

Micro Gestures For a New Co-Efficiency in Art: An interview with Andrew Sunley Smith



Fig. 1. Migratory Projects, (CCA Glasgow 2006) installation shot (image: Ruth Clark).

Migration and displacement are recurring themes in your practice, as are the accumulation and destruction of commodities. There are obvious parallels here to the diasporic cultural condition of late capitalism or globalization, and attempts by artists and academic bodies to address this (for example the 2006/07 AHRC funding priority for research into Diasporas, Migration and Identities). As Nikos Papastergiadis writes: ‘The cultural dynamics of globalisation pose a challenge for scholars and artists: the urgent need for a more affirmative and critical response to issues of mobility and belonging.’¹ A significant aspect of such an ‘affirmative and critical response’ for Papastergiadis is the need for a ‘dialogic concept’ of art. To what extent would you consider *Migratory Projects* [Fig. 1] engages in a ‘dialogic concept’ of artistic practice and research? How important to you are Papastergiadis’s writings on ‘spatial aesthetics’?

Research for me is about connections and linkages, it is a process of exposing ideas, overlaying sorting and differentiating and importantly about ‘testing’ ones own ideas against others, strengthening or weakening lines of thought and forms that are developing in one’s work or the work of others. The dialogic is interchangeable with notions of the co-efficient and / or the relational. All three words are forms of the same idea. All are meant to implement a certain dynamic and fluidity as well as polemic. They are of the same seed and pre-figuration of each other. These are expansive and linking words very relevant to the present, and more importantly to movement dynamics and diaspora of people in our times. I think of the work as dialogic insofar as art can be taken as an interface, as well as a process of concretizing and actualizing connectivities. The dialogic is about bringing together various dynamics, forms, languages, groups, ideas and most importantly contexts.

Migratory Projects is in part, about survival in new contexts, making things work, extending the use of things, making things go a little further, adapting... and importantly 'feeding back' my observations and experiences. Being in the position of a migrant is at the same time profoundly inhibiting, debilitating, debasing and silencing - yet it is also very liberating and provides an objectivity second to none. The forms I use, make, and adapt in my projects are intentionally in dialogue with high and low forms of culture. They are aesthetically quite pop and pedestrian in my eyes, as well as highly conceptual works. The works in the migratory series are meant to operate and be in dialogue with custom car culture, escapist camping culture, green, DIY and recycling politics, notions of migration and issues of worth, hierarchy and value (which are always fully retested and redefined when one chooses or has to move cultures and radically shift contexts).

I've always been very fascinated by the ideas and physical factors that drive and contribute to our sense of belonging. I also always wondered if I could make an art that directly used movement and forward velocity as a constant in the work. As if one could never actually 'stop,' was unable to, as if one could never conclude, have the time to finish or be still. What effect would this have on people, on things on objects on relationships, on communication? Can value exist in a constant state of movement? People in flux and change are rarely included and given worth in society and cultures of the west. Much of the more co-efficient contemporary art produced predominantly in the 'new' Europe in the last ten years or so has, in its aim, been counter 'exclusional'; Jens Haaning (DK) Matthieu Laurette (FR), N55 (DK), AVL (earlier work) (NL), Harmen De Hoop (NL), Christoph Büchel (recent installations). In Australia too, these issues have been on the agenda for many artists; Diego Bonetto (Weed Project) (AUS), Ernst Ellemunter (vege van) (AUS), Danny Egger (Experiences in being: Accountability) to name but a few examples.

In terms of Papastergiadis, he is correct in emphasizing the need for a more affirmative and critical response to migration politics. I ended up living for a while in Holland when the Euro was being phased in (1999/2000) the purpose of my self imposed displacement was to research and find like-minded artists, ideas and forms that in some way could be connected to my own work. It was a journey all to do with connection as well as a means to enter into a broader range of dialogue. I was looking for dialogue and hoping to manage to locate my work and ideas into some trans-national 'shift' in art. I share and like Papastergiadis's idea of the dialogic in art – specifically as he contextualizes the idea to the Australian situation.

More important for me, however, is the writing of Nicolas Bourriaud on relational aesthetics. I read Bourriaud in 1999, way before encountering Papastergiadis strangely (owing that the latter is Australian). Both books are about the re-negotiation and redefinition of space, technology, sociability and cultural encounter I think I just happened to be in Europe at the right time to encounter Bourriaud's work when it was emerging. I'd actually really dried up in my search for vital new Australian critical writing that was about contemporary artwork, contemporary ideas and, importantly, living artists, writers and curators.

