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Contents

Introduction

Refereed papers
Mark Jackson
Impulsive Openness: Boredom and Bio-politics
Laurence Simmons
Heidegger and the Herringbone Cowshed
Sarah Treadwell
Animation, the Cat and Escaping Drawing
Peter Wood
Architecture = Building + Value: Exploring the Social Purpose of Architectur
Albert Reffii
Woven Flesh
A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul
Frontiers of Shame and Repulsion
Ross Jenner
What Goes Up Must Come Down: The Combat of Impulses in Italian Futurism and Rationalism

Non-refereed Papers, Projects, Reviews, Translations
Marco Frascari
Gee Wiz
Deane Simpson
Instinctive Systems
Anthony Hoete
Bovine Buildings
Reviews of the Fale Pasifika at The University of Auckland
Semisi Fetokai Potauaine
The Tectonic of the Fale
Jeremy Treadwell
Chains of Negotiations: Navigating between Modernity and Tradition
Maria O’Connor
Review of The Open: Man and Animal
Tim Adams (Trans.)
Félix Guattari: Architectural Enunciation
Reviews of the Models for Living Exhibition by John Walsh and Peter Barlett
John Pule
PARADISE: Looking for Exits. Review of MAU's performances in Germany and the Netherlands

Contributors to this issue

Notes for contributors
Frontiers of Shame and Repulsion

A.-Chr. Engels-Schwarzpaul

Introduction: Sydney 2004, Anaura Bay 1769

At the 2004 Sydney Biennale a “traditional wooden dunny” (Bond, 2004), imported from New Zealand, featured centrally in Daniel Malone’s A Long Drop to Nationhood. Set at the end of a long corridor and flanked by a mural inspired by Aboriginal artist Albert Namatjira, it is intentionally reminiscent of a scene in Tracy Moffatt’s short film Night Cries, where an adopted Aboriginal daughter wheels her white mother to the outhouse.

The outhouse, an “essential common denominator of two closely linked cultures” (Wei, 2004), according to Malone represents the pioneering spirit of the ‘colonial adventure’ in both Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Engaging “with questions of belonging and place”, he also plays on the contrast between the outhouse as “fundamentally associated with waste” and the museum as a place concerned with “high eternal values” (Daniel Malone, 2004). To interrogate such a body/mind split, alongside the cliché of the South as body and emotion, as opposed to to the North as mind and reason, was the concern of the Sydney Biennale On Reason and Emotion.1

1. According to Tony Bond (2004), Malone talked in the catalogue “about the need for us, in Australia, to recoup our Aboriginality if you like. To acknowledge, in fact, that this is an indigenous country and not a colony.” Malone, in fact, used excerpts from Germaine Greer’s “Whitefella Jump Up: The Shortest Way to Nationhood” in the text of his catalogue entry rather than making his own artist’s statement.

2. Thus, curator Isabel Carlos (2004) wrote in the catalogue: “The ‘emotional’ in Western societies has been connoted, almost to the point of cliché, with the south” (24). “In a conventional dichotomy we would say that the south is the body and the north the mind but, believing this to be a false dichotomy, one of my aims was to bring together artworks that create a total physical and psychological experience” (25).

