearance & Dispossession.

Few in Australia would doubt the significance of Indigenous storytelling to the evolution of human rights claims. Indeed, no recognition of human rights violations can come without story, testimony and witness. Virtually since the first years of white settlement, Indigenous people have been telling stories of their lives both within and outside of their communities and seeking recognition and redress before official inquiries from what we would now call human rights abuses.

—Kay Schaffer (*Narrative* 8)

Almost immediately upon the instalment of the Pinochet regime, Chileans were dispersed in great numbers, ordered to report to authorities and often housed in one of the many makeshift concentration camps—in the desert, on boats off the shore of Valparaiso, even in the National Stadium, which was transformed for this purpose. Increasingly, these people, as well as others who vanished under the cover of the black curfew nights, became the disappeared, as all traces of their whereabouts were suppressed by the meticulous fascism of the regime.

Decades earlier, across the Pacific, the practice of forced removal of mixed-blood Indigenous children from their parents (now referred to as the “Stolen Generations”) was endorsed within the context of “democracy”. Though these children didn’t physically disappear, (as did their ancestors in frontier massacres), their traditional culture, their languages, their familial bonds, their right to home,

all were annihilated with a force so permanent, it is now recognised as a practice of genocide. This internal diaspora of indigenous Australians is exposed in Indigenous-Australian poetry as the ugly evidence of the lies and deception that underwrite Australian democracy—the terror that *always already* defines our nationhood. Whilst the State promulgates the continued deception that we are united by “mateship” and fuelled by the creed of a “fair go,” poets like Scott, Fogarty and Wagan Watson narrate a “minority history” of the genocidal stain that indelibly marks the nation.

The psychic force of Chile’s practice of clandestine extermination also infects the nation’s contemporary literature with tropes of grief, separation, exile and haunting. As Rowe observes, “Those wounds have not disappeared. They leave their mark in the language, the very material of poetry” (28). At times this loss inspires a quest-like narrative, where protagonists search out long-emptied landscapes, as in Cameron’s evocation of a community of mourners:

*Abora que vagamos en busca de la luna  
oscura está la gleba los caminos  
marchan sobre sí mismos...*

[Now that we wander in search of the moon  
the ploughed earth is dark the roads  
walk down themselves...] (122-3)

or Zurita’s negation of Chile, where reckoning is a distant possibility:

*Porque aunque casi todo es mentira  
sé que algún día Chile entero  
se levantará sólo para verte  
y aunque nada exista, mis ojos te verán*

[Because even though almost everything is a lie  
I know that someday all of Chile  
will rise just to see you  
and even if nothing exists, my eyes will see you] (152-3)

The shredded hope here, the futility, give a sense of loss that is imbued with a haunting (and ghostly existence), a grief that sits in dialogue with Scott’s elegy in “Wangelanginy”, as his narrator enacts another quest for remembrance:

Marking traces of my own people,  
I sang a funeral song,  
struck leaves against the hut around the moon,

and, hearing an old sound, wondered: is it for me?  
Is it for me that they spoke, that they speak? (99)

In his own terms, such mourning signifies an active engagement with historical discourses for Scott, whose project can be understood as a “minority historiography”:

As a writer...it seems to me that my identity is about articulating a position I inhabit at an intersection of histories and peoples, and it is an obligation to speak for those people who history has silenced, and by attempting this to step forward with a heritage largely denied me (qtd. in Fielder, *Country* par. 26).

This quest, or in Scott’s terms, “searching, slyly hunting / going back, going inward / following, pursuing a sound...” becomes the investigative research behind the transnational poetic archive that these Australian and Chilean poets attend to. The circular nature of these quests (written around the contexts of past and future and here staged under lunar cycles) constitutes González Echevarría’s archive, which deconstructs the traditional order of History and:

is not so much an accumulation of texts as the process whereby texts are written; a process of repeated combinations, of shufflings and reshufflings ruled by heterogeneity and difference. It is not strictly linear, as both continuity and discontinuity are held together in uneasy allegiance (*Myth* 24).