Nikos's ideas on the exponential over-use of screens and public spaces and the ideas of renegotiating public spaces, cultural institutions and 'places' for art were always of use to me. Though often the way I work is that I am engrossed, profoundly when I'm developing projects – and run almost entirely instinctively while I'm 'making', uncertain of where I'll end up (will it be one project, three or ten and so forth). Oddly though, I never start an art

project unless I have an inkling that its significance is worth exploring and its purpose and use are pertinent in some way. I find and locate the written part of my projects and research more clearly, only once I have finished the object-based part of the project. It's a way of forming and finding my language I guess.



Fig. 2. Drive Out Cinema, (Reality 10.55, Brandts Kunsthallen 2006) installation shot (courtesy Andrew Sunley Smith).

My *Drive Out Cinema* works (AUS/DK/SCOT) [Fig. 2] were in part engaged in the dialogue of spatial aesthetics. I designed the projects so that I could project large scale from anywhere around the city, screening relevant films and pieces that I thought would be worth depositing in broader public spaces. (Introducing experiences and polemics of something that I think more essential and engaging than normal consumer pedestrian imagery).

The title is of course a play on the unfortunately dwindling Drive In's as well as a direct statement and expression and reaction of mine to the more commercial brain-numbing, multi-million dollar offerings so easily encountered at the myriad franchise global cinema complexes.

These projects were my cinema: a cinema off the grid, a cinema of independence, a projection of alternatives - a cinema of encounter. I screened what I wanted and what I wanted people to witness.

The works are of course 'tools' as much as they are facilities: the cinema vehicles are what drags and forms the objects for my installations. Again the use of continual forward movement, the process of which is filmed and then screened with the aftermath.

Your work is described as 'cross-disciplinary' (incorporating photography, drawing, video, sculpture, performance, installation). Do you find yourself migrating across (or between) artistic disciplines as well as geographies and time zones? What are the effects of this? For example, might *The Drive Out Cinema* be read as a symptom of displacement anxiety?

Yes, it can, and should be read as this. In part, at least. It's a communication of anxiety as well as it's a call into question the empathy, value and dependence we seem to have placed and hierarchized in inanimate objects. There is a dialogue and a friction between ecology and capitalism being drawn out in the versions of the project.

In different countries I've used different styles, values and aesthetics of furniture and household items as a means of connecting to different groups, classes and age ranges. (In Denmark I destroyed two Jensen factory production Summer Chairs not to mention other objects of such focused carpentry work, as I knew how the slow destruction of these things would be felt by the audience and by the art & design communities). I've been exploring value, loss and belonging in these works. [Fig. 3]



Fig. 3. The Drive Out Cinema (detail), 2006 (courtesy Andrew Sunley Smith).

The translation of forms and concepts into differing aesthetic hierarchies has always been interesting to me – essential in fact as a means of testing and as a means of dialogue. The *Drive Out Cinema* is also a way of formalizing my own critique and dissent with the wider cultural value system of prestige through ownership and the constant drive, in our culture, to keep producing and feeding a quite superficial system.

You include documentation of what you call ‘micro gestures’ (the modification of the Carrier, the bookshelf archive, the growing of tomato plants, the eating of fish, insects spotted along the way) [Fig. 4]. What role do these incidental micro gestures play in the larger scale *Migratory Projects*?

The *Micro Gestures* are instructional, in part didactic, like a guide – in case others may want to explore and learn to adapt and modify similar things in similar ways. The project is a way of bringing the unseen into the forefront. It's also a means of documenting some of my smaller methods of intervention and what I see in part as resistance especially when it comes to adapting the vehicle series for instance. The *Micro Gestures* contain images of restoration, modification, re-engineering, road testing, recycling, referencing, adapting and images of travel; for example, they show how to modify a car's engine so that it can be used as a power source to power a cinema, to cook food using the excess heat, how to live away from a city, what techniques and tools to employ. The project is perhaps a survival guide as much as it is an inventory and a revealing of a way of life. It's an unfolding and revealing of my world of manufacture. I think the project is one about connection too: connection to technique. I think it's quite true that my sense of home comes more through techniques for me, not through geography or context. Techniques - making, realizing and forming art - are what I know. These things are my home.