Figure 1: Daniel Malone, A Long Drop To Nationhood, 2004, Readymade Kauri wood outhouse, wall mural, video with sound, export/import documentation, Dimensions variable. Photo Jenni Carter.
In Malone’s work mind and body, North and South, and settler culture and indigenous culture congeal “in the form of a duny” (Biennale of Sydney Volume 1: Cake, 2004). How much are perceptions of the duny as an icon for ‘Down Under’ based on facts, and how much are they an invention in conventional notions of top and bottom, centre and periphery? After all, the privy was a common feature in Europe at the time of colonisation, often paired with appalling hygienic conditions. In contrast, one of Cook’s crew noted at Anaura Bay, in October 1769, that “every house, or every little cluster of three or four houses, was furnished with a privy, so that the ground was everywhere clean. The offals of their food, and other litter, were also piled up in regular dunghills…” (Hawkesworth, 1775: 312). Hawkesworth compared this favourably with conditions in the capital of a European nation, Madrid, where privies were rare until 1760. Prior to that, it was “universal practice to throw the ordure out of the windows, during the night, into the street, where numbers of men were employed to remove it, with shovels” (313). This appeared to contemporaries so normal that a Royal proclamation ordering proprietors to “build a privy”, and announcing the construction of “sinks, drains, and common-sewers … at the public expense” (sic) was seen “as an infringement of the common rights of mankind” and met with great resentment (313). The situation in the British capital was hardly better: the River Thames served as the sewer for a population of two million in 1830. In Manchester’s Parliament Street, “one single privy” served “three hundred and eighty persons” in 1851, and “in Parliament Passage … thirty thickly populated houses” (Engels, 1845).

So where do notions of the North as mind and South as body originate? How can they be so persistent, despite contrary facts, that Malone and others see their relationship with contrary facts, and reconcile their presence in the same community? The situation in the Britich capital was hardly better: the River Thames served as the sewer for a population of two million in 1830. In Manchester’s Parliament Street, “one single privy” served “three hundred and eighty persons” in 1851, and “in Parliament Passage … thirty thickly populated houses” (Engels, 1845).

Civilisation: A long process of separation

Between the eighteenth and the twenty-first century, according to Norbert Elias, a process that had been underway in Europe for some time reached a new stage. In The Process of Civilization (1939), Elias traces in historical documents a long-term development in European courts and cities. Over the course of this development, however, people eventually came to think of their civilisation no longer as a process but as a universal standard. Long sections of Elias’ investigations are concerned with sixteenth century humanist texts, in which an unprecedented plethora of rules and regulations concerning the “natural functions” emerges. Much greater control of affects and impulses was called for, and this changed people’s relationships with their own bodies and those of others.

Elias was theoretically informed by Sigmund Freud’s ideas in Civilization and its Discontents (1930), in which civilisation appears as a burden that must be borne so as to avoid worse evils. Freud, in turn, owed much to Friedrich Nietzsche’s thought, who once wrote that the difference between animals and humans depends on the latter’s development of a plenitude of conflicting drives and impulses. Their synthesis, precisely, makes humans the masters of the earth. Nietzsche regarded the cerebral organ, just like the ‘subconscious’ regions of the brain, as the result of a slow process during which “new injunctions, which speak of a lowered shame threshold. On the other hand, details are still discussed in the texts that will soon be passed over in silence.” Interestingly, shame was associated not with guilt feelings, but with fear of exposure to those more powerful; certain things “are not done”, as Della Casa observes elsewhere, “except among people before one is not ashamed” (117). Supersior produced shame in their inferiors by imposing on them stricter controls of impulses and emotions. Conversely, the “sovereign holding court on his pierced chair” was a privileged sight “as an infringement of the common rights of mankind” and met with great resentment (313). The situation in the British capital was hardly better: the River Thames served as the sewer for a population of two million in 1830. In Manchester’s Parliament Street, “one single privy” served “three hundred and eighty persons” in 1851, and “in Parliament Passage … thirty thickly populated houses” (Engels, 1845).
calls them by their names in de tail. In the later edition, all these detailed references are dropped and they are ‘passed over in si lience’.

13. Some things that a “great lord” might do before retiring to bed with his servants or in the presence of a friend of lower rank” would not be a sign of arrogance “but rather a particular affection and friendship” (117).

14. Given the possibility that the baring of one’s private parts in front of an inferior can be a friendly gesture, the “men… women, girls, boys, abbeys, Swiss Guards” passing by the houses next to the forest at Fontainebleau in 1694 may have felt honoured to watch Madame la Duchesse d’Orléans doing her business. She herself felt in -convenienced and wrote to the Electress of Hanover: “You are indeed fortunate to shit when whenever you may please and to do so to your heart’s content… We are not so lucky here. I have to hold on to my toad until evening the houses next to the forest are not equipped with fa -cilities. I have the misfortune… of having to shit outside, which gravely perturbs me because I like to shit at my ease and put my ass fully bare” (quoted in Laporte, 2000: 4, 11).

