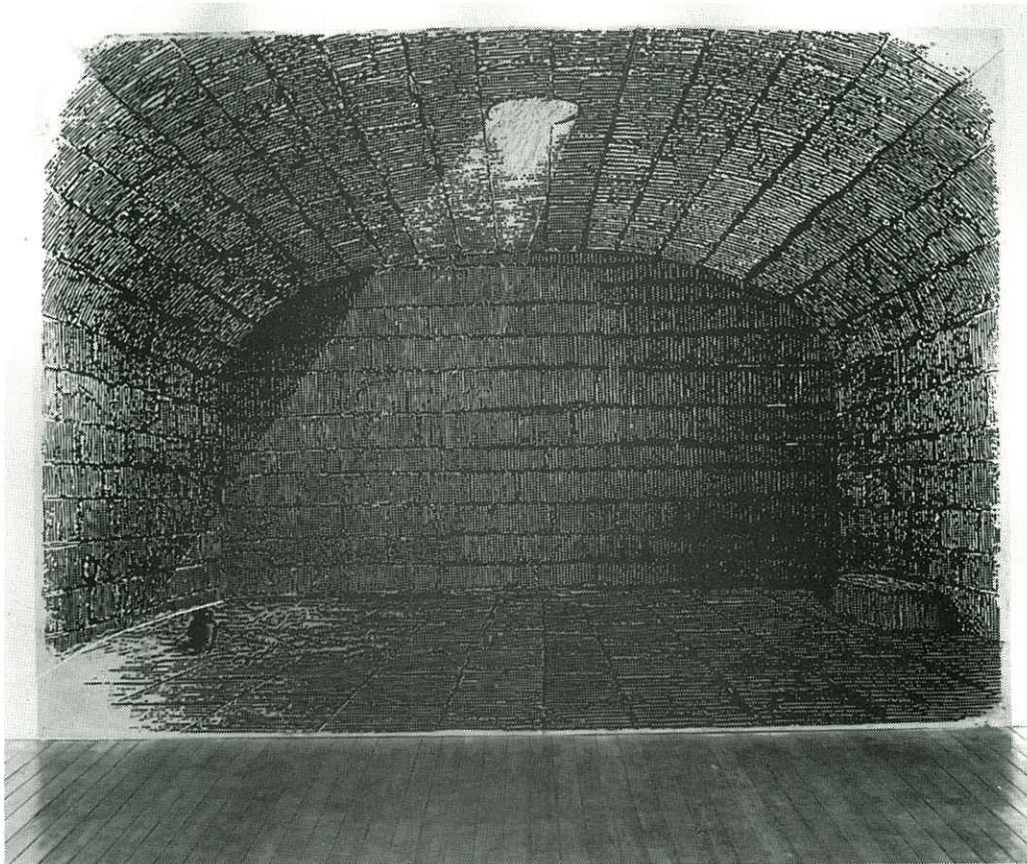


KEN ORCHARD

net-work: the prison of vision



net-work: the prison of vision, (1987). Cat. 3

net-work, n. 1. a work of art, comprised of two woodblock panels, each 3.3 x 4.5 metres, and each divided into seven sections, into which numerous lines have been gouged; this scarred service. 2. two reproductions after engravings, of the Tessellated pavement, Tasmania (43.0° S, 147° 26' E), taken from Garran's Picturesque Atlas of Australasia, Vol.2, 1886, p.503; and an interior view of the upper cell of the Marmertine Prison, Rome (41° 53' N, 12° 30' E), taken from Cassell's Illustrated Family Bible, c.1845, p.337, New Testament. 3. a relationship between various forms of reproductive media, namely engraving, photomechanical reproduction and woodblock carving. 4. a graphic correspondence between interior architectural masonry and tessellation disclosed by natural reductive processes; a visual concordance between these two structures. 5. an opposition of two one point perspectives, arranged in such a manner as to effect psychological responses in a viewer; an implied relationship between these two works and a third party. 6. an inversion of the traditional value accorded to the mediating substance (i.e. its persistent reduction to the status of artefact) by labour investment in the primary surface. 7. the total sum of labour, exclusive of deductions.

April 16 to May 15 1988.