Fig. 4. Carrier Archive, *Micro Gestures* 2005, (detail) (courtesy Andrew Sunley Smith).

The project is also about the economy of labour and its aestheticization. It is a revealing of real everyday methods of labour and artistic gestures not so much the grand, specialized, traditionally romanticized ones. It's a means of leveling as much as it is a way of canonizing a mode of art production. The notion of forms of high and low art have always amused me, and inspired irreverence toward anything that denotes a class system in the arts. *Micro Gestures*, in a way, backs up and quantifies the intense amount of labour and aesthetic decisions made, realized and tested in each project shown. It also shows the work learned and executed by one's own hands, one individual. I hope that the project is empowering for people to see, as opposed to alienating. With labour and skill a greener and better solution can be achieved. I experimented and ran a Ford V8 truck in Australia on LPG fuel that cost as much as a small car to fuel and polluted far less. I think if we need cars, we need to think about better and more sustainable systems. Going backwards can be an option, re-addressing. Importantly, we need the skills ourselves to ensure they work.

Micro Gestures is a tiny documentation of the thousands of tiny parts that make up the world - a revealing and a mindfulness displayed of ALL things - all the gestures that form a whole system or thing. It's about art being conscious as opposed to disengaged or detached from the greater everyday world. It's a project about self-awareness and responsibility in the production of art.

The project expands on and explores an idea I had that my work was informed by working-class aesthetics. The techniques, tools and processes I use, as well as where the ideas and final forms could find potency and relevance. I think that the project is partly a way of keeping my philosophy of dymaxion adaptation up front (maximum dynamics from any one thing) and present in my exhibitions. The *Micro Gestures* also reveal the waste and rubbish produced in the projects, so the documentation always provides an accountability; I kept all the tins, offcuts, sawdust, spraycans, paint rollers, and general refuse for over four years whilst doing projects in Australia. I wanted to see how much waste was produced, what my intentions had required, produced and consumed. It's like for every action a reaction, the project is about balance. Jacques Rancière himself has argued that equality is performed through a constant tallying of individual accounts and adjustments to shift the balances. I think that the balances do shift and that equality is attained by micro adjustments on a mass scale. Transparency of knowledge and of techniques ultimately aim to empower, as opposed to alienate. I think this is also the aim and reason for the *Micro Gestures*.

In the publicity material for the Glasgow show *Migratory Projects*, you commented: ‘I’ve always found that momentum and transition is always in my work and very much a part of migration, in terms of destruction or creation...The use of vehicles and engines has always been important and very firmly situated in the geography of Australian culture. Engines are also an important cultural metaphor for me, as they perpetually consume, burn and eventually exhaust’² The DIY autonomy of the Carrier modified for the CCA and your reference to the creative and destructive impact of migration above brings to mind certain aspects of anarchist thought. To what extent has the context of anarchism or utopianism informed the development of specific approaches or practices in your work?

My work on the whole is always ideas-driven and the forms and techniques change and develop to suit my ideas. However, I’ll often begin art projects once I have identified the attitude, sense, behaviour or mood I will need in order to complete and ‘temper’ a project. I think certain attitudes from anarchist thought underpin many artists’ characters - especially those born in the late 60s or early 70s in the UK. In a pop sense it was infused and symbolically (if nothing else) at the forefront of a few well known vibrant subcultures. Insofar as anarchy, in broad definition, is anti-coercive, I find myself more and more becoming fascinated by thoughts and views that society and individuals can be organized without a tax greedy, coercive, compulsory government, in whom no-one seems to believe or trust any longer. For example, the anarchist William Godwin, in *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its influence on modern morals and manners* (1793-1796), considered a minimal governmental state as a necessary and present evil that would become increasingly irrelevant and powerless by the gradual spread of knowledge within the masses.

I recently saw a film at Glasgow’s GFT, *Garbage Warrior* (Dir: Oliver Hodge, 2006), a documentary about the American architect Michael Reynolds, building for over 30 years in the New Mexico desert. Reynolds has been building and experimenting with detritus, recyclables, beer cans, car tyres and clay to construct sustainable low-impact, off-grid housing. The film documents his work as well as his battle to get his knowledge recognized and have a bill passed in government to allow his projects to continue. The film illustrates Godwin’s idea beautifully as we see Reynolds attempt to educate the government councillors and officials to recognize the importance of his groundbreaking ecological work. Reynolds is coerced at high emotional and personal financial cost, to alter the progress of his designs and constructions in order that they fit within state town planning regulations. The film sees Reynolds at logger-heads with the government for over three years, depleted and getting exhausted until he is finally granted the right to continue his experimentation into sustainable and ecological housing systems - only after getting a bill passed and recognized by the powers that be. One can gather through the duration and conversations within the film that it seems to take the three years for the government to get familiar and up to speed with Reynolds and the concepts that he is introducing to them. He is forced to write his applications in a language they – the Councillors - can understand. He is teaching them, and they are supposedly the informed ones... the people in power.