15. Would it have been difficult for him to imagine that “savag es” not so long ago were ahead of Madrid, Paris, or London in their separation of food and filth—without that matter necessarily effecting the same psychological separations that accompanied European toilet training?


17. See note 5. In 1539, François, King of France, passed an edict that privatised his sub -jects’ waste production. They were henceforth forbidden to toss out into the streets and squares ‘refuse, offals, or pu -trefactions, as well as all waters whatever their nature’ and had 1995. The bathroom similarly featured, in a 1917 article “Bathrooms and Civilization”, as “an index to civilization … And in no line of building has there been so great progress in recent years as in bathroom civilisation” (February issue of House and Gardens, quoted in Lahiji & Friedman, 1997: 81). It institutionalised the control of impulses and moulded individuals and groups further towards an ideal of civilisation.

Over the course of this development, demarcations between inside and outside were constantly reproduced: for example, the restraint of impulses was more and more exercised by European subjects themselves, rather than imposed from outside, as they adapted to the requirements of increasingly complex societies with lengthened chains of social interdependence. Simi -larly, the separation from excrement—initially managed through sheer dis -tance—was re-integrated into the house once suitable hygienic technologies were developed. This shift meant simultaneously a further privatisation of bodily functions. Finally, the hygienist discourse accompanying those technical developments simultaneously applied to single bodies, groups and the larger social body. Certain groups of people were constructed as unhealthy, social bodies and removed from the centre just like excre -ment; and, in many cases, by the same means: water. Let’s look at the last two aspects now, in turn.

The State and the sewer

The history of European cities reflects a protracted struggle over waste management. For a long time, any number of enactments “could not prevent people from defecating in the open.” But in the nineteenth century, techniques based on the reticulation of water and excrement became a mat -ter of concern for a healthy, albeit invisible public body in the care of the state. At an international congress of hygiene, held in Brussels in 1832, Eng -lish hygienist F.O. Ward described a system based on the “constant circula -tion of water” and out of the city (in Gille, 1886: 235). This system linked the city with the country through “a vast tubular structure” which has two divi -sions; … each of these divisions is made up of two distinct subdivi -sions: an afferent, or arterial system: and an efferent, or venous system” (236). He concluded that “it is a matter of just pride for us that our country” should have conceived of “this purely analogous discovery—circulation in the social body” (237).

English hygienists were initially in the forefront of this development but, soon, other European nations entered the body works competition. It is in the context of intensifying national rivalry in Europe that Adolf Loos’ 1898 essay “Plumbers” makes sense:

Increasing water usage is one of the most pressing tasks of a culture. May our Viennese plumbers therefore do their jobs as fully and completely as possible in order to lead us to this great goal—the attainment of a cultural level equal to the other countries of the civilized Western world. For otherwise something very unpleasant, something very shameful could take place. (Loos, 1898: 190)

On the upper levels of London society, a “compulsory cleanliness” made itself felt towards the end of the nineteenth century and the “wash-out closet” (elsewhere known as the “English basin”) became popular (Laporte, 2000: 61, 59). A range of products catered for “new notions of cleanliness, order, and, by extension, beauty”, at least for the upper classes, and an “archi -tectural abandon” turned some ‘public’ conveniences into commemo -rations: “chapels to waste” (60), where “civilized man deposited offer -ings and prayers to ward off the … awareness of his primordial origins” (61). To control matter in the combat of the impulses, architectural force of form was enlisted. Whereas matter “presses down and wants to spread out formlessly on the ground” (Wöllflin, 1886: 159), form can provide an upright condition resisting any residual forces of a primordial condition to be forgotten or overcome.21

