ABOVE AND BEYOND

Austral/Asian interactions

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KATE BEYNON

SIMRYN GILL

JOAN GROUNDS

LINDY LEE

KEVIN TODD

GUAN WEI

JOHN YOUNG

NEIL EMMERSON

PAT HOFFIE

ALWIN REAMILLO

AH XIAN

EMIL GOH

JUDY WATSON

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CURATORS
Clare Williamson and Michael Snelling

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AUSTRAL/ASIAN INTERACTIONS

Clare Williamson and Michael Snelling

(We are now) poised in a liminal space and an in-between time, which, having broken out of the binary opposition between circular and linear, gives a third space and a different time the chance to emerge. (KUMKUM SANGARI) [1]

This exhibition arises out of a new space which has emerged within contemporary practice in Australia over the past decade. It is a space characterised by complex interchanges between Australia and the many cultures of the Asia-Pacific region manifested across governmental, commercial, and cultural spheres. Recent increased artistic dialogue between the regions has led to exciting and important opportunities for exchange, both on personal and collective levels. This activity has enabled a blurring of borders as well as greater recognition of the ongoing presences of Asian cultural practices within Australian art itself. *Above and Beyond* highlights these influences by bringing together artists from several generations, artistic and philosophical positions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, working in differing media, and with varying degrees of involvement with Asia.

There are treacherous waters in any cross cultural escapades—the colonial and postcolonial histories of East and West, antithetical political and cultural systems, different racial and ethnic groups, migratory histories and patterns, to name a few. We are in a world/time that uses languages of 'diversity', 'chaos', 'multiculturalism', 'pluralism'—the languages of difference, the non-unified, the pandemonium—not the languages of order, regularity, conformity. We are also, however, in the time of One Australia, Distinctly Australian, globalisation (the global village), cyberspace and virtual reality. While the Soviet empire collapses, the European Union establishes itself. As the centre/periphery debates are newly constituted in the aftermath of the dissipation of the Cold War, the tensional forces of capitalism and communism have deteriorated as capitalism has emerged the winner (there had to be a winner, that's how the debate was conducted) and the images on our television screens are no longer about skirmishes in the arms race between the two centres and the peripheries (the Contras in Central America, the Cubans in Angola, the Russians in Afghanistan) but about culture, identity, ethnicity, and nation (in Rwanda, Bosnia, Sri Lanka, Fiji, Malaysia, India, Australia).[2]

There are problems inherent in all this cross culturing. How much does this exhibition, and similar projects, further the colonial impetus (not simply a West to East colonialism, but, increasingly, an economic imperialism that pays scant regard to Kipling's old truism about East being East, West being West and never the twain shall meet) and contribute to the submerging of difference? 'The post modern has made some features of the post colonial visible or speakable for the colonisers, reassuringly strange and safely subversive, just as Orientalism did in an earlier stage of colonial ideology.'[3] Some artists have been at pains to stress that while they are anxious to step outside many of the political and cultural restrictions of their countries, this does not deny their 'other' culture. Additionally, their practice may or may not have anything to do with a 'search for identity'; although this exhibition deals with identities, it is not, fundamentally, about framing these artistic practices as a search for self. To do so would be to imply, as many of the debates about identity do, a world of lost souls, artists, ethnicities and nations voyaging without a compass on a choppy postcolonial sea, trying to avoid being washed up on the rocky shores of the West.

During recent years, Australia has been the site of significant cultural trade (both import and export) with Asia. Through major projects such as the *ARX* (Artists Regional Exchange) events and the *Asia-Pacific Triennials,* as well as individual exhibitions of contemporary work from countries such as Japan, Thailand, Taiwan and China, artists and audiences in Australia have had access to a rich mix of current practice from throughout the region. At the same time, the 'export' of Australian art exhibitions and artists to Asia by organisations such as

1: Kumkum Sangari, quoted in Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings,* Pantheon, New York, 1990, pp 4-5

2: Kalantzis, Mary, 'Centres and Peripheries', *Republica,* Issue 3, Angus & Robertson, 1995, p 207, an article which examines how cenre/periphery debates interface with Australia's multicultural policies and the Australian identity.

3: Mishra, Vijay and Hodge, Bob, 'What is Post(-)colonialism?' in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory,* Harvester Wheatsheaf, New York, 1993, p 289. Quoted by Melissa Chiu in *John Young, The Double Ground Paintings,* Australian Art Promotions, Sydney, 1995, p 8

Asialink has provided a broader profile for Australian culture as well as nurturing the incorporation of new ideas and processes into Australian art practice. These developments have occurred within a broader environment of postmodernism and postcolonialism which, more universally, are also perhaps encouraging multiplicities of voices and the decentering of cultural sites.

In 1991, Rodney Hall, then Chair of the Australia Council, declared that 'there can be no doubt that Australia's future is essentially linked to Asia'.[4] Over the next two years more than fifty percent of the Council's international budget was directed toward projects involving the Asia-Pacific region. Slightly earlier, Asialink had begun its program of exhibitions of contemporary Australian art to Asia and residencies for Australian artists in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, China, Malaysia and India. There are many theories surrounding such developments in cultural policy, ranging from the celebratory to the cynical. Pamela Hansford lists a number of factors including our moves towards a republic and our claims to be a truly multicultural nation, but also the fact that Asia provides us with a way out of the dead-endism of postmodernism. 'The problem was that we were all dressed up with nowhere to go. Asia has provided this much needed destination... Exotic and relatively peaceful [in the economic eyes of the west], the East has once again become an antidote for a decline in the fortunes of the West.'[5]

This exhibition deals with the implications of such recent activity for Australia's own cultural landscape.[6] A number of Asian-Australian artists represented here have spoken about a new climate in which to express their 'Asianness' as participants in Australian culture. At the same time, non-Asian-Australian artists included here have indicated a turning of attention to Asia as well as the traditional Europe and USA as sources for their work. By presenting their work together here, this exhibition suggests the complexities and slippages which now exist and which prevent any easy categorisations or expectations of appearances or content.

While unique because of the various factors outlined above, this present moment in Asian/Australian cultural dialogue also has a history which extends back to the nineteenth century with the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants and the rise of Orientalism.[7] During the earlier part of the twentieth century, Australian artists who in some sense engaged with or travelled to Asia included Margaret Preston, Ian Fairweather and Donald Friend, and more recently, artists such as Tim Johnson. Australia has regularly received exhibitions from Asia, however until very recently these have tended to only present traditional and historical work in keeping with an Orientalist view of the region as an inscrutable other, as existing in another time as well as another space from our own. Edward Said wrote of such attitudes, 'Something patently foreign and distant acquires, for one reason or another, a status more rather than less familiar...The Orient at large, therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty.'[8] The importance of recent projects such as the *Asia-Pacific Triennials* and the *ARX* events is that they have challenged such views by presenting contemporary work which engages with current global issues affecting both the East and the West.

