Boats, Borders and the Geo-Imaginaries of the South

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Asylum seekers arriving by boat off the coast of Australia continue to provoke much debate galvanizing the efforts of successive governments to repeatedly assert and delimit the boundaries and contours of the nation. Significantly, amidst the dramas played out in Australia's oceans and coastlines, images of boats acquire a particularly potent mnemonic and affective force in the public imagination. As a mediatized spectacle, these images etch themselves against a national consciousness already inured to—though still prone to panic at the sight of—the flotilla of rickety boats packed with people heading south towards Australian shores.

This paper activates a mode of spatial inquiry into Australia's identity through an analysis of a number of frames through which the passage and interdiction of boats off the coast of the nation may be viewed. By focusing on contemporary artistic representations and practices that explore the various ways this mediatized spectacle may be apprehended and understood, I show how these frames foreground a distinct set of transnational relationalities shaped by the tensions between Australia's history and its geography. In particular, I examine the way in which Australia's peculiar and paradoxical geographical location as South of both the West and Asia play a key role in affixing the horizon within which a conception of the nation and its relationship with the world was—and continues to be—defined and shaped. Significantly, I not only critically probe the constitutive fears and anxieties that underlie bounded conceptions of the trope of the South, but also examine how such a trope can articulate itself as a site of exchange and negotiation, a distinctive borderland that engenders new cartographies of difference and belonging in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world. I

argue that these frames overlap and converge on the wider questions of space, place and identity at the very moment when the process of globalization and migration has done so much to shake any certainties about Australia's identity as a geographically distinct and spatially bounded nation-state. In so doing, they represent crucial sites for articulating and enacting a transcultural politics of mobility and spatiality that attends to the ways in which the trope of the South may been imagined not as a sphere of containment or an enclaved territory, but as an evolving cartography, the shifting outlines of which opens up new horizons of possibility for rethinking the spatial and temporal coordinates of Australia in a globalizing world.

Imagining the South

In the first decade of the current millennium, boats have taken centre stage, sweeping into public consciousness and prompting renewed efforts by the Australian government to control the flows of migration by remaking of the nation's 'borderscapes' to its north through practices and discourses of security and sovereignty (Neilson 2010; Perera 2007). This defensive response to the southward bound migratory journey across ravenous seas not only registers an ongoing sense of the racialized tenor of our times, it also alludes to the historically embedded cartographic anxieties of the Australian body politic. For the implementation of hugely popular measures to keep refugees out of Australian territory by successive Australia governments is reminiscent of the garrison mentality of White Australia that held sway at a time when the desire to maintain a closely guarded boundary around Australia as a distinct and separate island-continent was the order of the day. Significantly, the various defensive responses to the southward-bound movement of refugees arriving from 'Asia'—the region which has been described as our 'near North'—can also be seen as symptomatic of the fears and anxieties that have historically defined the psychic terrain of the 'big island' in the 'South.' As an index of Australia's antipodality, the trope of the South marked not just the site upon which a raft of speculative utopian and colonial fantasies were historically projected—from a land that was unknown (*terra incognita*) to one that was uninhabited (*terra nullius*)—it also constituted a relational node that marked Australia's anxious location as White settler colony on the fringes of Asia. As David Walker observes: 'For well over a century, Australians have had "Asia" on their mind, nervously aware that their "title deed" to the last continent for migration was not impregnable' (1999: 11).

Moreover, the anxiety of antipodality that marked White Australia's spatial imaginings has arisen partly as a result of the geo-imaginative articulation of the terrestrial and maritime space of the South. Indeed, shortly after the celebrations of Federation, Alfred Deakin observed that Australia 'is certainly a very self-conscious nation that has just made its appearance in the centre of the Southern Seas' (cited in MacIntyre 1986: 25). Here, the 'Southern Seas' appears as a geo-elemental trope that is coterminous with the idea of Australia as a singular and self-contained 'island-continent'; that is to say, the oceanic appears as the 'constitutive outside' of the terrestrial, as the moat that surrounds the unassailable fortress of the newly inaugurated modern nation-state of Australia. This defensive geo-imaginative articulation of a bounded and territorially demarcated space of the nation is, moreover, grounded in a 'insular imaginary predicated on the territoriality of an island geo-body,' one that has shaped—and continues to shape— some of the peculiarities of Australia's view of itself and its place in the world (Perera 2009: 23). Of particular interest to this paper then is the way Australia's anxious experience of antipodality has emerged as a result of its geo-imaginative emplacement in the space of the South.