Much like the operation of memory, this testimonial poetry circles around temporality, highlighting the most significant traumas of the oppressed communities it represents and rewriting history as unsealed and malleable. As interpretations of genocidal loss and of community, these poems focus on the disappeared in spirit form, inviting phantom protagonists to haunt the regimes with the presence that was denied them. As such, this poetry locates subjectivity in the ghostly territory mapped in the poetry of Dransfield, Volkow, Salom and Lihn. With measured sureness, Sergio Mansilla bears witness to the return of the disappeared in his “*Ánimas errantes*” [Wandering Souls] (S. White, 244-5):<sup>31</sup>

*Al caer la tarde una multitude de muertos  
vuelve a sus casas,  
buscan sus tierras y sus hogares*

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<sup>31</sup> Translated by Steven White.

*que la memoria las recuerda.*

...

*Multitudes de sombras andan  
en la noche por los campos  
y su paso hace andar los molinos a agua  
y quejarse los árboles, como agonizantes  
abandonados en hondonadas remotas.*

[At dusk the multitude of the dead  
returns to where it lived.

They look for their lands and homes  
that memory brings back.

...

Multitudes of shadows move  
through the night across the fields  
and their steps make the waterwheels turn  
and the trees complain like the dying  
abandoned in remote valleys] (244-5).

Not only is Mansilla's imagery chilling, his shifting of the symbolic weight of home, land and country—his transformation of the *patria* into “*sólo distingue vagamente / un paisaje solitario donde apenas / se escuchar el lejano canto de la aves nocturnas*” [only a vague / lonely landscape where the distant cry / of night birds can scarcely be heard] (244-5)—re-territorialises the literary landscapes of Chile, leaving the country irreversibly haunted by post-dictatorship terror. Perhaps the most indelible statement of this intention to reconfigure citizenship—by haunting the fatherland with its ghosts—is Mansilla's acknowledgement of nationhood as *communion*, as History invades the personal and the personal invades History:

*Vuelvan, y a cada paso queda  
un espacio íntimo vacío*

[They return, and at each step  
an intimate space empties] (244-5)

Fogarty appeals to such spirits, bedevilling English Grammar in what Johnson calls “a manner which is a response of an Aboriginal songman against the genocide inflicted on his language and the tyranny imposed on him by a foreign language...” (*Guerrilla* 48):

Now our shadows will abirth our spirits  
Tomorrow, yesterday, death knows the end (51)



History is haunted here, as life and death are entangled in an elaborate form of rebirth. This narrative surfaces in many of these poems, particularly Chilean poetry, as the only locus of hope. In a move that posits revolution in perhaps its most literal form, the politics of what Fogarty writes as a “Hoping, hoping / Waiting to overtake” (51) become the projected futures of these poems—a future that Scott terms “Speaking ourselves back together again” (100).

Such a revolutionary politics of rebirth (which, for Chilean poets also problematically resurrects Christian discourses) works for these poets as the endpoint of the regime. Gonzalo Rojas is most famous for this thematic<sup>32</sup>, as is obvious in the ultimate lines of his poem “*Los días van tan rápidos*” [“The days go so quickly”] (Blume, 139-40):

*Estemos preparados. Quedémonos desnudos  
con lo que somos, pero quememos, no pudramos  
lo que somos. Ardamos. Respiremos  
sin miedo. Despertemos a la gran realidad  
de estar naciendo ahora, y en la última hora.*  
[Let us be ready. Let us remain naked  
with what we are, but let us burn, let us not rot  
that which we are. Let us blaze. Let us breathe  
without fear. Let us wake to the grand reality  
of being born now, and in the last hour] (139-40).

Embracing a complex kind of *essential* humanity—“*lo que somos*” [that which we are]—Rojas weaves violence and triumph into a statement that promises to overthrow oppression, even if solely by the linguistic fires creating community and memory. There is bravery and retribution here—“*quememos, no pudramos*” [let us burn, let us not rot]—and a call for justice—“*Respiremos / sin miedo*” [let us breathe / without fear]. This also works as a prayer for Chile, where the inferred “Amen” closes the poem—“*ahora, y en la última hora*” [now, and in the last hour...]. This practice of a benedictional poetics is echoed in the closing words of España’s “Beyond Torture,” which inscribes oppression as global:

*las flores del amor y la justicia  
cercerán más adelante sobre las cenizas  
de todas las dictaduras de la tierra.*

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<sup>32</sup> See W. Rowe, *Poets*.