I would say I’m much more dystopian than utopian in thought. Yet my dystopian attitudes and observations drive me to want to change things. I’m much more interested in concrete examples of utopian attempts than in fictions on the subject. Recently, in a lecture I gave at the Bauhaus Universität in Weimar, I showed images of Andrea Zittel’s project *A-Z Pocket Property* (2000), a huge floating constructed, vegetated, self-sustaining concrete island of the *Micro Gestures For a New Co-Efficiency in Art: An interview with Andrew Sunley Smith*

coast of Denmark where Zittel lived with a group of friends for many months, growing food, cohabiting and trying out the system of free state existence. The whole project was made into a documentary about an experimental utopian living situation. Like Thomas More's original book, the situation begins to break down, Zittel and her friends argued, did not have all the necessary skills to fix water pumps, sustain food growth and maintain the balance of the island and generally realized they had no system of adequate motivation to keep things going. It's a very comical situation and, I guess, ultimately, to my mind, a false situation. But a living trial and example nonetheless.

Like Reynolds the architect, I find now the motivation in me comes from my dystopian observations that things are not as good as they could be. And it's getting worse. I think that most turbo capital cultures are not very mindful of the residual effects of what is being realized as they (and we) progress. I'm very much an 'every action has a reaction' kind of artist. Every gesture, every intention is conscious and so on. And I like to believe I'm too much of a pragmatist to get lost in dizzying and idealized utopian dreams.



Fig. 5. Trailer Garden project (2002-07) (courtesy Andrew Sunley Smith).

I see that we can really now only achieve a certain level of independence within dependence. My *Trailer Garden* project (2002-07) [Fig. 5] was exploring this idea. The idea that one could grow food, supplement a diet with vegetables nurtured and reared on one's own – obviously the supermarket is unavoidable (unless you are a land owner with lots of free time on your hands). The project, like many of my others, I treat as a prototype, not only to test things but as a form of thought too. I guess popping my head in the Trailer each time to pick food was my very own version of partial micro utopia. This was as escapist as I could get, or allow myself. Too much escapism is dangerous right now, I think.

I'm quite taken by the ideas of re-wilding the environment, the Anarco-Primitivist standpoint: a green anarchism of sorts. I think my experiences of living in Australia for many years have tempered this. I like the notion that people are humbled by wild and potentially dangerous creatures and environments around them, as in a strange and direct way it teaches people to respect their surroundings. (I've been surrounded by thousands of red-back (black widow spiders), swam in shark-inhabited waters and it was all fascinating and educational.)

People are more concerned and pre-occupied with what I call and term 'Upgrade Anxiety' whereby we are all so caught up in getting the latest Mac book, plasma TV, IPOD, Induction oven or latest luxury production run vehicle that they remain placid and passive to the facts that we now use more resources than we ourselves generate, and we use 20% more resources than nature can generate. As my favourite Guardian journalist and writer, chronicler and activist, George Monbiot informs us, our culture - in its current design and formation - demands the use of 50 tonnes of natural consumables each year to sustain an individual's life and activities.

You organized a symposium to coincide with *Migratory Projects* at CCA which was titled 'The New Co-Efficiency in Art' (17 October 2006, CCA, Glasgow). The term seems to combine your reading of Duchamp and Bourriaud, but what does it mean in relation to your practice?

I wanted to qualify and quantify my own practice as well as find better definitions to articulate the work I was looking at, researching and producing myself. I began using the term New Co-Efficiency to define and to best describe an art that works on, across and through various levels and can be accessed from various perspectives. Duchamp used the term in 1957 in a lecture on the 'creative process' to describe the new arts as going more underground and sourcing inspiration from fields far outside the normative realm of the traditional arts. Nicolas Bourriaud references the co-efficient in his seminal text *Relational Aesthetics*, but only very briefly. Relational art is like the second-phase realisation of Duchamp's co-efficient to my mind, the aftermath and manifestation of Duchamp's early forecasts.