> *When East becomes North and West is under your feet, your compass spins frighteningly. To calm it you must find for yourself a new axis.* (JUDITH WRIGHT)[9]

Before discussing any of the individual artists and their works here, it is necessary to acknowledge that the use of terms such as 'Asia', 'Asian', 'East' and 'West' are convenient shorthand but are also misleading in their implications of the region as a 'monoculture' and of its actual physical relationship to Australia. 'Asia' and 'Asian' are terms which have tended to disguise the enormous diversity of cultures, languages, beliefs and political systems throughout the region. At a time when globalisation (specifically 'Westernisation') is threatening to dissolve much of this actual diversity, many communities within Asia are consciously responding with measures to ensure environmental protection and the preservation of indigenous cultures, although this is by no means unproblematic as the recent history of, for example, Fiji publicly demonstrates. Australia sees itself as 'Western', even though it is

4: Rodney Hall, quoted in Fazal Rizvi, untitled catalogue essay, in *Here Not There* (catalogue), Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1993, unpaginated

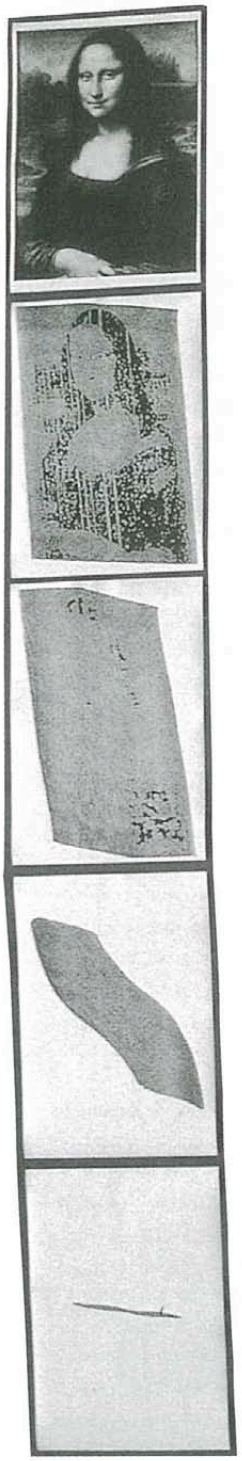
5: Pamela Hansford, 'The Impossible Aesthetic', *Object 2*, 1995, pp 9,11

6: A number of recent exhibitions have, in differing ways, questioned or examined aspects of this activity. For example, refer *Here Not There*, op. cit. and *Transcultural Painting* (catalogue), University of Melbourne Museum of Art, 1994

7: For a history of Australia's cultural relations with Asia, refer Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992 and Alison Carroll, *East and West: the Meeting of Asian and European Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1985

8: Edward Said, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, 'The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism', *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1990, p. 78

9: Judith Wright, quoted in Fazal Rizvi, op. cit., unpaginated



Ah Xian
Disappearance of Mona Lisa, from the *Deduction #2* series (detail) 1996

physically east of Asia. At the same time, the 'West' with which we have traditionally associated ourselves often views Australia as an exotic outpost, as 'other' than itself.

> *The earth's waters are both boundaries and pathways for peoples, objects and ideas.* (FUMIO NANJO)[10]

This exhibition attempts to avoid any neat groupings of artists according to characteristics such as cultural identity or place. It seeks to cut across any possible divisions into Asian-Australian or non-Asian-Australian by blurring any such borders. For example, Simryn Gill's family is originally from India, she was born in Singapore, raised in Malaysia, educated (in part) in the UK, and now moves between Australia and Singapore. Kevin Todd is from Ireland, lives in Tasmania and has spent time studying Islamic culture in Malaysia. Alwin Reamillo is from the Philippines and lives in Perth, where he collaborates with his partner Juliet Lea. His work here deals with the (often tragic) experiences of Filipino women who are routinely 'exported' to other cultures such as the Middle East to work as Overseas Contract Workers. All of the artists represented here, except one, have come to Australia (either directly or via their ancestors) from another place. Judy Watson, a descendant of the Waanji people in north Queensland, is the only artist here to truly come from this place. However, since 1990, she has been an artist-in-residence in Italy, Norway, Canada, India and France. The picture is therefore a much more complex one than that of the 'local' and the 'outsider'.

Two new essays commissioned for *Above and Beyond* amplify the scope of the exhibition through other contexts. In her essay here, Julie Ewington considers many of the forms of movement which have occurred and which continue to occur across borders throughout the region, looking particularly at Australians as travellers and notions of pilgrimage. Laleen Jayamanne's essay delves into the cross cultural aspects of the cinema of Jackie Chan, particularly as it references the Western cinema of Keaton and Chaplin. She explores some aspects of the mimetic, the 'unsevered link between perception and action', bringing a performative and filmic aspect to *Above and Beyond*.

Transference and cross-fertilisation of cultures and artistic practice have occurred regularly throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Thai art draws from Chinese, Indian and Khmer influences, Indonesian art reflects a synthesising of Hinduism and Islam with Javanese mysticism, while the Japanese yamato-e style was developed from Tang dynasty painting from China.[11] Western art styles have also increasingly fed into modern and postmodern art practices throughout Asia, just as influences from Asia (such as Japanese comics) have influenced Australian art and popular culture.

> *I thought of myself as a fair dinkum Australian. Little did I realise that 'Din Kum' is Cantonese for 'real gold' and the shout would go up in the Chinese section of the diggings 'Din Kum! Din Kum!' The term has passed into the Australian vernacular to mean something that is absolutely real, but it had a Chinese origin.* (WILLIAM YANG)[12]

Guan Wei and Ah Xian, who have both arrived in Australia from China after the events surrounding Tiananmen Square, speak of Western influence in their work while still in China. It is not possible for them to divide their practices neatly into their 'Asian' period in China and their 'Western' period in Australia, although they recognise the greater access to European, American and Australian art and ideas since emigrating. Ah Xian's *Deduction #2* series utilises photocopy and fax machines to bring together two different concepts: one from the Chinese philosophies of Yi Jing and Tai Chi and the other from a Western physics perspective of 'signal reduction'.[13] In works from this series such as

10: Fumio Nanjo on Simryn Gill in *TransCulture* (catalogue), Japan Foundation, Venice Biennale, 1995, p. 114
11: Caroline Turner 'Internationalism and Regionalism: Paradoxes of Identity', *Tradition and Change: Contemporary Art of Asia and the Pacific*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1993, p. xiii
12: William Yang, 'I ask myself, am I Chinese?', *Art and Asia Pacific*, vol. 1, no. 2, April 1994, p. 94
13: Ah Xian, letter to Michael Snelling and Clare Williamson, 31 March 1996

The Disappearance of Mona Lisa, Ah Xian first produces one thousand black and white photocopies of a well known icon, whether it be from European history, Chinese religion or American film culture, each copy being a next-generation of the previous copy. The result is an ever decreasing image which eventually ends in total disappearance. Ah Xian then selects a representative spread of fifty images which he sends by fax signal to the exhibiting gallery. He has written of the work:

From micro-creatures to the universe as a whole, from individual human existence to the whole of human history, everything, from the first moment of its existence, is in a process of constant decline. The concept of 'Nothingness' as the highest state of being emanates from Chinese philosophy and forms an important theme of these works... Technology has opened up a unique and exciting opportunity for artists like myself to explore new possibilities for combining traditional Chinese art forms and skills with contemporary concepts, techniques and styles.[14]