Water closets and sewers were part of a characteristic process of segre -gation by which a whole range of body functions was removed from social life and displaced behind the scenes. With the availability of a technical apparatus allowing for the quick separation of body and excrement, excre -tion could once again take place within the house or apartment. Since the end of the sixteenth century, the prevailing attitude in architectural trea -tises had been to remove ‘the place’ as far as possible from the actual places of dwelling.22 When Johann Claudet, influential teacher of architects at the École des Beaux-Arts wrote in 1901 that “as far as the toilets are concerned, we place them without any fear … into the midst of the apartment” (1901: 65) "to delay and retain any and all stagnant and sulfured waters and urines [sic] inside the confines of [their] homes” (quoted in Laporte, 2000: 4, 11). In keep -ing with rules that applied dif -ferent standards to superiors and inferiors, however, wastes in the King’s castles continued to be disposed of outside.

21. Haussmann regarded the Parisian sewers in 1854 as “the organs of the metropolis” which “function like those of the hu -man body” (quoted in Gandy, 1998). See also Gille (1986: 228).

22. As Ross Jenner outlines in his contribution to this issue, sev -eral architectural theorists have seen parallels between the flow of bodies of impulse and those in the built environment. Heinrich Wöllflin considered the “opposition between matter and force of form” the “principal theme of architecture”. “We as -sume that in everything there is a will that struggles to become form and has to overcome the resistance of a formless mat -ter” (Wöllflin, 1886: 159). Will, or the force of form, is what “holds us upright and prevents a formless collapse” (159). There is more than a faint overlap with Nietzsche’s thought here. Henry Statten (1990: 166) writes of Nietzsche’s concern with the conflict between force and form that the “endless dispersal of the substance of humanity can only be brought to a halt by and aim upward, an aim at goal”. Staton goes on to remark that “wherever there is the desire for mean -ing and the search for something more durable than the pointless pouring-fourth of life, there will usually also be the distinction be -tween the human and the animal, the fear of the female who disperses one’s substance, and loathing of the corruption of the body” (167).
21. While this apparatus does not explain the “advance in the frontiers of shame and the threshold of consent” in place, it consolidates and constantly reproduces the new standards and their dissemination (Elias, 1939: 99, 118-9).

22. See Guenard (1997: 26, 39). In 1883, it was still common in Parisian apartment blocks or tenements to find one privy for twenty five persons, placed somewhere in the entrance area or courtyard (137). Only legislation passed in 1894 made it compulsory for new buildings to allow for interior toilets. This did not necessarily mean their placement in the apartments themselves, and—if so—they were usually tucked away bordering onto the kitchen and the servants' realm.

23. There is a structural parallel between the segregation of ‘the place’ from normal life and Elias’ notion of the dampening of affects, on the one hand, and, on the other, the integration of the WC into the middle of the house and a relaxation of the control of affects, following a sufficient moulding of individual psyches. See “Disciplining and informalization processes” in van Krieken (n.d.). An interesting extreme case of moulding of affects is that of prisoners in Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon cells: “A slight screen, which the prisoner might occasionally interpose, may perhaps not be thought sufficient. This, while it answers the purpose of decency, might be so adjusted as to prevent his concealing from the eye of the inspector any forbidden enterprise” (http://carte.org/panopticon.html).

24. Slavoj Žižek finds an analogy between German, French, or American toilet constructions and national political characteristics: “German reflective thoroughness, French revolutionary hastiness, English moderate utilitarian pragmatism” are reflected-

62), he clearly announced a new trend in architectural design that set itself in opposition to common practice. Much of the discussion at the time was concerned with health and hygiene—but these were not the only factors.