In reality every thought represents the capacity to grasp the divisions of a whole... numbers are nothing else than the divisions of a unity... In myself and in others I began to observe how many numbers a man can really conceive, that is to say, can carry in his mind without breaking them down or writing them out; how many successive consequences of a principle can he grasp at once... And I never found the number to be greater than four... That's why we're constantly mistaking accident for substance, effects for cause, means for end... and ourselves for something eternal.

Rene Daumal: Mount Analogue
Penguin, UK, © 1959, p69-70

Daumal's criticism of the discontinuous, careless anarchy of the Western ego aptly describes some major characteristics of post-modern theory, that fragmented mind which deconstructs the whole with the intention of revealing the secret conditionings within it: a quest for multiple messages without any meaning; par excellence, this process devotes itself to the accident, which it intentionally mistakes for the substance – a dry, intellectual defeatism which extolls the banal and the purposeless.

Such an attitude rejects the possibility of any ethical perspective in its intense anti-humanism (from one point of view, a healthy antagonism to the death-blinds of ancient, mystified, ethical structures). But, in continuously emphasizing the breaks in the patterns (the blanks in any structure, the necessity of fortuitous leaps within the pretended logical structures of the past) post-modernism itself, illogically, asserts the impossibility of any continuum of meaning. That is, 'Truth' is to be necessarily excluded from any intellectual quest as its possible consequence, while its ambiguous twin, 'honesty', guides the quest itself.

There can be no 'principles', as such, to destructure (in Daumal's meaning). All pursuits are paradigms floating loose from any intent. The ego, in its determined assertion of permanent dominance over nature, is dispossessed in post-modernism in a manner which Daumal could not have foreseen. For, it is not replaced by any other more universal principle such as the peradems of **Mount Analogue** symbolize and the attainment of which they reward. Instead, both culture and nature are assigned to the precipices of void.

The problem extends from the metaphysical to the socio-political. Imants Tillers offers a parallel observation to Daumal's, without, however, pretending to the confidence of the latter's resolution. Tillers' inability to make a commitment with such assurance is represented in his work, as in much art of the twentieth century, by the grid.

In the spatial sense, the grid states the autonomy of the realm of art... antinatural, antimimetic, antireal. It is what art looks like when it turns its back on nature... its order is that of pure relationship... it deals with paradox or contradiction not by dissolving the paradox or resolving the contradiction, but by covering them over so that they seem (but only seem) to go away... (it) allows a contradiction between the values of science and those of aspiritualism to maintain themselves within the consciousness of modernism...

Rosalind E. Krauss: The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths.
MIT Press, USA/UK, © 1985.

In a post-modernist context, the re-use of the grid emphasizes the ambiguous retreat from purpose. It also concedes victory to the mechanically reproductive modes of the century, which have ousted both the 'craft' aspect of the 'high' arts and the notion of a dominating artistic personality behind the single work of art. What Tillers' grid essentially intends is to work against its own origins in the avant-garde myth. But how it actually operates within the works themselves re-opens possibilities of resolutions. And this is where Ken Orchard's installations, **net-work: the prison of vision**, and its inverse, **DGB 16 f.54-55 (Vol.12)**, take-up the

unravelling threads of Tillers' **Mount Analogue** and, in a highly complex way, reconcile Tillers' uncertainty with Daumal's activist optimism by providing both with an actual geography within nature and an origin in human history.

For Michel Foucault, who still offers an effective role for the intellectual in the socio-political structures of the later twentieth century, 'Truth' is power itself. Whereas Tillers recites the names of those who were empowered to produce 'Truth' in other epistemes (and, thus, 'history') by writings which are, in the present episteme, only incantations, mantras, words of power which conjure up now only illusions instead of substance, Orchard re-writes in his carving the cartographical data of von Guérard's sketches, data which still enable an actual presence (the mountains) to manifest. Nature is relocated in relation to culture in his juxtaposition with Tillers' work. As in Daumal's book the everyday presence of the physical re-adjusts and makes possible the spiritual aspirations. The two are bonded and the physical is no illusion.

'Truth' is produced in an intersection between the physical, the historical and the metaphysical. Foucault maintained the possibility of 'a new politics of truth' by 'detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony'. It could be freed from its 'circular relation to systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it'. (Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton [eds.] Michel Foucault, **Power, Truth, Strategy**, Sydney, 1979, p47.) The essential key was in changing the relation of the hegemony to the productive forces of nature and to the socio-political/cultural structure.