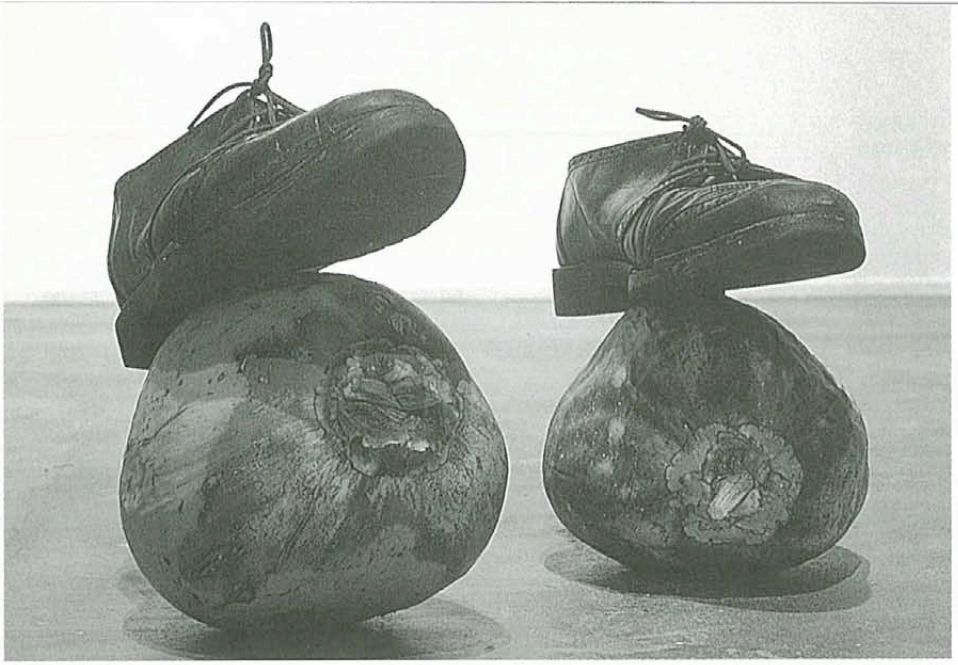
Emil Goh
despair (detail) 1996

Emil Goh also uses forms of communication to represent the travelling of ideas as well as the personal experience of separation and cultural dislocation. In *despair,* a series of white envelopes bear the imprint of red wax seals which read 'des/pair', 'dis/associate', 'dis/appear', 'dis/empower'. The intimacy of the handwritten letter suggests both an emotional pain of separation as well as an assertion that 'I'm on record, therefore I exist'.[15] Based in Australia since 1985, Goh's family all remain in Malaysia. He regularly returns to visit them and they him, sometimes bringing with them items such as family photographs which are then incorporated into his practice. In *joo sieu,* the light of 'votive' candles flickers across old family photographs of Goh's mother (whose Chinese name forms the title of the work) in Western dress, evidence of her upbringing in a French missionary convent. Functioning as a contemporary shrine, which must be attended to each day, this small installation suggests the various cultures which are active in Goh's mother's identity and which have in turn fed into his own.

Simryn Gill's practice is quintessentially concerned with the exploration of 'positionality' while almost disavowing and certainly questioning nationhood, nationalism and 'cultural identity' in the sense of a unified, coherent terminology.[16] She is also resolutely located: 'While my passions may be "post-national" as it were...I know my home and there's a point at which I find myself saying I *am* Asian and Asia is real.'[17] She reconstructs identity with materials (such as the American Indian headdress constructed from chillies [which were introduced to India from Central America]) and process (in *Out of My Hair,* she makes Chinese sampans using the Japanese techniques of origami). A sort of transcultural art nomadism overlaid with a sharp wit. The coconut is a symbol of the tropical belt. It forms or has formed the basis of economies in several nations and is extraordinarily well exploited—no part of the coconut palm is wasted, it provides food, shelter, clothing and income. It plays, then, a counterpoint to the disposable, resource wasteful economies of the West. Gill's work is

14: Ah Xian, letter to Clare Williamson, 11 June 1996
15: Emil Goh, quoted in Jane Goodall, 'Crossing cultures, mixing media', *Eyeline* 27, Autumn/Winter 1995, p. 7

16: For a discussion of the issues surrounding 'positionality', refer to Yao Souchou, 'Of hair, geese and words' inscrutability', *Out of My Hair,* Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1995, unpaginated
17: Simryn Gill, from letter to Clare Williamson, 15 June 1996 and in conversation with Michael Snelling, June 1996



Simryn Gill
Fragment #3 from *Wonderlust*
1996

never just this simple and polemic, however, and there is always ambivalence and ambiguity. The coconut is also propagated by sea (the seeds are carried by the oceans all over the region), rather than contained by the barrier of water. Coconut palms break the rules, are ubiquitous and wherever they go, they became a native of the place. In *Wonderlust,* the coconut bark man's suit, while amusing and referential to such icons of Western art as fur cups and saucers, carries other loadings, of colonial containment and post colonial freedom, the buttoned up harness of the inappropriate garment, a symbol of both economic imperialism and the aspirations of many Asian states. In *Wonderlust,* the leather shoes complete the suit, a symbol of the modern nation state, and the coconut upon which the shoes rest, a destabilising symbol for contemporary Asia; the coconut suit both empowers and undermines—it is claimed as 'native', yet it is the 'wrong' outfit. These contradictory voices are essential in Gill's work, suggesting '... an uncertain entanglement between the coloniser and the colonised, East and West, Europeans and the natives.' [18]

Young Ze Runge or John Young was born in Hong Kong in 1956 and sent to Australia in 1967 to complete his education at the time of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. He studied philosophy and mathematics before becoming a painter. Deconstructing the familiar, destabilising the unique, working on the cusp of late modernism and postmodernism, Young is one of the defining figures in exhibitions of this nature. As Frances Lindsay points out in her foreword to *The Double Ground Paintings,* these recent works have been included in the exhibitions *Transcultural Painting, Diaspora Asia, The Bridge* and *Antipodean Currents,* the very titles of which aptly convey concerns central to Young's philosophical approach. Relationships between painting and photography, truth and the 'real' as posited through the modernist grid, the aesthetics of postmodernism, and more recently postcolonial and postmodern interplays have been at the core of his investigations. Young's recent work is more explicitly about the transcultural, using Orientalist images as the surface, or 'ground', upon which to impose other images, or other 'grounds'. These paintings posit an irreducibility of his own cultural experience into either an essentialised Chinese or Australian one. 'Transculturality, to me, is trying to elucidate some sort of emotional certainty which is paradoxical or contradictory at the same time.' [19] The *Double Ground* series addresses accusations of complicity in reinforcing dominant discourses levelled at postcolonialism, by deriving the formal elements of the series from modern and postmodern arguments, while the subjects are principally postcolonial in content. [20] These concerns continue less explicitly in his new work, including *Untitled #5.* Supposedly a landscape, it does not designate anywhere specific. The square format is associated with more abstract forms of painting, and the lack of gesture or authorial signature accentuates the different space it occupies—more 'the world' and less Asian specific. The narrative of the *Double Ground* painting has disappeared.