Thomas Crapper’s flush toilet, according to a 1993 Chicago Tribune article, changed

the course of history by allowing society to live with itself. It is more than valves and arms and floats that hiss and gurgle; the flush toilet is the very symbol of modern civilization. … Life without the water closet is, for most of us, a horror beyond imagination, so unspeakable and unacceptable that we cannot conjure up the prospect. (Ecenberger, 1993)24

According to another non-academic source, Queen Victoria’s “porcelain throne” represented an attitude that may well have “seemed more ‘dig-nified’—more suited to aristocrats than the method used by the natives in the colonies” (Health Benefits of the Natural Squatting Position, 2001). Is it not surprising how civilisation, since the nineteenth century, has become a maxim for dominant European views of national achievements? Does it not stand, even today, for stable and consummate standards, which place ‘civilised’ nations far ahead of those who have supposedly not yet reached their level of progress?25

Imperial reticulations

Nineteenth century fears of social division and the contagion of poverty-related diseases eventually led to a wholesale purging of dangerous elements—be they matter or humans. Points of intensive crowding, such as hospitals, barracks, prisons and workers' housing, were to be “moved to the edge of the city, where conditions of isolation and ventilation would guarantee both their security and that of the city” (Fonssagrives quoted in Gille, 1986: 229). With that, the hygienists’ programme spilled over—or returned to—issues not only of architecture, but also of politics.

Waste management in the context of colonisation became the imperial reticulation of a poor or criminal population beyond national borders. Following the American colonies’ embargo on convicts, the colonisation of Botany Bay was to ensure the ongoing flushing away of criminals (and the poor). However, ex-convicts—or escaped convicts—perhaps unexpectedly also ended up in the New Zealand colony, which, in Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s scheme, served as another, different and more wistful variation of a ‘safety-valve’ for overpopulation, endemic unemployment and poverty in England.

Already Elias observes, it was “not a little characteristic of the structure of Western society that the watchword of its colonising movement is ‘civilisation’” (1959: 509), and Robert van Krieken (1997) argues that any “self-conscious attempts to bring about ‘civilisation’, have revolved around essentially violent policies and practices”. Barbarism and civilisation are thus “part of the same analytical problem” rather than successive stages of development (1997).

In the colonies, according to Laporte, civilisation is “the purview of the conqueror. The barbarian craps where he pleases; the conqueror emblazons his trails with a primordial prohibition: ‘No shifting allowed’” (2000: 57). The coloniser, according to Professor McHugh in Ulysses, brings with him to new shores “only his cloacal obsession”. “It is meet to be here. Let us construct a water closet” (Joyce, 1922). Cloacal obsession in the nineteenth century was articulated through progressivist vocabularies of hygiene and toilet technologies.

The water closet might have represented an achievement in nineteenth century Europe, with its particular problems of over-crowding. But a peculiar myopia excluded from perception historical and geographical particularities such as the vast difference between the metropoles and the hinterland in Europe, or earlier observations of barbarians and civilised such as Hawkesworth’s notes about hygienic conditions in Anaura Bay in 1789. These lapses of historical and geographical awareness supported a particular ideological system by which one type of toilet comes to mean something different from another, in peculiar ways. The perception of the ed in “ambiguous contemplative fascination; the hungry taste to get rid of the unpleasant excess as fast as possible; pragmatic approach towards the excess as an ordinary object to be disposed of in an inappropriate way” (1997: 5).

25. For long periods, civilisation in Europe had been an ideal rather than a reality, but by the second half of the nineteenth century it had become a maxim for dominant European views. As a goal, it shaped the process of interior restructuring that accompanied industrialisation, the rivalry of nation states, and expansionary and imperialist policies. The reference to nationhood in Malone’s installation is interesting in this context.

26. Such progressivist vocabularies may have even taken in Norbert Elias, who at times—despite his continuous discomfit with the notion of civilisation as achievement or standard—lapsed into his own brand of progressivism. See Elias (1995).