My observations and research have shown me that what I see as being the most vital art of today, employs techniques of not only these two ideas, but strangely unmentioned from 1957 to the present is any recognition and articulation of the underpinning philosophy and practice of Pragmatism. And it is Pragmatism that I think is ultimately the core idea of both the co-efficient and the relational. Modern Pragmatism (Dewey and after – 1940s to present) always emphasized and canonized the role and use of art as a vital, usable, continuously flexible and successful means of heightening, revealing and bonding society together. Pragmatics emphasizes that knowledge should never be sacred and exclusive, but in fact should be inclusive and embrace all forms of tangible experience - placing worth upon actual concrete forms of interpretation. The new co-efficient, for me at least, is in fact all of the above; not a 'new wave' as such, but a newness that combines and references and links these ideas in a way that aims to increase the relevance and perhaps the use of art in our contemporary society. People should especially read John Dewey and Richard Shusterman in relation to Pragmatism. I think the most exciting aspects of contemporary art practice in the last few decades are, in fact, a resurgence and recrudescence of Pragmatist standpoints. (The posthumous interest and newly found relevance of Gordon Matta Clark, for example).

The strategies and materials that I use in my projects are carefully selected, as they are ones of very co-efficient natures. I like my projects to be able to function on differing levels – this has been a huge part of my investigations and the way in which I 'test' my own art and the art world itself. Co-efficiency in a work of art is very much an essential factor as the artwork must succeed aesthetically, conceptually, and socially if it is to be 'successful' and memorable in its communication. The co-efficient as described by Duchamp is to my mind, a proto-relational idea.



Fig. 6. Migratory Projects: The Drive Out Cinema, (PICA, 2007-08) installation shot. (courtesy Andrew Sunley Smith).

I use the term ‘new co-efficient’ in order to stretch and enlarge the definition away from the original slightly in order that it can encompass and house ideas that I attach into it from Pragmatics. It is a modification and re-design. Pragmatism is a co-efficient philosophy and vice versa. These ideas cross flow delightfully. My practice demonstrates by ‘example’, as opposed to the old methods of ‘suggestion’ alone, and tests my ideas through the forms I choose, use and adapt. I’ve wanted to develop a non-representational form of art. A direct system of use, production and broader concrete meaning.

The emancipatory enlargement of the aesthetic involves... re-conceiving art in more liberal terms, freeing it from its exalted cloister, where it is isolated from life and *contrasted to* more popular forms of cultural expression. [...] there is no compelling reason to accept the narrowly aesthetic limits imposed by the established ideology of autonomous art... [an ideology which] is no longer so profitable, or even creditable.³

How does the installation of *Migratory Projects: The Drive Out Cinema* (PICA, 6 December 2007 - 27 January 2008) [Fig. 6] differ from the version installed in CCA Glasgow (7 October – 18 November 2006)? How important is it for the viewer to see all three of the *Drive Out Cinema* works together.

I think it is quite important that all three films are screened together as viewing the three works installed together gives a more global twist to the content. With each film being essentially and intentionally the same action/process repeated in Australia, Denmark and Scotland - only with the style and content of the furniture used varying as best a possible to fit with the culture in which each film was made. The common factors to all, were the direct use of the earth in this case as a destructive and resistant force, and the development and use of the carrier vehicles in each country that dragged, formed and ‘sculpted’ the furniture. (Along with the earth itself, as a tool as it were -via fossil fuel combustion engines; again fuelled by and made from the earth, oil, petrol, diesel, and LPG gas.) In many ways the film project and drag process is a complete loop. Dust to dust, ashes to ashes: all of our value hierarchies that we place in commodities being destroyed, torn, pulled apart almost vengefully by the earth itself.

An important part of the context of the Perth ICA show, was that the huge amount of earth in this installation was on the second and top floor of a building in a large room over 20 meters long by 9 meters wide. It was a large Earthwork, all of which had to be carefully carried and transported up the stairs and via lift to the top of the building, which for the more astute and

sensitive would indicate that it had to be cared for, nurtured almost. One to one handling, barrow by barrow, bag by bag. 'How did all that earth get up here?', etc. It was quite a feat, task and achievement for the install crew - whom I thanked individually in the catalogue. Additionally, I wanted to test the three films together, to bring out the ramifications of differing cultures essentially all acting the same way, repeating the same gestures, building cultures in similar ways and holding very similar value systems. The same comfort signifiers. The research part of the project was to see how much the three cultures differed in response.