18: Yao Souchou, 'An Array of Things', Simryn Gill, *Wonderlust* (catalogue), Artspace, Sydney, p. 6
19: John Young, interview with John Clark, 'Swimming in the transcultural sea', in *John Young: the double ground paintings,* Australian Art Promotions, Sydney, 1995, p. 25. Also refer Melissa Chiu, 'Meetings along the edge: An introduction' in the same volume, pp. 7-9
20: Chiu, Melissa, ibid, p 8

Judy Watson
Untitled 1994

Both John Young and Lindy Lee have spoken of the new opportunities to express aspects of 'Asianness' in their practice over recent years. Born in Brisbane to Chinese parents, Lindy Lee spent the first decade of her practice reworking portraits drawn from European art history. In part an assertion of her 'Westernness', they were to a greater extent explorations of what it means to be human. These works were followed by a period of questioning and upheaval in which Lee sought to reconcile her sense of self to the experience of cultural dislocation. Out of this came her adoption of Zen Bhuddism and an important new focus for her image-making, which further developed in 1995 when she undertook a four month residency at the Asialink studio in Beijing. A difficult experience in which she felt both same and other, this period in China enabled Lee to study Chinese brush painting, an activity which she had previously not allowed herself to do. The act of taking up the brush became in itself a significant Chinese gesture, an acknowledgment which forms the basis for all of her works produced since. 'I think anyone who has to go to the lengths I did to declare myself European is acting almost defensively...Now my work reflects far more of the ebb and flow of life and incorporates my different cultural mix—all of it. This is the liberating part.'[21]

The Aboriginal notions of 'country' are crucial to any reading of Judy Watson's work, and yet 'rather than asserting a fixed notion of identity, her art is a refreshing metaphor for the gaps that exist between different cultural experiences'[22] Descended from the Aboriginal Waanji people in far North-West Queensland, Watson has drawn on the histories and places of her people within an intensely autobiographical and political framework. The recurring imagery—the vastness, contours and textures of land, the traces of presence, the guardian figures, the marks and dots, the 'rich browns, charcoal grays, and subterranean greens'[23]—seems referential, influenced by, both Western abstract conventions and Aboriginal concerns. Watson was in Bhopal, India for a residency in 1994 (although as mentioned elsewhere in this essay she has travelled extensively in recent years) and her work there developed her ongoing preoccupations and perhaps indicates responsive influences. *between islands* and *one night in bhopal* are paintings from India that, as Victoria Lynn points out in her essay for *Antipodean Currents,* 'have been triggered by Watson's continuing preoccupation with being "between experiences"—between traditional and urban Aboriginal culture, black and white, India and Australia, Northern Europe and Asia-Pacific, and so on' and later in the same essay, 'India is formidable in its vast array of traditions and their continuing vitality. Watson's time there could only have reconfirmed her understanding of the complexities of indigenous identity.'[24]

Pat Hoffie has an ongoing, diverse relationship with neighbouring countries as artist, writer and speaker. Her practice is politically interrogative, frequently utilising reworked found or acquired objects to draw attention to the problematics of the cultural milieu she is operating in. Confident in several media, although working mainly in paint and installation, Hoffie doesn't mess about with her intent. Audiences are rarely innocent, frequently complicit, and much of her practice involves the communities where she is residing in the making of the work. She deals often with the effect of the large upon the small—the shenanigans of the superpowers, the mighty, the wealthy are exposed as they interface with smaller, less powerful communities and the individual. In 1993 Hoffie was an artist in residence in Manila. The resulting exhibition, *Gimme Fiction,* included Tagalog movie billboards executed by the Galicia family (who have a billboard painting business) who supplied the canvases, after they had been used, to Hoffie to work on. The centrepiece of the installation consisted of a billboard sized canvas of a man and woman kissing.

21: Lindy Lee, quoted in Susan McCulloch, 'The Oriental Express', *Weekend Australian,* 20-21 April 1996, p. 1/Features
22: Lynn, Victoria, 'Judy Watson: Map/Dream/Journey', *Antipodean Currents: Ten Contemporary Artists* from Australia, Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1995, p 106. Lynn's short catalogue essay has covered much of the terrain *Above and Beyond* is concerned with in relation to Judy Watson's work and amplifies areas of relevance to the exhibition as a whole.
23: ibid. p 107
24: ibid. p 106

Superimposed in different typefaces and sizes read the words 'transnationally speaking...cultural exchange is the lubricant for economic intercourse'. Sited as it was in the Australia Centre, a government institution in Manila, it insisted on refusing to play the game of cultural and diplomatic politeness. In *Adelaide Installations,* for the 1994 Adelaide Festival, Hoffie again worked with the Tagalog billboards, this time reworking and resiting them, as billboards, from Manila to Adelaide in strategic institutional locations. The work in *Above and Beyond* utilises 'new' billboard canvases, cut into smaller pieces, reworked in Brisbane, of Hollywood movies as advertised by the Galicias, with the addition of small found references to the place of women in, perhaps, any of those societies. Less monumental, more intimate, they allow the inclusion of delicate cosmetic icons that slyly subvert both artist and audience, and the appreciation of the recycled material, the resuscitated, layered, imagery loaded with the questions of culture—original canvases painted in Manila by a family of artists to advertise Hollywood movies about United States culture appropriated and recycled by a Scottish-born Australian artist who reworks them in Australia and collages items purchased in Manila and repaints the surface to recontextualise them as a different kind of art.

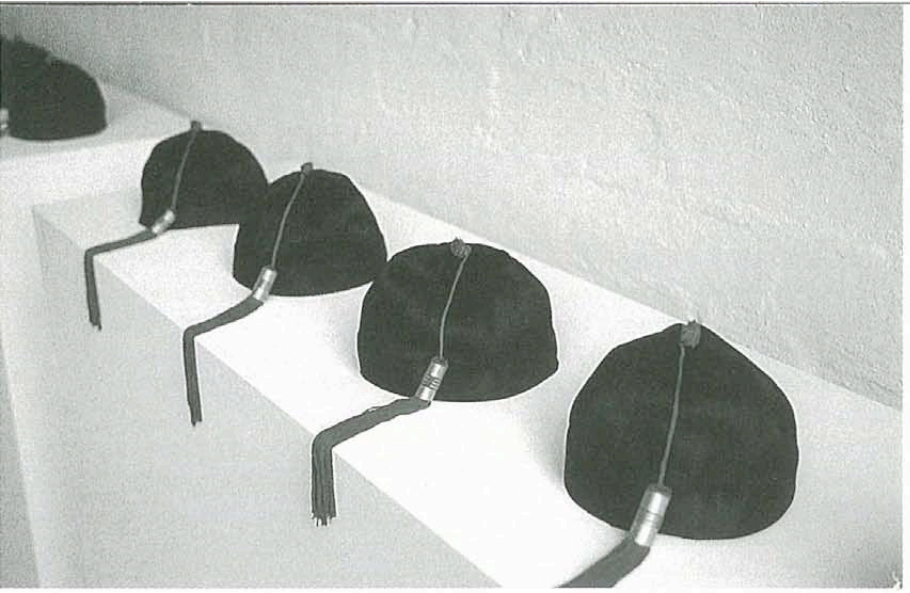
25: Bernice Murphy, 'Fabulous engagements: recent work by Guan Wei', *Guan Wei* (catalogue), Sherman Galleries, Sydney, 1995, unpaginated

26: For more information on the experience of Overseas Contract Workers, refer Marian Pastor Roces, 'Desert Song: A Hanging (A Beheading?)', Sunil Gupta, ed., *Disrupted Borders*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1993, pp. 85-95