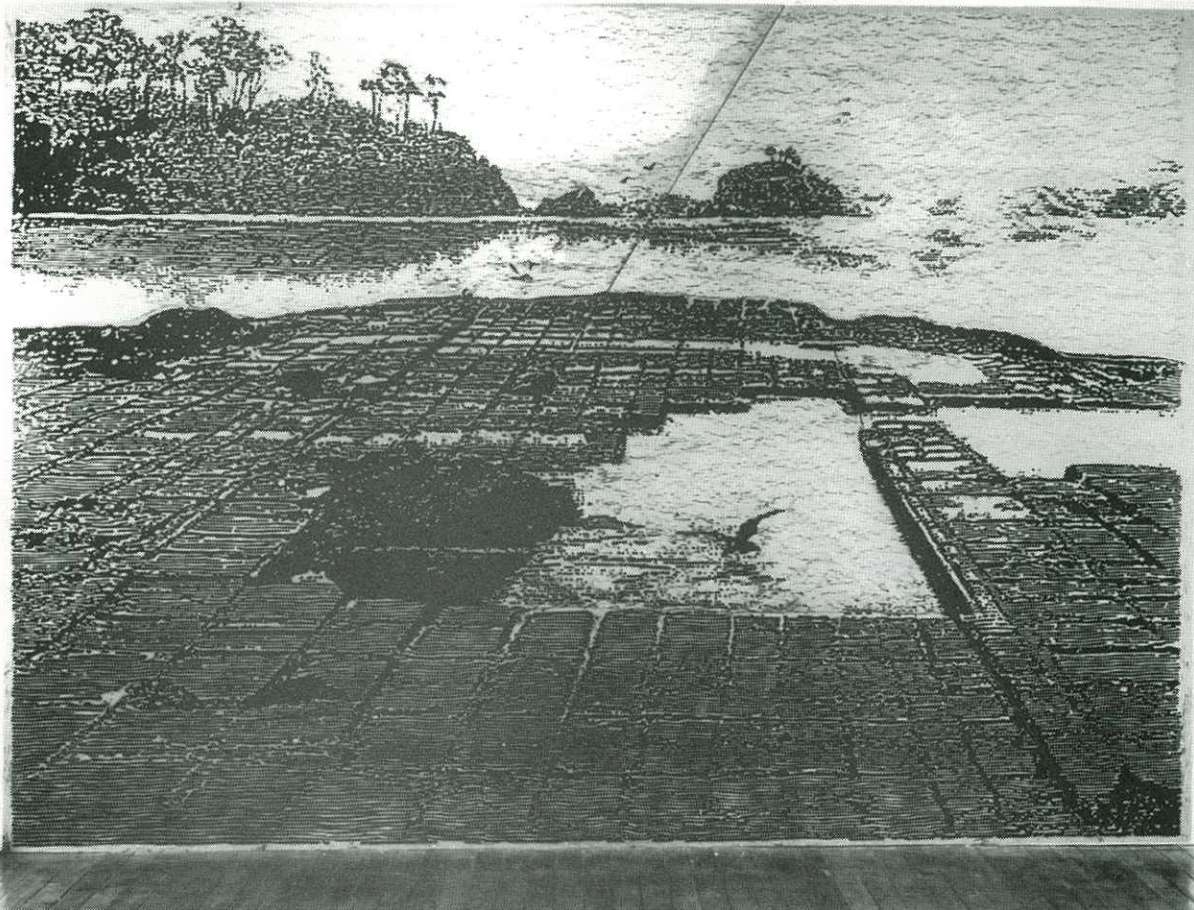
Tillers' notion of 'Truth' is a flat criticism of the Australian condition of banal marginality, of the quote of the quote, of the unreality of the post-modern 'culture'. Gridded onto the von Guérard, **Mount Analogue** refers back to white Australian myths of origin, of the Promised Land; in the landscapes of colonization, stand the founding fathers of its aesthetic culture of platitudes of myth and splendour. Nonetheless, Tillers' work is a magnificent and effective work itself, of an inspiring grandeur. It does not cancel out the intention of the past. And it was this which generated the parallel statement of the present exhibition.

The reference to Daumal, to his insistence on the totality of Truth and its possible attainment, lifts Tillers' work out of a critique of collective national chauvinism into that of personal, ethical integrity. It also ambivalently activates Daumal's dreams. Ken Orchard's works, in turn, highlight Tillers' ambivalent desire for Truth and power, as well as his admiration of Tillers' artistic and intellectual accomplishments. Orchard's work is not a socio-political statement, save indirectly, but is a unification of its physical and metaphysical aspects.

