Re-imagining the Urban Habitus symposium  
*Wednesday 10 December 2008*  
91.3 – DRI Central Space  

**Program**

10.00am  Welcome and Introduction of Keynote (Professor Elizabeth Grierson)

10.10am  **Keynote:** *Designing Citizens: City Space, Architecture, Subjectivity*, Professor Michael Peters, Professor of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign and Adjunct Professor, School of Art, RMIT University

11.15am  **MORNING TEA**

11.30-12.10pm  **Towards Topophilia: Gesturing across markers of site. An investigation of generative relations between aesthetics, subjectivity and urban spaces.** Professor Elizabeth Grierson, Head, School of Art; Research Cluster Leader Art, Knowledge and Globalization, RMIT School of Art; Research Leader, Intervention through Art, Design Research Institute; and Project Leader, Art and Urbanism, Global Cities Research Institute

12.10-12.50pm  **Foaming Relations: Urban Habitus of Affect**, Dr Hélène Frichot, Senior Lecturer, Architecture Design, RMIT University

LUNCH

2.00-2.40pm  **Elias and the Urban Habitat**, Dr Linda Williams, Coordinator Art History & Theory, and Research Cluster Leader, Art and Environmental Sustainability, School of Art

2.40-3.55pm  Postgraduate Panel (Chair: Professor Elizabeth Grierson)  
*20mins ea + questions*  

1. **The City as a Curated Space: A comparative case study of the visual arts in public space in Melbourne and Sydney**, Tammy Wong, PhD Candidate, RMIT School of Art

2. **Exquisite Corpse in the war zone: probing into the flux of geopolitical borders in theatres of**
social interaction and military action, Tintin Wulia, PhD Candidate, RMIT School of Art

3. Material deconstruction and the transference of meaning, Dr Emma Barrow

AFTERNOON TEA

4.25-5.05pm Locating the Monochrome 2: On Nothing and the movement of meaning between East and West, Associate Professor David Thomas, School of Art.

5.05-5.45pm Global Fissures: Intercultural dialogues in contemporary art practice, Dr Kristen Sharp, Lecturer in Art History & Critical Theory; Research Assistant, Design Research Institute

REFRESHMENTS
**SYMPOSIUM THEME & PAPERS**

**Symposium theme:** The project considers the ways cultural globalization transforms meanings and experiences of people and place with attention to urban spaces. "Urban habitus" is configured as a potentially generative place of material networks and interventions. The overall concern is to identify the way cultural production articulates the habitus of urban space and identity and the determination of cultural value through institutions and practices of knowledge transfer.

**KEYNOTE:** 'Designing Citizens: City Space, Architecture, Subjectivity'

A brief revisiting of Lefebvre and the Situationists, leading into a discussion David Harvey's urban geography and Derrida's 'geography'.

**Professor Michael Peters (University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign; Adjunct Professor, RMIT School of Art)**

Michael A. Peters is Professor of Education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (USA) and the University of Glasgow (United Kingdom) and Adjunct Professor at RMIT University, Melbourne (Australia). He writes at the intersection of fields in philosophy, education, policy and politics, with a strong interest in theories of postmodernity, knowledge and economy, and implications for education.

He has written over forty books and some three hundred articles and chapters, including most recently *Showing and Doing: Wittgenstein as pedagogical philosopher* (Paradigm, 2007) (with Nick Burbules and Paul Smeyers); *Truth and Subjectivity: Foucault, education and the culture of self* (Peter Lang, 2007), *Why Foucault? New Directions in Educational Research* (Peter Lang, 2007), *Building Knowledge Cultures: educational and development in the age of knowledge capitalism* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), with Tina (A.C.) Besley; and *Knowledge Economy, Development and the Future of the University* (Sense, 2007). He is the editor of the following publications *Educational Philosophy & Theory, Policy Futures in Education* and *E-Learning*. 
Other Speakers:

**Professor Elizabeth Grierson** *Towards Topophilia: Gesturing across markers of site. An investigation of generative relations between aesthetics, subjectivity and urban spaces.*

Elizabeth Grierson is Professor of Art and Philosophy and Head of the School of Art at RMIT University. She is the Leader of the Art, Knowledge and Globalization Research Cluster in the School of Art. Elizabeth is an Executive member of the RMIT Design Research Institute leading the research program Intervention through Art, and leads the Art and Urbanism projects in the RMIT Global Cities Research Institute. External appointments include Adjunct Professor AUT, New Zealand, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, UK, member of the InSEA World Council International Society of Education through Art, executive board member of Australian Art Education, and Deputy Chair of ACUADS Australia Council of University Art and Design Schools, and on the international committee of GSA Global Studies Association UK