In very different ways, both Guan Wei and Alwin Reamillo explore ideas of cultural and commodity exchange in their work. In Guan Wei's series of paintings, four of which from *Treasure Hunt* are shown here, artefacts or creatures become the objects of adventure and contemplation. Guan Wei's images are hybrid works, with a highly stylised cartoon-like feel characterised by flattened spaces, solid colour, strange juxtapositions of dislocated objects and curious gestures, playing on that Western stereotype of the Oriental—inscrutable, cryptic and prone to strange practices. The dislocated objects become so ambiguous, often so funny in a wry kind of way, that the subversive commentary might be missed. The protagonist of much of his recent serial work is a hybridised character—gesturing with Bodhisattva mannerisms at a Last Supper with a large red and blue capsule—who is present in the spheres (the air, the surface, and underneath) in a series of tableaux that seem to be rhetorical parables, enigmatic yet pregnant. The imagery of this work is drawn from China and Australia and the codes are visual—despite the cartoon-like feel, there are no bubbles with words, no overly explicit titles. There is, though, an overt cultural duality, most particularly in *The Last Supper,* and *Treasure Hunt* series. The key figure is invariably depicted with only one eye. As Bernice Murphy has previously pointed out, this feature suggests a link to Taoist philosophy, and its belief that only one eye is required for the external world, an inner eye being focussed on the internal self.[25]

Alwin Reamillo's work *Pasa Doble* suggests a much more sinister exchange of 'commodities'. Comprising two 'crates', inscribed with a number of layers of stencilled and adhesive address labels, this piece acts as a powerful metaphor for the 'trade' in Filipino women, who are regularly 'exported' to other cultures to work as domestics or entertainers, or, in the case of countries including Australia, are 'sold' as 'mail order brides'.[26] The human proportion of these boxes, their OCW stickers (Overseas Contract Worker), and the ominous sense that one is not permitted to know what is contained within, powerfully suggest that these are the tragic vehicles for the final voyage home for too many of these women. Reamillo's processes of collage and layering of texts echo the colonial history of the Philippines with its successive impacts of Spanish, American and Japanese presences.

Alwin Reamillo
Pasa Doble (detail) 1994-96



Kate Beynon
Ten hats for ten sons
(detail) 1995

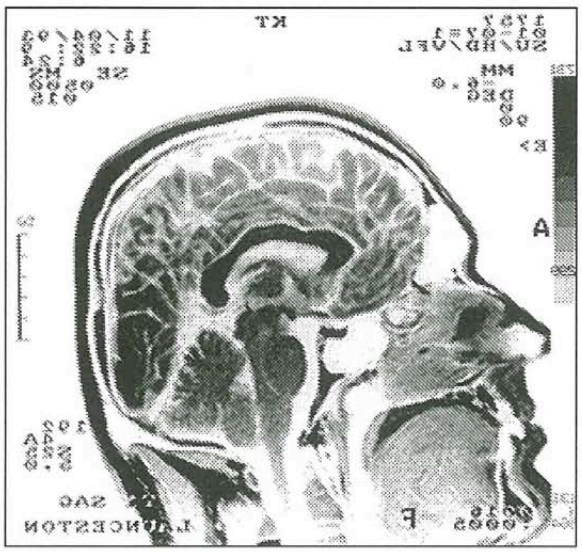
> *But every place she went/they pushed her to the other side/and that other side pushed her to the other side/of the other side of the other side/Kept in the shadows of other.' Identity is a way of re-departing. Rather, the return to a denied heritage allows one to start again with different re-departures, different pauses, different arrivals.* (TRINH T. MINH-HA)[27]

A number of Asian-Australian artists here have recently embarked on journeys of 'return' to the countries of their or their parents' origin. However, as Lindy Lee discovered when she took up an Asialink residency in Beijing, the return can be a shock in the level of difference experienced—not quite 'home' at all. Kate Beynon, who was born in Hong Kong and is now based in Melbourne recently travelled to Beijing to study the Chinese language. Her journey was, in a sense a 'going back' to a place that neither she nor her mother (who was born in Malaysia and lived in Hong Kong before emigrating to Australia) had ever known. Her compositions of Chinese characters, which she forms from chenille sticks, retell traditional Chinese legends. Her choice of narratives reveal observations about attitudes towards gender, subtly echoed in her selection of a domestic craft material as her medium. Through the use of rich fabrics and red tassels, *Ten hats for ten sons* evokes traditional attitudes that the more sons one has, the more fortunate one is, beliefs that continue despite China's 'single child' policy.

An important feature of this exhibition is its intention to move away from a position in which artists of a particular cultural experience are brought together to speak only of that experience, as though their sole focus or project is one of 'looking for oneself'. While this is undeniably an aspect, *Above and Beyond* also seeks to create a space for consideration of a wide range of concerns which a group of artists may choose to engage with. Neil Emmerson is one artist who grapples with the slippery edges of cultural and social experience to investigate histories which may be read not just as journeys around the artist's self but also as observations of times and places other than his own. *The Rape of the Lock* is a series of fastidiously crafted lithographic prints, each of which is a different permutation of a seemingly infinite number of layered images, colours and papers. By overlaying the supposedly disparate histories of China's Cultural Revolution with the socio-sexual 'revolution' led by Oscar Wilde, Emmerson sets up parallels and contrasts between two cultures. The relationship of Oscar Wilde with Aubrey Beardsley is mirrored in a fictionalised partnering of Mao Tse-Tung with the mythologised young hero of China's Cultural Revolution, Lei Feng (Mao as the last Emperor with his favourite boy). Chinese soldiers triumphantly hold up a copy of Huysmans' *Against Nature* in place of Mao's *Little Red Book*. Emmerson's imagery effects a conflation of the binary oppositions of the supposed masculine West with the feminine East. Woven throughout the series is the thread of Orientalism, a fascination with the mystique of the exotic East which informs both Beardsley's imagery and Emmerson's own.

Joan Grounds' large site-specific installations in Australia and Thailand are subtle revelations and meditations on time and the environment. Working frequently with other artists she explores the responsibilities humankind has to the planet and each other, constructing unapologetic, often surprisingly funny, political and critical discourses. *The Wok and the Billy,* made with sound artist Sherre DeLys, is a witty suspension of a wok and a billy singing to each other. In *Multiply and Subdue the Earth,* the biblical title is amplified through a cactus tattooed with the word 'multiply', punctured by needles and balanced precariously on cylindrical blocks. This layered work, with its pierced phallus, Christian command and imperial and empiric gestures, goes straight to the heart of issues

27: Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Cotton and Iron', *Out There*, op. cit., p. 328



Kevin Todd *Head #5* 1996

surrounding overpopulation and colonialism, avoiding a simple polemic while implicating the artist. Grounds' work is not concerned with borders and nationalisms, it is concerned with interfaces between cultures and the planet.

The experience of travelling to and spending time in Asia can, for both non-Asian and Asian-Australian artists, be one of affirming the culture that one is already familiar with rather than necessarily being one of taking on the ideas and processes of another. The best view of a culture is often the long distance one or the one seen by a recent arrival. It can enable one to recognise aspects of existence that may be common to otherwise radically different societies and to understand or question one's own cultural features.