26. The compulsive need to eradicate traces of the ‘effec-
tory animal’ by immersing shit in floods of water, the spite of interior restructuring that allowed society to live with itself. It is

ative animal’ by immersing shit in floods of water, the spite of interior restructuring that allowed society to live with itself. It is
long-drop as an icon of the New Zealand or Australian vernacular, or of the lavatory as one of civilizing achievement, is based on imaginary investment rather than facts. The long-drop’s appearance in the Sydney Biennale, revisiting the ‘forgotten’ world of dummies and night carts, may be read as a return of what was repressed or eliminated in the process of civilisation. Alternatively, it may index an intrinsic part of a European barbarism that was always folded into civilisation.

Separations of the metropolis from its excess population, of settlers and natives, and between body and excrement may have been parallel and interconnected processes. They are all concerned with literal or metaphorical top/bottom relationships. When Malone calls his installation *A Long Drop to Nationhood*, the title implies not only the physical movement of matter (down, as opposed to mind: up) but also an implied loss of status, from centre to colon-y. Implicit is still an unspoken assumption that people at the centre have not only decided the combat of the impulses, but also have a right by virtue of their (our?) higher standard of civilisation to make others do as they (we?) do.  

What Malone’s metaphor implies is that Australia and New Zealand share a colonial history, and that a long-drop is the makeshift, unsophisticated convenience attached to that condition. Once accepted, the metaphor extends and gets mixed with the brutality and arrogance of colonial politics in both countries.

Much of what happened at Okahu Bay (Orakei) in the 1950s, for example, was justified by references to hygiene and health: Ngati Whatua, in their struggle to maintain their rights of occupancy at Okahu Bay, found their efforts over decades of court procedures blighted by health concerns. Thus, a 1935 sanitary report held “swampy conditions and inadequate drainage” against the continued existence of the Okahu Bay *papakainga* (habitation).

27. Okahu Bay is situated in what is now a central Auckland region. About its history, see *Waitangi Tribunal report* (1986), particularly in this context: Chapter 7: “Cleaning Up 1930-1952.”

28. In 1952 “those left had to be burnt out and physically carried from their homes. It seemed necessary that that should not be delayed. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II was to visit Auckland in the coming summer 1952-1953.” Her route of arrival was at the time expected to pass the “unsightly Orakei shacks”—a prospect the council could not countenance.

29. The outfall was located at the head of Okahu Bay. From 1914 “Auckland’s crude sewage was discharged to the shellfish beds of Ngati Whatua, opposite their ancestral village. There could have been no greater insult to a Maori tribe even if one were intended” (*Waitangi Tribunal*, 1986).
Ngati Whatua’s objections that the “insanitary conditions” were not of their making were ignored. The mayor of the time failed to move the issue from housing and hygiene to broader issues of good faith and the rights of tangata whenua (people of the land, indigenous people). Okahu Bay, situated “at the front door of what must become a thickly populated European settlement”, was not considered to be the appropriate place “for a Native settlement”.

In a striking parallel to nineteenth century European politics, the pa-pakainga was termed a “health hazard”, “a disease centre”, to be removed to make room for a new “garden suburb”. And yet a 1954 film (Auckland’s Drainage Problem) shows how “night carts collect sewerage from suburban Auckland homes. Aerial views indicate the pollution of Manukau Harbour from the sewerage outfall at Orakei” (1954: Looking Back 50 Years, 2004).

What, then, do we make of the perceived opposition between the North as mind and the South as body, as articulated by the curator of the Sydney Biennale? Surely it is still based on the same conflict of the impulses observed by Nietzsche, Freud and Elias. However, this combat is no longer served by Nietzsche, Freud and Elias. Rather, the frontier now delimits vast antipodean regions whose populations, indigenes and settlers alike, are supposedly ruled by emotion—but also of the present day Portaloo, the Exceloo or the Megaloos of the South as body, as articulated by the curator of the Sydney Biennale? Surely it is still based on the same conflict of the impulses observed by Nietzsche, Freud and Elias.

It is in this context that the juxtaposition of long-drop and lavatory—but also of the present day Portaloo, the Exceloo or the Megaloos of more recent suburban developments—reworks (part of) reality into anxious oppositions.

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