**Dr Hélène Frichot** *Foaming Relations: Urban Habitus of Affect*

The German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk uses the analogy of foam to describe the relations that cohere between one individual and the next, each co-isolated in the context of the modern city. Our habits, in co-production with the framing of our urban habitus, determine that we are arranged as networks of isolated, bubble-like, monadic cells. By effervescent means we nevertheless find ways of communicating across the cell walls that we share, and which divide us. I will enlist a series of concepts to consider the foaming relations that go toward forming the life of the urban habitus. These will include, relational aesthetics (Nicolas Bourriaud); ethico-aesthetics (Félix Guattari); human and nonhuman relations (Bruno Latour) all of which will help toward articulating a foaming, bubbling mass of relations that are external to their terms. Despite, and also because of, the ‘ego-technological’ mania facilitated through new technologies – think iPod or iPhone – it is possible to imagine relations between actors as a ‘living foam’ shared out by a singular substance or stuff, animated by the circulation of affects and percepts. This would appear to suggest that although our daily habits determine that we live out increasingly capsular existences, new collective modes of expression and challenging forms of sociability are still possible, as long as those bubbles keep seething, foaming, and do not entirely evaporate into thin air.

Hélène Frichot is a senior lecturer in the Program of Architecture, RMIT University. While her first discipline is architecture, she also holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Sydney. Hélène is co-curator of the Architecture and Philosophy Public Lecture Series (http://www.architecturephilosophy.rmit.edu.au). Her transdisciplinary research is broadly published as book chapters, in scholarly and professional journals.

**Dr Linda Williams** *Elias and the Urban Habitat*

**Associate Professor David Thomas:** *Locating the Monochrome 2: On Nothing and the movement of meaning between East and West.*

Through this paper I discuss the importance of blankness in the urban habitus as manifest through the monochrome in contemporary art. I do this firstly by describing how my own practice situates the monochrome amid time and space, and secondly by examining certain ideas and art practice that inform these works, including the idea of the monochrome as an interval in the fabric of the world. This position is supported by a brief analysis of selected examples of works by contemporary European and Asian artists working in this field. In doing this, it is my intention to demonstrate how a study of the contemporary monochrome can reveal an understanding of the complexity of the cultural interaction, difference and similarity between the East and West.

A/ Prof David Thomas is the MFA Program Coordinator (Australia and New Zealand) in the School of Art, RMIT University. His work is represented in numerous public and private collections in Australia, USA, France, Germany, NZ, and the UK including the NGV and kunstmuseum Bonn. His research practice includes painting, photopainting and painting/installation. His works often employ monochromes and painted reflective surfaces to mirror actual space and time. It engages with issues of duration, perception, complexity and formal language. His practice is informed by Non-objective, Concrete and Conceptual traditions of painting, and addresses being, amid time and space. David Thomas leads the Art, Time & Space Research Cluster in the School of Art.

**Dr Kristen Sharp:** *Global Fissures: Intercultural dialogues in contemporary art practice*

The globalization of contemporary art practice includes the emergence of new forums and spaces for exchange and interaction between artists and their works. Art exchanges, facilitated through artist-in-residency programs, travelling fellowships and international exhibitions are a growing part of this process. This paper presents a critical analysis of intercultural dialogues between artists. It focuses on research developed from a project involving artists from RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia collaborating with staff and students at Xian Yang Normal University, China. This project is part of an ongoing history of exchanges between these artists and institutions, which continues to develop and transform as a result of such collaborations. The nature of the interactions between the artists and their work is therefore not just a singular event but rather part of a series of exchanges. Framing these encounters with the concept of fissure is critical to analysing how cultural gaps can become important components in the pursuit of ongoing dialogues.

Dr Kristen Sharp is currently a lecturer in Art History & Critical Theory at RMIT School of Art, and a Research Assistant in the Intervention through Art program in the RMIT Design Research Institute. Her research focus is on globalization and cultural identity, art and transcultural Asian studies. Her PhD titled *Superflat Worlds: A topography of Takashi Murakami and Superflat Art* was completed in 2008.