To travel can consist in operating a profoundly unsettling inversion of one's identity; I become me via an other. Depending on who is looking, the exotic is the other, or it is me. For the one who is off- and outside culture is not the one over there, whose familiar culture I am still a part of, or whose unfamiliar culture I come to learn from. I am the one making a detour with myself, having left upon my departure from over here not only a place but also one of my selves.
(TRINH T. MINH-HA)[28]

For Kevin Todd, the experience of spending time in Malaysia reinforced his sense of Irish identity and culture. Similarity as well as difference played a part in this process. While the presence of religious faith in daily life in Malaysia was fundamentally different to Todd's experience of Western thought, he was struck by elements which appeared common to Islamic and Celtic art and decoration. The works presented here, from his *Shifting Paradigms/Self Portraits* series, extend Todd's ongoing project of working with scientific and medical imaging technology to locate his own identity and make-up, but are now influenced by the attitude of Islamic art. The series of sealed perspex boxes contain medical scans of parts of his body believed in various cultures to have been the centre of intangible human attributes (eye, brain, heart, chest) together with abstract digitised patterns and an actual sample of his DNA cultured in a government laboratory. Together, these three elements comprise a self portrait of the artist. Of the use of patterning he has written,

> *The juxtaposition of body images and patterns relates to concerns with some Celtic and Romanesque artworks which are thought to be a synthesis of Islamic and Christian influences (called Mozarabic art). The use of pattern in a metaphysical context is certainly very Islamic and interesting as contemporary Western thought tends to associate geometry with the rational and therefore opposite to the spiritual.*[29]

Above and Beyond can only skim the surface of the rich and complex space with which it engages. There are other artists who should be here, other issues that should be discussed. What this exhibition does set out to achieve is to open up for consideration a range of possibilities that it, by omission, may also suggest. It responds very specifically to a climate which is particular to Australian practice as it approaches a new millennium. On its physical journey through the country over the next twelve months, we hope that this exhibition will be a catalyst for taking stock and of looking above the present to consider beyond.

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28: Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'Other than myself/my other self', Traveller's Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement', quoted in Ryuta Imafuku, 'Glass Made of Water', *TransCulture*, op. cit., p. 57
29: Kevin Todd, letter to Clare Williamson, 20 March 1996

ABOVE AND BEYOND ONE'S 'CULTURAL HERITAGE'

JACKIE CHAN AND HIS DRUNKEN MASTER

Laleen Jayamanne

A parallel text, in the context of a cross-cultural group exhibition on the thematic of Australia's Asian connection, is fraught with one of the perils of parallel editing: a lack of convergence. This piece is intended to be more like an oblique text that will connect in one way or another. As a film critic I think with images that move in time, so I want to write about Jackie Chan, the Hong Kong star of martial arts films whose image has been at the forefront of Australian media coverage recently. He has been shooting films in Australia (most recently *Mr Nice Guy,* 1995) and his current highly successful Hong Kong film *Rumble in the Bronx* (1995, shot in Vancouver) is showing in major Australian cinemas. There is also a Jackie Chan fan club in Australia and a great demand for his videos.

There are several reasons why one might want to write about Jackie Chan's work. He is the biggest action star in Asia and has also worked in Hollywood with varying degrees of success. He is keenly aware of the global changes occurring not only in the genre of action cinema (because of the dominance of computerised special effects) but also of the globalisation of culture and how this may affect the tastes of his primary Asian audience (according to the *The Far Eastern Economic Review,* the box-office receipts of the Hong Kong industry have plummeted 30% in the last three years). He also knows only too well that time is running out for him as an action star who does his own stunts, there is so much a body can take as it grows older.

My particular interest in him began when I was doing work on Charlie Chaplin's slapstick comedy and was trying to find contemporary films with slapstick of that early kind (not the current clunky heavy kind nor the special effects driven kind of which there is plenty) and hit a dead end. I couldn't find a single film that had the same degree of virtuosity of physical performance, combining the skills of the acrobat with that of the clown and storytelling. A friend working on Hong Kong action cinema came to my rescue when she said I had to see Jackie Chan. And true enough it turned out that this was where that old Hollywood tradition of slapstick had found a contemporary performative context within martial arts films. There is a wonderfully complicated process of cultural exchange, translation and transposition going on in Chan's appropriation of the great tradition of physical comedy from the silent Hollywood cinema of the early part of this century and in the way he works this into the tradition of martial arts inherited from the cinema of Bruce Lee. Chan himself acknowledges his debt to the great silent comedians of Hollywood, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin and others, as well as Gene Kelly. And as he says Hollywood also has learned from him and from Hong Kong action cinema as a whole. Certainly all the major stars of Hollywood action cinema have recently paid tribute to Chan, and Quentin Tarentino has said, 'He is one of the best film-makers the world has ever known. He is one of the greatest physical comedians since sound came into films'.[1] He was invited to give a minor award at this years' Oscar ceremony but that scene was edited out in the version televised in Australia. It was of course shown in the Asian version, which according to Chan is what really matters to him. When he does some amazing kung-fu stuff to combat a mean motor cycle gang in *Rumble in the Bronx* there is a phrase the baddies keep repeating, 'who is this guy!?'.

Jackie Chan was born in Hong Kong in 1954 and his parents migrated to Australia when he was about six years old having boarded him at The Chinese Academy of Performing Arts, a Peking Opera affiliated school where he was taught singing, acting and various martial arts for several years. After this training he worked as a stunt man and bit player in martial arts films. In 1975 after working for Shaw Brothers in a small role, Chan came over to Australia to live with his father. It has been said that 'soon bored, he returned to Hong Kong and signed a ten-year contract with Bruce Lee director Lo Wei for whom he made a series of medium-budget action pictures'.[2] His real first hits were *Snake in the Eagles Shadow* (1978) and *Drunken Master* (1978) which made him a star. 'Chan had a great deal of artistic control over the latter film in choreographing the fight scenes. The heady blend of crazed martial arts choreography and wild slapstick firmly established a new genre, comedy kung fu cinema with Jackie Chan its undisputed king.'[3]
He extricated himself from the ten year contract in 1980 and signed with Raymond Chow's Golden Harvest, the biggest production company in Hong

1: Helen O'Neill, *The Australian,* (The Weekend Review, May 11-12), 1996, p. 3
2: From the video cover of *Drunken Master*
3: Ibid.

Kong where he has both directed and starred in his own films. With *Police Story* (1986) he broke into the western market as well and over the last two decades has made over forty films, commanding a huge popular success.

Chan made three films in Hollywood in the early 1980s, (*Cannonball Run, The Big Brawl* and *The Protector,* all of which bombed at the box-office). After *Rumble in the Bronx* was a hit in the US, becoming the highest grossing film during the weekend of its release, he was asked what had changed, and Chan replied 'It's all a question of timing. When I came to America first time, it was really tough. With the press it was like:
"Who are you?"
"Jackie Chan."
"Jackie who? Where you from?"
"Hong Kong."
"Is that part of Japan?"
"No, it's part of China."
"What do you do?"
"Martial arts."
"Oh, Bruce Lee."
"No, I'm different."
It was really tough. After that just want to come back to Asia.'[4]

One could say that Chan is an Asian artist with an Australian connection (his parents are here, he makes films here and the company he works for [Golden Harvest] has an off-shore office in Melbourne) while the people in this show are largely Australian artists with Asian connections.