More violently and importantly, I wanted to explore the idea of overload and create a bit of a cacophony, sort of a whole room of feedback, violence, empathy (for the destruction of commonly valued and loved mundane items). The films individually are quite violent on their own in parts, but together I think take on a much greater force, and 'scale' naturally. I wanted the work to be uncomfortable and overwhelming. Individually people say the works are quite poetic - which is part of their seduction, and the way they are edited and slowed down is about leading people into the work calmly... detail is noticed, and each physical movement and tug of the rope, twist, bruise and tumble is 'felt' a lot more - before it gets uncomfortable.

In Denmark I dragged and destroyed some Jensen production country chairs, and some beautifully crafted oak furniture and an amazing Danish side table, as well as a good portion of white goods, leather loungers and lovely classic Danish beds. I want with the furniture in each country to be able to attach to different stratas of social groups, wealth, class and backgrounds. I was informed by the curator of the Brandts Kunsthallen *Reality 10.55* exhibition that the work attracted the most intrigue, upset, disturbance and interest by far.

Ultimately the films are about the destruction of comfort and familiarity – but by the very machinery and dynamics of industrial culture, the culture that first enabled and produced the objects that define it. The constant and forward movement, let loose and returning, feeding back.

I always like to fully test and draw out all the meaning I intended in the work that I make. I want to extract all the meaning and excess feedback that I can. I am very interested in the notion of cultural feedback, the idea of culture overloading and feeding back on or into itself. I'm thinking a great deal about this lately. It's the fine line between maximum dynamics (Buckminster Fuller's *Dymaxions*) and overload that I'm becoming more and more intrigued by.

How does your artistic practice relate to your PhD research at the College of Fine Arts, the University of New South Wales, Sydney? Do you see any differences between the culture of artistic research in UK and Australia?

My practice relates directly to my PhD, and I see the PhD research as no different in essence to what I would normally be doing as an artist. The PhD naturally allows time to practice delivering seminars, lectures and writing of course, as well as allow time to develop and test projects.

I started my PhD as a natural progression of simply accruing research and reference material, through pure interest alone, in the area of art I term as 'Pragmatic' or 'newly co-efficient,' which, thanks to Bourriaud, can also be defined as 'relational art'. I had also been working on producing a number of art works that really were straddling between the old disciplines and

had started to use the exhibition space for something perhaps a little broader than for simply viewing art passively.

My work was about adapting and reconfiguring vehicles, engines, developing alternative power sources, gardening, direct interaction, direct experience, intervention and, above all, the notion that art itself was always determined by the encounter. I was basically asking a lot of questions and not finding any credible and satisfying answers or examples of work. So, I set about trying to find more and more information. I travelled to Holland, the UK, China, Denmark and throughout Australia in order to build on my ideas. The lecturing staff I was talking to also knew very little about the things I was finding, so I knew there was so much information missing.

I think the main difference between the UK and Australian research practices, speaking personally, is that I have found that on average, I think, due to the constant feeling of geographical isolation from Europe, in Australia you research much harder to find what you need and have to go further afield to have things answered. But there is a great thoroughness to Australian culture and a mindfulness as well as that great iconoclastic attitude that goes with the culture and people. It is a fantastic point from which to approach research and from which to define newness. It is the new world personified, made in the majority from migrants who have fused ideas from all across the world.

It is a much more straightforward culture than the UK, less bureaucratic too. This is reflected in the academic institutions also. When my PhD started it was very new for the art institutions in Sydney. I think I was the second person at the NSW College of Fine arts to take it on. I was the very first Arts graduate in all of Western Australia to receive a full Scholarship award for Post-graduate art studies, which in itself was groundbreaking. In a way I was stepping into unknown territory and luckily went on to an institution that allowed me to customize my own course to a certain degree.