In recent times, various cultural critics and theorists have evoked the trope of the South as a pivotal space for imagining an alternate cartography for directing the flow of dialogue and exchange, beyond the confines of centre-periphery relations. The Cuban art critic, Gerardo Mosquera, for instance, argues for the need to develop horizontal routes, connection and dialogue between the various cultures of the South as a means of bypassing the mediation of metropolitan centres (Mosquera 1994). Likewise, Nikos Papastergiadis contends that the South is a 'spherical concept' that harnesses the relational energy underpinning what he calls 'South to South' circuits of contact and exchange across spaces with similar histories of displacement and colonization, such as Australia, South Africa and South America (Papastergiadis 2010). In a similar vein, Connell deploys the South as a relational category to highlight relations of power in the realm of knowledge so as to challenge the dominance of metropolitan epistemologies (Connell 2007). Yet, while these efforts to delineate affirmative understandings of the South play a role in unsettling the dominance of metropolitan mediation, they nevertheless tend to diminish the significance of Australia's engagement of Asia, a region that Papastergiadis problematically asserts 'has done little to re-orient the mapping of [Australia's] cultural imaginary' (2003: 3).

In her account of the transnational relations that characterize the Asian diaspora in Australia, Audrey Yue has sought to recast Australia's dual location 'south of the West' and 'south of Asia' in terms of the cognate geographical and theoretical trope of 'going south':

> Inscribed in a migratory movement of literal displacement and reoriented in the racialized landscape of a postcolonial settler Australia, the trajectory of 'going south' aligns itself with (Australia as) south of the West, (Australia as) south of Asia, and (both Australia and Asia as) south of the East and West. Implicit in the trajectory of 'going south' is an interrogation of how Australia, as south of the west has also come to construct itself as specifically south of Asia. (Yue 2000: 192)

By tracking a specific migratory movement and trajectory from Asia to Australia, the trope of 'going south' points to the way these movements and flows do not take place in empty space, but move across the *already constituted* space of the island-nation of Australia, a 'racialized landscape' marked, as it were, by multiple faultlines and checkpoints, and uniquely defined by a heightened sense of decenteredness in relation to 'the West.' The terrain of the South—nominated as 'Australia'—is thus a deeply fraught and contested one; a 'dubiously postcolonial' geo-body whose internal fissures and boundaries appear as the gaping legacies and after-effects of a haunting past (Morris 1992: 471). At the same time, as Stuart Hall observes, faultlines and borders are also *productive* 'sites of surreptitious crossings' where new relations, practices and forms of connection emerge (Hall 2003: 34–35). The South is thus not just a historically constituted site, but also an evolving cartography, a product of the interrelations of a multitude of histories and trajectories and one that is open to remapping as a complex, multidimensional living spatiality.

Indeed, the critical and geographical trope of the South may perhaps be productively understood as a *mode of location* and e*pistemic category* marked by the deep-seated tension between Australia's history and its geography. As a *mode of location*, the trope of the South is a marker of Australia's postcolonial predicament and its anxious experience of antipodality and decenteredness south of both the West and Asia. It thus foregrounds a distinct set of transnational relations shaped by the tension between Australia's history (as a white settler colony) and its geography (as located in or on the edge of Asia). As an *epistemic category*, the trope of the South brings into view a set of vectors that intersects with the making and remaking of the spatial and temporal coordinates of the paradoxically located entity of 'Australia' as south of both the West

and Asia. In this sense the South can be understood as a *site*, in the sense described by John Frow and Meaghan Morris, that is 'the point of intersection and of negotiation of radically different kinds of determination and semiosis' (1993: xv). As a site at which a mutiplicity of forces—determinations and effects—are articulated, the South is never a closed, coherent and integrated place or territory, but rather is always in the process of being made, a product of the interrelations of a multitude of histories and trajectories. The South is thus always pluralized and hybridized, as well as partial, provisional and open to contestation. It is a space-time configuration that is both a historically and geographically constituted site *and* a dynamic, relational and multiply inflected spatiality.