Tillers' **Mount Analogue** was intended to be understood as a sequence of parts, lacking a principle referent, a point of union. It was a deliberate fragmentation. Orchard draws across the gap, the break, between it and its originator, by entering into the archeology of the works, to the level of von Guérard's original drawing, seeking that holism which Tillers both desires and denies.

That inspirational and physical point of origin was repeated in Orchard's working method... the carving of an image into that first primitive means of reproduction, the woodblock. This functional labour metaphorizes the historical layering and stratification by nature, reversing it into a process of recovering information, removing layer after layer. Several other inverses follow in the process. The post-modern reverence for mechanical reproduction, and the traditional arts' powerlessness in respect to it, was relocated historically by Orchard's use of the woodcut. This, in turn, was detoured from its original function. Although prints were taken from the block so that a formalist and semantic play ensued of negative and positive inversions, the blocks themselves were to be displayed as, firstly, sculptural reliefs and, secondly, as installations which would move from the two-dimensional

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(which represents atmosphere and absorbs viewer through illusion) to the three-dimensional which is actual space and light. Continually, Orchard was striking at an inter-relation and a motion across the gaps of two-dimensional and three-dimensional, that is, cerebral and physical. The method of working was an answering statement to that of Tillers' own laborious ethic of procedure.

Orchard's insistence on the physicality of the subject-matter of his two works and also on the process of making was further emphasized by the displaying of chips carved out of the blocks. Into the refined discourse of the intellectual, enters, and demands recognition, the physical presence of the human as a construct of this earth, not just as a conceptual entity of a particular cultural structure. This is certainly a direct statement in Foucaultian terms, as well as in the contrasting metaphysical dreams of Daumal, of the conditions under which new paradigms of behaviour and aspiration must be created.

The grids in Orchard's work, as in Tillers' are actual breaks, but Orchard has turned them into arabesques which are both formally pleasing and also construct the perspectival spaces of the two **net-work** panels, freeing and trapping vision, and moving (as in his relief/installation relations) from the formal to the illusionistically-constructural in the same view. A more complex relation than exists in Tillers' boards.

Another inversion which acts as unificatory principle exists in the mutual dependence of **net-work: the prison of vision** and **DGB 16 f.54-55 (Vol.12)**, in the generation of the latter work from the former, both conceptually and materially from the off-cuts of **net-work**. **net-work** was partially instigated by Orchard's own personal history from a source in the family Bible of illustrations of scenes of sacred sites. These, Orchard (as in the case of the von Guérard) has located physically by producing cartographic references for their location on the earth, externalizing them back into the spaces of nature. But, they remained tied to his own memories of a distant familial connection with the hermetic

tradition of masonry.

Like Daumal's personal fascination with both the hidden and the earthly, the personal and universal principles, with the mundane facts of the physical coating of the human mind and the body's negotiating of nature, Orchard seeks to integrate the dualism of existence into the one act. He speaks of it as an archeology, implying the layering of meanings in his works, but, in fact, he returns to Daumal's profound influence on him, beyond the post-modern concept of the multi-layered codes. In Orchard's work, there is a holism in which the constituents of a structure are not only consecutively, methodically, recited and numbered, but, through the act of carving matter, are restored into a unity in which the breaks between the parts disappear.

The inversions are signifiers of this process of restoration. The formal symbols of this are the two triangular structures, one upright, the other inverted, in **net-work: the prison of vision**. Inner and outer spaces echo each other in the pyramidal constructions of the woodblocks and their reversals. In this inversion and mirroring are there two elements, or one?

The size of the works wrought by minute, painstaking, miniaturist, obsessive labour, and the insistence that they be viewed both as descriptions of the process of copying and also as craftwork, a labour amid intellectual pretension, playing off current theory against traditional explorations of naturalism (of light and its poetic and hermetic, as well as its naturalistic, impressionistic allusions) produces not merely impacted meaning, but is a reflection of the ambiguous paradoxicality of Tillers' statements: another view of the constructions of Truth in our culture. Construction, working-method, meaning are the same thing in Orchard's current work – one answer to the illogical jumps in the patterns of Western thinking.

Urszula Szulakowska. © 1987
Dept. of Art History, University of Queensland.