Skill-Tradition-Training-Pain

Jackie Chan was trained in traditional Chinese performing arts skills from the time he was a small child pretty much in the same way that Buster Keaton and many other stars of early American slapstick comedy learned their skills in vaudeville circuits, some as children of parents who were vaudeville performers, acrobats. John Flaus, the Australian critic and actor, recently said that he feels cheated when he sees the current special effects driven slapstick implying that he had a yearning for the original stuff where the stars themselves did their own physical comedy. This nostalgia for the real thing or the original seems to be returning to present day western audiences even as special effects is taking over cinema there. A function of showing Chan's out takes at the end of *Rumble in the Bronx* is I guess to give us a sense of the skill and danger involved in what he does. It also makes the action hero more vulnerable and funny in an endearing way when he winces in pain as he twists an ankle or smiles at the camera, and qualitatively different from the cool, stoical, laconic, western action hero personae projected by Stallone, Schwarzenegger, Willis.

Chan has referred to his rigorous training as a child in the Peking opera school as being 'very tough, get up at five o'clock, training until midnight. A lot of things, you don't want to learn it, it's just by being beaten... I cry a lot. Everybody was just crying, crying.' He was in this school for ten years. 'Students left the school with highly developed physical skills and very poor literacy. Asked if it damaged him, Chan begins to laugh quietly, then gestures towards the films set. "Look at me now. Of course, no. But how many Jackie Chans are there in China, in Asia? Only one. In our school we had more than 100 students and only one Jackie Chan comes out, I think me and the director [from the same Peking Opera school], we are lucky" '.[5] I shall return to this idea of branding tradition in the flesh shortly.

'...No. I'm different' —Slapstick Kung-Fu

The great tradition of slapstick comedy of Hollywood may be seen as industrial cinema's taking over of a pre-technological form of non-literary performance which has a very long history in western theatricality. Its transposition into the cinema also drew from it new affects that were serviceable to a public dealing with the trauma and delirious pleasures of the modernisation of the human sensorium through technologies of mass reproduction. Cinematic slapstick was a thrilling, shock-like response to the shock effects of speed, mechanical temporality and the power of objects over bodies in modernity. If this tradition of slapstick is no longer active in western cinema it is because the traumatic effect of nineteenth century technology, theorised by many as an experience of shock, has by now been normalised, neutralised and assimilated by the body. The cinema itself through its techniques of shock formulated as montage was an agent of this acculturation. But the liquid electronic field does not permit the clear separation of the body from its technologies of permeation. The current liquidity of space and stretchable temporality of the electronic media liquidates virtuoso slapstick.

It is a truism that different cultures do not register the impact of modernisation at the same time nor at the same speed nor in the same way nor, of course, do they respond in the same way to it. If the martial arts film may be seen as a genre that attempts a negotiation of tradition and the modern (and one could see the American western genre as doing something like this within a different cultural context and performative tradition) what happens to its solemnity and high seriousness when slapstick is inserted into its lethal thrusts? It is here that Chan claims for himself an innovatory role as the bearer of Bruce Lee's formidable mantle.

4: Lynette Clemetson, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 159/11, March 14, 1996, p. 46

5: *The Australian*, op. cit

The Drunken Master: Alcohol and Slapstick

The Drunken Master[6] is about Freddy Wong (Jackie Chan), the wayward son of the head of a martial arts school, Robert Wong. The father finds his son's high spirited behaviour unpardonable and sends him off to the drunken master Sam Seed (Yuen Siu Tien) to be taught his secret technique unique to him. The story is about this teacher-pupil relationship and how the son finally grows up by mastering the requisite skills and defends his father from a villainous businessman who wants to ruin him and the whole village.

There are three different kinds of martial arts practitioners in this film. Freddy's father runs a professional martial arts school of distinction and he mucks up there and doesn't train properly. The second is the cold blooded martial arts professional killer. The third is the drunken master, a wayward teacher with a secret technique which he is reluctant to impart to any one unless he sees that the pupil truly desires it. As we shall see there is a certain erotics to his pedagogy. These three figures practising martial arts techniques of defence and survival embody three strikingly different relationships to the tradition they practise.

The presence of alcohol as a thematic, narrative and performative element complicates these differences in a rather enigmatic way. This film creates an affinity between what the slapstick body does and what alcohol does to the body. Both help the body to lose its gravity and become light, to believe that the body can take wing; alcohol is pure spirit, distilled matter, so is the body doing slapstick kung-fu. There is a particular, utterly fascinating take on alcohol in this film which I want to describe. The master puts Freddy through a rigorous, 'mindless' process of physical exercises while he himself lounges around drinking and laughing in reply to Freddy's agonised 'why are you torturing me?'. One of the training exercises consists of Freddy hanging upside-down on a pole, emptying two big barrels of water with two tiny cups, into another, as he does sit-ups which are really like hang-ups because he is upside-down. Once he completes this he has to do it again in reverse with even smaller cups. It also turns out that the master cannot fight without alcohol, he lacks strength when deprived of it and his hands are seized by a tremor.

The most fascinating take on alcohol occurs in the climactic fight when Freddy is finally ready to grow up by defending his father against the big baddy. Magically his drunken master pops up to enjoy the show and throws the pupil a flagon of alcohol which he uses as a prop even as he takes swigs from it. In the inebriated victory that ensues we see Freddy's initiation into responsible adulthood completed. The master gives alcohol to his pupil only after the rigorous training is completed and it becomes something like a figure for invention beyond sound technique and rigorous training.

Tradition and Impulse

It feels a bit trite though to say that alcohol functions in this film as a figure for, say, inspiration. A more precise approximation to what it does is something like create a surplus of impulses within a rigorously codified system of combat.

Branding tradition in the flesh: puppet master and (human) puppet

One of my favourite scenes is the one when the drunken master attaches Chan to a harness-like contraption. It is made of two short bamboo rods with four pieces of rope attached to each of its four ends, two of which are tied on to Chan's wrists and the other two held and controlled by the drunken master. It's a curious image whose shape changes very fast and doesn't quite settle, though I have stilled it unduly in this description. What this mechanism permits the master to do is move Chan's body like a puppet attached to ropes. It is stunning to watch the way muscle and bone are pulled, stretched, tormented and strengthened like a piece of kinetic sculpture, at different rhythms and speeds, while the master has a whale of a time and the pupil cries in agony, 'I'm broken'. So what is experienced by the pupil as utterly irrational is the basis for the institution of a code of gestures which comes to have its own rationality.

Awakening impulse: becoming drunken woman (goddess Ho)

The final part of the training occurs when the master is gently taunted by the pupil who says that his training hasn't amounted to very much. The drunken master is delighted with this criticism for it is the first sign of the pupil's desire for something more than sound technique and training. He realises that it is now time to demonstrate the eight drunken gods technique (his secret) of doing kung fu, the final climax of which is the [woman becoming drunk] style of the goddess Ho, (especially poignant as it is an old man doing it with no sense of parody at all) which Chan brushes aside in a parodic move as 'women's stuff', as we shall see to his near peril. Each of the drunken god moves is punctuated by its specific name, and the corresponding image of it in a book of the tradition is shown.