Frame one: The box

In August 2001, some weeks before the September 11 attacks and in the lead up to Australia's federal elections, a Norwegian cargo ship, the *M.V. Tampa*, rescued over four hundred mainly Afghan and Iraqi refugees from a boat that had began to sink off the Indonesian archipelago en route to Australia. As the *Tampa* made its way towards the island-continent, it was refused entry into Australian waters by a government declaring it was not 'a soft touch and [not one] whose sovereign rights in relation to who comes here are going to be trampled on' (Howard 2001: 30235). Within days, the image of the giant ochre hulk of the *Tampa* was projected onto the national imaginary, sweeping into a national consciousness already inured to the sight of overcrowded boats making landfall on Australian shores.

In a 'cosmopolitan' age of increased travel, mobility and global interconnectedness—facilitated by enhanced technologies of transport (the airplane) and communications (the internet)—the container ship appears almost anachronistic. Nevertheless, the ship and its heavy-duty cargo has long been a vital force in the movement of objects and people, carrying with it human fears and hopes as well as the projections of the imagination. Reflecting on the great colonial voyages of discovery and trade, Michel Foucault describes the ship as an exemplary form of heterotopia that juxtaposes several contradictory spaces and which results in the formation of new spaces; a vessel that is pregnant with heterogeneity and the potentialities of the imagination:

> The ship is a piece of floating space, a placeless place that lives by its own devices, that is self-enclosed and, at the same time, delivered over to the boundless expanse of the ocean, and that goes from port to port, from brothel to brothel, all the way to the colonies in search of the most

precious treasure … from the sixteenth century up to our time, the ship has been at the same time
not only the greatest instrument of economic development … but the greatest reservoir of the
imagination. (Foucault 1998: 184–85)

The complex imaginings and multiple narratives engendered and embodied by the cargo
ship as it traversed the oceans in a mercantile age have only been heightened by the
increased volume and intensity of trade in commodities that characterize the era of
globalization. Indeed, the cargo ship with its treasure-trove of objects from afar has
been one the main drivers of globalization in the post war era, dynamically transforming
local cultures and economies and configuring new modes of identity and belonging. As
a mobile space that traverses across the earth's vast oceanic surface, the ship as
heterotopia does not merely mirror the world; it also partakes in a process of world-
making, one that foregrounds multiplicity in the movement and co-existence of objects
and people as well as the lines of force that direct their flow.

In this context, the modern shipping *container*—stacked high on deck or packed into the
hull of bulk freighters—can be understood as metonym for the stark disjunctions and
shifting geographies that inscribe globalization. In his photographic work, *Panorama,
Mid-Atlantic* (1993) (figure 1), the US artist and critic Alan Sekula powerfully deploys
the image of the shipping container as part of his pictorial exploration of the conquest of

Figure 1: Allan Sekula, *Panorama. Mid-Atlantic*, 1993 (from *Fish Story*, 1988–1995),
Cibachrome print, 33 1/2 x 62 1/2 inches, 85.1 x 158.8 cm © Allan Sekula.
Courtesy of the artist and Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica.

maritime space in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world marked by the deterritorialized flows of capital and the exploitation of labour. Sekula describes the shipping or cargo container in this way:

> The contemporary maritime world offers little in the way of reassuring and nostalgic anthropomorphism, but surrenders instead to the serial discipline of the *box*. The cargo container … transforms the space and time of port cities, and makes the globalization of manufacturing possible. The container is the very *coffin* of remote labor power, bearing the hidden evidence of exploitation in the far reaches of the world. (Sekula 2000: 411, my emphasis)

Here, Sekula's figuring of the globally mobile cargo container as a coffin may be understood in two ways. Firstly, by depicting the standardized shipping container as a tomb that subsumes and disciplines labour through containment, Sekula recalls Marx's description of 'cosmopolitan' capital as 'dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour' (Marx 1976: 342). An index of both mobility and enclosure, Sekula's shipping container thus represents a powerful attempt to critically comprehend the stark, grinding realities of an ever more disposable and remote labour force that lies in the shadow of the relentlessly expansive, unconstrained and virtually frictionless world of global capital and commodity exchange. Its passage through the seas and across multiple frontiers is, moreover, tracked and scanned by technologies of control, surveillance and logistics at various points of entry into the national body, a process that increasingly reveal the traumatized bodies of undocumented subjects clandestinely inserted therein (Neilson & Rossiter 2010; Verstraete 2003). The shipping container not only exposes the way the free flow of capital is predicated on the restricted movement of people; it also discloses the asymmetries of power that mark the experience of global mobility and migration

Deploying the schema of global cultural flows developed by Arjun Appadurai (1996) one could argue that the refugees on the *Tampa* were caught in the yawning gap between Australia's economic and cultural aspirations, a gap that marks the disjuncture between what Appadurai describes as the 'ethnoscape' and the 'financescape' that shape the flow of people, money and goods in and out of Australia. Nevertheless, the movement of capital and people across national borders does not take place across empty space or in a completely random and chaotic manner; rather, the routes and contours of these flows are powerfully affected and refracted by the historically and culturally specific topographies over which they traverse. That is to say, the global

cultural flows move across *always already* constituted space. The spaces traversed by these flows thus need to be historically and culturally situated within a particular geography. As Shu-mei Shi puts it, '[f]low is always affected by topography—it must follow specific contours, layouts and routes which affect its speed, direction and density. The direction of flows are also historically marked' (2000: 89).

From this perspective, the particular space or topography across which these flows traverse is not a continuous and given 'surface'; rather, the space of flows needs to be understood as always already constituted by particular historical, social, economic and cultural relations that shape, configure and enable (as well as constrain) such flows. How these complex relationalities shape and configure the space of flows, then, follow particular national histories and cultures as in the case of Australia, whose settler colonial history and island topography have moulded its peculiar view of itself and its place in an increasingly globalized world. The space of the South nominated as 'Australia' is thus a deeply fraught and contested one, marked by multiple faultlines and checkpoints, and uniquely inflected by its anxious experience of antipodality and decenteredness. Moreover, Australia's insecure footings—its experience of groundlessness—in the South define its predicament of postcoloniality and its paradoxical geographical location South of both 'the West' and 'Asia.' What is therefore now increasingly at stake in the spatial (re-)imagining of 'Australia' is the relationship between sovereignty, territory and identity that girders the geo-imaginary of the nation-state.

Frame two: Sovereign hospitality

Sometime around 4 p.m. on a cool wintry day in 2010, along the steps of the iconic Sydney Opera House, starts to gather an assemblage standing and mingling furtively as an anticipating crowd awaits their instructions. In the ensuing minutes, the crowd dutifully proceeds to unfurl an Australian flag, slowly wrapping it around their heads and standing still in silence against the crisp air of the late afternoon sun (figure 2). As an aberrant assemblage, the crowd and its act of collective stillness distracts; unsettling the familiar, picturesque image of the iconic building and disrupting the touristic gaze cast upon it. With parts of their faces covered by the Union Jack and the stars of the Southern Cross, the crowd is rendered silent and anonymous by the very emblem of national sovereignty and the violent acts of exclusion enacted in its name. Yet rather

Figure 2: boat-people.org, *Muffled Protest*, 2010.
Photo CC BY-NC-SA Ilaria Vanni, Creative Commons.

than passively acquiesce to silence and erasure beneath the drape of the flag, the crowd enacts a particular modality of stillness amidst the shock of its spectacle—one that simultaneously 'stands out' and 'takes a stand' (Bissell & Fuller 2011: 2).