KEN ORCHARD

Curriculum Vitae

Born Adelaide, S.A., 1959

Education

South Australian College of Arts and Education
1978-82.

Awarded B.A.F.A. (Sculpture)

Second Year (p/t) Masters candidate (Sculpture), S.C.A.
1986.

Group Exhibitions

- 1981 SAS Channel 10 Young Artist's Award
Exhibition, Festival Theatre, Adelaide.
- 1982 *There at the time*, S.A. Workshop members
Exhibition, Roundspace Gallery, Adelaide.
- 1983 *Recent South Australian Sculpture*, Survey
Exhibition, Art Gallery of South Australia.
- 1983/1984 *Outlook*, Travelling Art Exhibition, Art
Gallery of South Australia.
- 1986 *Hungry*, Sydney College of the Arts
Sculpture Dept. Exhibition, Performance
Space, Sydney
Exiles or Expatriates? Exhibition, Festival
Theatre foyer, Adelaide.
- 1987 *Woodblock Prints*, Central Theatres
Gallery, Griffith University, Brisbane.
The Ark, ARX 87, Distance project, Perth.
Group Exhibition, Gallery 52, Perth.
net-work, Two person Exhibition, Artspace,
Sydney.
The Figure, The Pedersen Memorial Prize
for Drawing and Printmaking. Queensland
Art Gallery.
- 1988 *net-work*, Solo Exhibition, Contemporary
Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide.
net-work, Solo Exhibition, Australian
Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne.
Bradford Print Biennale, Bradford,
England.

Works in Public Collections

Art Gallery of South Australia.
Griffith University Collection, Queensland.
Robert Homes à Court Collection, W.A.
Art Gallery of Western Australia.
Queensland Art Gallery.

Publications

Artlink, Sept. 1981.
S.A. Art Gallery Broadsheet, March, 1983.
Outlook, Travelling Art Exhibition catalogue, A.G.S.A.,
1983/4.
Contributor - *Fade To Black* magazine, S.C.A. film
group, 1985.
Contributor - *Hungry* exhibition catalogue, May, 1986.
Artlink, Dec.-Feb. 1987.
Woodblock Prints catalogue, Griffith University, Qld.,
1987.
net-work: the prison of vision catalogue, Artspace,
Sydney, 1987.
The Figure catalogue, Pedersen Memorial Prize
Exhibition, Queensland Art Gallery, 1987/8
Artlink, March-May 1988.

Prizes/Grants

SAS Channel 10 Young Artist's Award, 1981.
The Maude Vizard-Wholohan Aquisition Prize, 1982.
South Australian Arts Grants Commission grant, 1983.
Occupied V.A.B. New York Studio, Soho, N.Y.C., 1983.
Artist-in-Residence (Printmaking), Griffith University,
Qld., 1987.
The Pedersen Memorial Prize for Printmaking,
Queensland Art Gallery, 1987.

List of Works

1. **Three Textures**,
(1986) 244 x 366 cm
3 woodblock panels on plywood
2. **Three Textures**,
(1986) 244 x 366 cm
3 woodblock prints on Stonehenge paper
edition of 6
courtesy private collection
3. **net-work: the prison of vision**,
(1987) each 325 x 456 cm
2 x 7 piece woodblock panels
courtesy of Art Gallery of Western Australia
4. **net-work: the prison of vision**,
(1987) each 350 x 475 cm
2 x 7 piece woodblock prints on cotton duck
edition of 4
courtesy of Art Gallery of South Australia
5. **DGB 16 f.54-55 (Vol.12)**,
(1987) 180 x 610 cm
112 woodblock panels
6. **DGB 16 f.54-55 (Vol.12)**,
(1987) 180 x 610 cm
112 panelled woodblock prints on Arches/Stonehenge
paper
edition of 6
7. **Cutty Sark**,
(1987) 92 x 137 cm
woodblock print on cotton duck
edition of 10
8. **Transformation**,
(1987) 375 x 375 cm
17 panelled woodblock prints on cotton duck
edition of 5
9. **Heart of Stone**,
(1987) 115 x 200 cm
woodblock prints on cotton duck
edition of 5

The works dated 1987 were made during a six month
Artist-in-Residence program at the Queensland Film
and Drama Centre, Griffith University, Queensland.
The residency was funded by the Queensland Ministry
for the Arts and Visual Arts/Crafts Board of the
Australia Council.

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