[The flowers of love and justice  
will grow sometime later from the ashes  
of all the dictatorships on earth]. (208-9)

As an important site for revolution in the aftermath of colonial or dictatorial oppression, poetry counters the iron-clad logic of the regime with the promise of an act of documentation; the formation of an archive of “minority histories”; the enunciation of retribution—all of which sit vitally alongside legal imperatives to bring oppressors to justice and political measures to avoid their reinstatement. To read contemporary Indigenous-Australian and Chilean poetry is to recognise that there are shared postcolonial politics of genocide, dispossession and revolution *across* the Pacific and that divergent histories and differing forms of colonisation don’t necessarily prohibit valuable comparisons from being made, nor should they limit analysis.

## **Afterword.**

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These comparative analyses, in their demonstration of shared colonial, postcolonial and neo-colonial legacies across Australia and Latin America, reveal that in order to pursue the limits of Australian postcoloniality as an object of analysis, this context must be one of transnational frameworks. Despite historical, geographical, cultural and political variances between Australian and Latin American post-colonial experiences, the mutual effects of Eurocentricity, dispossession, disappearance and oppression link these postcolonial regions via an historical and ongoing “coloniality of power”.

With the aid of *teoría latinoamericana*, understandings of Australian postcoloniality benefit from theoretical frameworks such as post-Occidental and post-dictatorship critique, as well as detailed studies of modernity, imperialism and colonialism. Also, the employment of *poesía latinoamericana* as a body of work comparable to Australian poetry aligns Australian neo-coloniality and postcoloniality with other national and regional articulations of identity and community under these constraints. Within a transnational postcolonial community, new (poetic) historical archives—most crucially those documenting

“subaltern pasts” and “minority histories”—can be formulated alongside analyses of late capitalist liberal democracies, in a multilingual discourse that can more extensively probe the limits of postcoloniality, and counter neo-imperialisms. In this regard however, much remains to be done.

## At the Limits of the Dissertation.

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The (un)mapping of the postcolonial geographies of contemporary Australia exercised here (via its poetry and in dialogue with Latin American poetry and theory, postcolonial and hyperreal theory) is a small and singular gesture towards the larger imperative to think postcoloniality, nationalism, literature and identity within *transnational and multilingual* frameworks. As such, this dissertation critically opens up the psychosocial register of Australian (post)coloniality, the “Hyperreal Politik”, Australian poetic engagements with Integral Reality, “Hyper-Indigeneity” and the neo-imperialism of the New World Order, as productive limit-spaces into which contemporary Australian postcoloniality has begun to move.

The comparative intertexts of Latin American poetry and theory engaged with here also testify to the ways in which Australian poetics is *already amenable to transnational frameworks*. The shared experiences of Eurocentricity, coloniality, anti-imperialism, genocide and oppression across Australia and Latin America attest to the urgency of further (un)mapping of the border zones between these, and other, postcolonial spaces. With the aid of comparative cultural analyses such as this, the Australian condition of postcoloniality, and Australian poetics, can be informed by other experiences and theories of (post)coloniality. Moreiras’ challenge (which introduces this dissertation)<sup>1</sup> to search for an *other thinking*, a “certain effort” (*Irruption* 719-20), is thus approached here via an exploration of the limits of Australian postcoloniality (its limitations *and* extremities), as represented in contemporary poetry and theory. In this regard, the inclusion of hyperreal and Latin American theories as negotiable limits to Australian understandings of postcoloniality exist here as templates for new transnational thinking.

At the limits of this dissertation, beyond its comparative analyses, is the gulf of work missing in current scholarship around this transnational context, this “other

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<sup>1</sup> See epigraph, p. v.

thinking”. The investigative frontiers that this dissertation anticipates, therefore, are chiefly those of multilingual, comparative translations of literature and theory. The poverty of existing postcolonial theory in engaging with multilingual (and thus counter-hegemonic) contexts greatly restricts the fulfilment of its own ethical and theoretical postulates. While poets are already confronting the character of contemporary neo-imperialisms, the scarcity of analyses of the pervasive politics of the New World Order demonstrates the potentially retrogressive bent of postcolonial theory. The Anglophile and Francophile prejudice of postcolonial studies in the Western Academy also grossly limits the authority of its claims, as much as the scope of its textual, political and imaginative application.

Beyond this dissertation, therefore, is the space for further projects such as the anthologising of multilingual postcolonial poetics and theories in original languages as well as in translation; the analysis of comparative anti-colonial and anti-imperial scholarship, and the investigation of the continued trajectory of coloniality in (post)colonial nations such as Australia.

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