I said in my doctorate interview that I did not want to produce another literary degree, quoting old dead writers, but wanted to focus on living artists and the work and research they did. The people producing culture right now were my interest. The living writers, artists, curators and related influences were to be the focus. I set myself these parameters, yet I also said that I wanted the work, the objects, the artworks to always come first. I had a fear of my work becoming less vital, less vibrant and depleted by the constant demand for over-definition. I've always seen the production of artworks, writing and research as a synonymous and symbiotic affair, and have always balanced between them comfortably. But to be certain, I agreed with my interview panel that I should weight my course structure as 70% studio production and 30% written component. (Years down the track the PhD formed itself into much more a 50-50 weighting however). Like any course, though, it comes down to the fact of having good rapport, relationships and conversations with ones supervisors as well as an unshakable amount of self-discipline. I think I found the newness of the courses difficult at times, when one needs clear instruction and definition, as the system in a sense was still defining itself when I began my research. Though the freedom that the newness provided allowed a lot of scope to negotiate and experiment.

I think most of my interest in working with any institutions has been at early and formative stages, where I find things much more transparent and you recognize that for a while you are

part of the very system you are helping to define... Australia can be a lot like that at times. When I started I think I was quantifying and qualifying my own practice and defining its context, as well as also helping to quantify the nature of an art PhD within the College of Fine Arts NSW.

With the crashing waves which frame the final *Drive out cinema* sequence (filmed on the Isle of Bute in Scotland), along with your wreckage have we washed up ‘on the shores of politics’?

I do love the idea and the challenge of being washed up. Smashed and debased and having to re-assess and start again. It's a refreshing thought to my mind, as a migrant. I know it well. It's a point of beginning and of redefining.

Some people have accused Rancière quiet harshly of being a tired fantasist in his views, espousing the end of ideology, the end of politics, and of utopia, but the dynamics of the world are very different now, much more fragmented I think and more difficult to organize. Rancière raises many key points in which I find resonance. The whole idea that we should explore the affects of no longer thinking about the future in terms of a utopian possibility and lose the idea of having a yardstick as such, a goal of finality based on forward motions of politics and social transcendence, and stop believing that ‘time’ is somehow the thing that will transform everything. We have an almost mystical and passive belief that time we will solve things. This, as Ranciere alludes, is a mirage.

I would say that politics (like art) is now in a global state of redefinition, post the cold-war dynamics. Rancière's aim is to analyze and criticize the dogmatism of old political ideological systems as well as assess the metamorphosis of the old political divisions of the old socialist left, the Marxist, the capitalist and the newer democratic orders.

I think, Australia as a country and as a situation, is the best metaphor for this. It is a country that is populated in the majority by peoples from other countries and cultures, all from very different political situations, South Africa, Britain, Ireland, Japan, China, Italy, Holland, to name but a few. If we take politics to be the control and ‘organisation of dissent,’ and if we look at Australia in these terms, Australian dissent (as an organized shared dynamic) is always strangely dissipated by the majority not wanting to be involved (this is why the indigenous issue has taken so long to address).

Predominantly most new Australians left behind the old politics and lifestyles by choice and through a great deal of effort and hardship to escape, as it were, to set themselves free - adrift yet on a trajectory to a new world. Many, for example, having witnessed the conclusion of Thatcher's UK, the disorder and chaos of South Africa, the police states of China and, for some, the direct and very real need to flee from the Middle East in order to save life and family. Who, after experiencing these situations, would want to engage in the old politics and the world it had produced and engendered?

This is not to imply this is a form of passivity, but to the contrary, I think this is the new Australian citizen's form of resistance – to no longer engage. To be left alone and be free of the old world as much as possible in order to develop new systems and new orders collectively. Naturally the old world crops up and the outside world invades the peace and decorum in examples like the Woomera detention centre and the Tampa crisis in 2001. The *Micro Gestures For a New Co-Efficiency in Art: An interview with Andrew Sunley Smith*
<http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n1/sunley.html>

outcomes of which were that Australia had to re-draw radically its immigration policies and massively reinforce its borders. Symbolically and physically both are gestures of keeping people and 'politics' away and from washing up on its shores, en masse. A new world in contemporary conundrum, but wanting to keep the detritus of the old world from its shores as much as it can possibly get away with and with due protective process. Australia is a young, developing country, a living situation of continual research and development, attempting to administrate what the shores continually offer, bring in and wash up.

It is empowering to be free of the weight of history. One can always swim further.

¹ Nikos Papastergiadis - Global flows and hybrid art in the age of siege <http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=63> [accessed 13 July 2008]

² http://www.cca-glasgow.com/events/sunley_smith.html [accessed 13 July 2008]

³ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Second Edition, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), p. xv; p. 143. See also Richard Shusterman, 'Breaking Out of the White Cube', in Suzi Gablik, *Conversations before the end of time* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p. 247-65.