6: *The Drunken Master*, Dir. Yuen Woo Ping, 1978

In the final fight, the inebriated Chan goes through the eight different drunken techniques including the 'drunken cripple with the strong right leg'. Chan is repeatedly battered by the killer and realises that he has only one move left. The master yells at him to do the drunken miss Ho and Chan yells back, 'I can't, I didn't study it'. The master looks anxious and yells back on the wave of an impulse 'combine the seven gods technique and invent your own miss Ho' which Chan does with great improvisatory skill. What makes this moment of invention within convention so thrilling is that at the beginning of the film we have seen Freddy's aunt defending her daughter (against Chan's seeming sexual assault on her), with a kung fu style that could match any professional killer for its 'no funny business' professional efficiency. So there is something like a two way street in this metamorphosis of styles and techniques across gender.

There is a delicious paradox encoded in the final fight scene whose Chinese philosophical implications I have no way of knowing (as yet), but to a lay person's eye (not quick enough to see it very well) the training which seems like torture (Freddy calls it that) looks like a practice that kills all capacity for impulsive moves of the body. But then, after all that, the master encourages his pupil to show his prowess as an adult by reawakening in the body the capacity for impulse through the mediation of alcohol. That impulse should take the shape of comic moves seems appropriate given the high seriousness of the martial arts, which is a matter of life and death. An insult within the tradition is to say that it looks like dancing rather than martial arts. I think impulse and the coded tradition do not function as simple opposites in this film which is why their figuring is so fascinating.

Comedy or humour, cheekiness or playfulness are introduced as special gifts of the drunken master (his secret technique?) so that one feels that the conditions for the renewal of the tradition lies there in the awakening of impulse in the very place that kills it. It is this paradoxical relationship between tradition and a condition of its renewal which is what is played out between the drunken master and pupil. It is also this playfulness of the Freddy/Chan persona that links him with the American clowns of the silent cinema or a Gene Kelly.

According to Walter Benjamin, child's play is mimetic, that is, it is governed by an unsevered link between perception and action. This unsevered link or capacity is what Benjamin calls the mimetic faculty.[7] This is not stimulus-response behaviour of the Behaviourists nor is it the behaviour proper to a cinema governed by a sensory-motor mechanism, rather it is according to Benjamin the capacity to make correspondences, the capacity to perceive non-sensuous similarity across incommensurables; eating an old shoe like a gourmet meal as Chaplin does in *The Gold Rush* (1925). Theodor Adorno aligns the figure of Chaplin with that of child, clown and animal, which is a way of signalling a capacity for non-discursive intelligence which has not severed its link with the body, with a capacity for inventive reception, which is perhaps another name for impulse.[8] From what I can gather, as someone new to this cinema, the kung fu styles, named after natural creatures such as dragon, snake, tiger, eagle, hyena, may signal the mimetic roots of this death dealing skill, sustaining a memory of the primitive hunt and survival in nature through mimicry.

Gilles Deleuze's concept of the impulse image offers another way of thinking about the energy dynamism proper to impulse which is not the same as emotion. Deleuze says, 'impulses are not lacking intelligence; they even have a diabolical intelligence which leads each to choose its part, await its moment, defer its gesture and borrow the outlines of form which will best enable it to perform its act'.[9] The martial arts traditions that create a man-animal machine by naming techniques after natural creatures seem to signal in the direction of a violent impulsive vitalism. That Chan and Yuen can tilt this violence towards comedy is the miracle.

The martial arts films are of course set within determined milieux, conflictual social space governed by social power, injustice and humiliation (the professional killer defeats Chan in their very first encounter and tells him to go clean toilets which is the catalyst in his determination to really master kung fu). In such a space, Chan and his drunken master seem to suggest that ritualised action can take you so far and no further and happiness and not just survival can be wrested from these conditions only by inventing a capacity for play. This requires an ability to deal with the uncoded, and the contingent by an 'impulsive seizing of fragments in the originary world' and inserting them with a speed, rhythm and modulation which derails the relentless temporality set by the single-mindedness of the professional killer's action energy. Deleuze's idea of the 'originary world' is one 'made up of outlines and fragments, heads without necks, eyes without faces, arms without shoulders, gestures without form'. And such a world exists in relation to what he calls real determined milieux of the body and the social. The impulse is the energy which tears away fragments from the real object of the determined milieu. This object of the impulse is

7: 'On the Mimetic Faculty', *Reflection, Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, (New York: Schocken, 1978).
8: 'Twice Chaplin', as quoted by Gertrude Koch.
9: *Cinema 1, The Movement Image*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1986), chapter 8, 'From affect to action: The impulse image', p. 124.

always the partial object, the fetish, says Deleuze.[10] It seems to me that the great drinking scene between the master and pupil (which is the ritual preparation before initiation into the secret technique of the eight drunken gods) suggests that alcohol functions as a sign of the originary world. The comic impulse is the fuel that propels metamorphoses under duress and alcohol creates an originary world 'composed of unformed matter, sketches and fragments' making invisible energy visible. Speed in this tradition is also the capacity to see this invisible energy.

The BeyoNd

There is a glorious scene in the Chilean/French filmmaker Raul Ruiz's film *Three Crowns of a Sailor* (1975) where the drunken sailor who is also the story teller, asks his drinking companion, and listener, the theology student, whether he knows what *the beyond* is and when he replies with talk about after-life the sailor gets really angry and says 'not after-life you fool, ***the beyond***' and resorts to a gesture. He violently pulls the head of the theology student and draws it close to his index finger pointing insistently at something invisible on the table. His head is pulled so close to it that it's almost like an invisible point that he is being forced to register without actually being able to see anything as such. Then the camera too gets drunk as it were by all this stuff about thE beyonD and leaves the two protagonists, doing a splendid pan above and beyond them, scanning the reflecting baroque ceiling of the dance hall (where they are drinking) with its intricate detail, while the sound track takes on multiple voices and sounds, a choral effect of sorts. Finally, the camera returns to the sailor guzzling alcohol from a bottle and laughing in a frenzy while the theology student looks absolutely dazed by this cinematic demonstration of **the beyond**.

10: Ibid., p. 128

As an artist Ruiz of course does not tell us what 'the beyond' is, he shows it, and I as a critic will not make a fool of myself by trying to tell you what it is, in discursive prose, because really, I don't know how to. I only have a sense of what it is when I see certain moments of the films of say Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton or of Jackie Chan and Yuen Siu Tien, his drunken master. I suspect that artists who have a strong regional focus and base can not afford to be uninterested in the beyond which is both a metaphysical idea as in Ruiz and a pragmatic one (like the need and desire to look above and beyond one's own backyard) for all of us living in a globalising cultural economy and imaginary. tHe beYond however must never become THE BEYOND. How thE bEyOnd is materialised is by the joyful impulsive labour of artists.

'Asked about his (Chan's) breakages, he taps his head and one foot: "from here to here, I cannot count them. Not every bone, but I twist almost every bone—break, break break. Twist, twist twist. You finish the film, it keeps a long time. So I may get hurt for a few months, that's OK" he says'.[11]

11: The *Australian*, op. cit

L A L E E N J A Y A M A N N E lectures in Film Studies at the Power Department of Fine Arts at the University of Sydney. She has made several short films including *A Song of Ceylon* in 1985.

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PLATE 3
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PLATE 1

PLATE 2

PLATE 3

PLATE 4