**Tintin Wulia** PhD candidate, School of Art: *Exquisite Corpse in the war zone: probing into the flux of geopolitical borders in theatres of social interaction and military action.*

Since its inception, the Exquisite Corpse technique has been instrumental in the Surrealists’ investigation of the mystique of accident. André Breton reflected that the technique “carries anthropomorphism to its climax, and accentuates tremendously the life of correspondences that unite the outer and inner worlds,” and Nicolas Calas characterised the resultant pieces as the “unconscious reality in the personality of the group.” The technique also illuminates Isidore Ducasse’s maxim that “poetry should be made by all. Not by one.” This paper aims to highlight the application of the Exquisite Corpse technique in probing into the flux of societal borders and in identifying invisible boundaries within a geographical space. It will do so through reviewing three of my collaborative artistic projects — *The Adventures of Flo and Kat*
across various geographical space, implementing variants of the technique and involving diverse collaborators. Based on the analysis, the paper will further attempt to contextualise the findings from these projects within the study of geopolitics, and — through this theoretical approach — to formulate a set of questions to examine the potential of developing a collaborative artistic project in theatres of military action: the war zone.

Tintin Wulia is an artist and PhD Candidate in the School of Art, RMIT University. Her practice is informed by the intricacies surrounding geopolitical boundary renegotiation. Her work takes form in media-, mural- and object–based installation in space, and often includes performative elements.

**Tammy Wong** PhD candidate, School of Art: *The City as a Curated Space: A comparative case study of the visual arts in public space in Melbourne and Sydney*

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the development of visual art practices occurring in the urban public realm. Public art practices, traditionally thought of as more formal, monumental and sculptural practices, have become diversified due to changes in views towards growing interests in art practices and their relationship to context and site specificity. Artists and curators have become increasingly interested in how site specificity can influence the reading of the visual arts and the social impacts that art practices can have upon communities and urban environments. In recent years, the Melbourne CBD has developed local art practices that have become highly visible in public, particularly the various visual art practices of the city’s laneways. This approach, as part of a larger strategy of the City of Melbourne to reinvigorate the city centre, has attracted much attention from the public, tourism and media, and has given Melbourne a unique atmosphere and identity. In contrast, Sydney, a city rich in history with the origins of modern Australia, grapples with unresolved cultural and artistic issues of it’s city centre, in recent times, issues which have been shaped by economic, social and political forces beyond the practices of the visual arts.

In light of these observations, this research will focus on exploring the role of visual arts practices in the CBD of Melbourne and Sydney, particularly on the ways in which the visuals arts operates in intimate, dormant spaces laced throughout the city. It will explore the conditions of contemporary urban space and investigate the role that visual arts in urban public space has played and seeks to understand the role of a non-commercial cultural practice in an environment that is predominantly economically driven.

In this presentation, I will present my initial findings in understanding the public art policies and practices of each of the cities. These findings will give some insight into the development of public art practice in both Melbourne and Sydney.

Tammy Wong trained as an artist in Applied Art at the College of Fine Art, UNSW. Since graduating she has worked in various sectors of the arts, predominantly in arts publishing, curatorial and exhibition management. In 2000-2 she worked with the contemporary art community in Beijing, China, working for Timezone 8, a publisher of critical writing on contemporary Chinese art. Upon returning to Australia, she was Gallery Manager for Newcontemporaries, a non-commercial contemporary art gallery in the Queen Victoria Building, Sydney. Following this she worked at the newly refurbished Customs House, Sydney, managing a programme of contemporary and historical exhibitions focused on various curatorial narratives on the development Sydney's urban culture. From her varied experience of working with differing art communities, she has grown a strong interest in how the conditions and environment of the artist contributes to the cultural development of the city, which has led to her research interests of the 'The city as curated space'.

**Dr Emma Barrow:** *Material deconstruction and the transference of meaning*
Concepts of identity at the intercultural interface are a networked, interlinked and changing process. Material production or 'de-construction' may be seen to engage with the diversity of social, cultural and historical contexts. Through the unfixed conditions of ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing’, site-specific art works comprising of film, sound and performance may be understood as a means of knowledge transference at the intersections of the collective, and offer multi-contextual interpretations. Video works ‘Paper Throw’ and ‘Four Sections’, premised on processes of material deconstruction, challenge an authoritative Western context of ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing’, in which Aboriginal people have been objectified. The aesthetics of these films activate a field of vision as relational practice. The term Relational implies a sense of an aesthetic and community interconnectivity that makes up a sense of the lived urban experience.

Dr Emma Barrow has recently completed her PhD in the School of Art, RMIT University. Her research positions arts practice as a way to negotiate processes of cultural exchange – such exchange acts a process of translation. Her arts practice consists of film, performance, land art, drawing and painting – demonstrating the visual arts as relational practice.