Conceived as a series of ephemeral interventions, 'Muffled Protest' is a work by the artists collective, boat-people.org, that was also enacted a few weeks earlier in Melbourne's Federation Square as well as at various public spaces across the nation and culminating in an exhibition of video and photographic documentation of the work on Cockatoo Island in Sydney (figure 3). The work seeks to register a 'dispersed collective manifestation of dismay' against the blinding forces of nationalism that continue to shape the Australian political landscape (Hepworth & Kelly 2010: 45). It is a 'statement of ambiguous, personal and silent declarations that quietly linked borders and interventions, the edge and the interior under the flag' (45). Moreover, underlying this most recent effort to creatively bring into focus the border panic directed against refugees, is the collective's premise that 'everyone who is not Aboriginal is a boat person' (44). As one of the members of boat-people.org puts it,

> *Muffled Protest* came out of discussions that explored the link between the Northern Territory intervention and the Tampa crisis. It was felt that both these events inscribed the colonial state, making Australian indigenous people—like refugees—outsiders to that state. The individuals that stand collectively with their heads wrapped in the flag signify those that are symbolically included within the colonial state. The ambiguity of the piece—and the time it takes to unfold—was intended to give space and time for contemplation of our own relationship to the state and its politics. It was a moment to recognize our own privilege and perhaps even the complicity that is entangled with that privilege. (Hepworth 2012)

In this way, the work can be understood as a performance of complicity through silence that creatively opens up a space to reflect on the complex ambiguities of hospitality and the tenuous grounds upon which it is enacted by the nation.

Indeed, a sense of Australia's insecure and precarious footing in the space of the South may be gleaned from the complex ambiguities that mark the practice of extending hospitality to the figure of the stranger who calls upon it. These ambiguities can be discerned in the collective's earlier tactical and interactive media art intervention, 'We are ALL Boat People,' and its website http://www.boat-people.org, a web-based project initiated a decade earlier in 2001.

While the group's website served as a platform for distributing 'tools' and resources—in the form of downloadable images, pamphlets, stencil templates, fact-sheets and

Figure 3: boat-people.org, *Muffled Protest*, 2010.
Image courtesy of Antonella Biscaro and Nik Midlam.

archives of past events—to assist the broader public in initiating their own actions and events, the primary organizing principle of the project centred on the words, 'Boat People' that was juxtaposed against an image of a tall ship. This jarringly incongruous image was projected onto a sail of the Sydney Opera House and stenciled on pavements and walls across various parts of the city in a manner akin to the Situationists' practice of *détournement* ('diversion' or 'semantic shift') (figure 4). In his account of the aesthetic strategies of the Situationists, Peter Wollen described the practice of *détournement* as the 'break[ing] down [of] the divisions between individual artforms, to

Figure 4: boat-people.org, *untitled*, October 2001.
Documentation of projection event, Sydney Opera House,
Photo: Tina Fiveash. Courtesy of the artists

create *situations*, constructed encounters and creatively lived moments in specific urban

settings, instances of a critically transformed everyday life (Wollen 1993: 121). By

deploying the tactic of *détournement* through acts of appropriation and doubling, the

'We are ALL Boat People' intervention adopted the principles of reinvention,

ephemerality and temporariness that inform much agit-prop, guerilla art and tactical

media art practice (Miekle 2003; Lovink 2002). In this way, their practices of

détournement were tactical in de Certeau's sense, as insurgent practices that 'operate in

isolated actions, blow by blow' and 'can be where [they] are least expected' (1984: 37).

Significantly, by juxtaposing the words 'Boat People' against a triumphalist image of a

tall ship reenacting the colonial voyage to Australian shores, the intervention's key

imagery draws its deeply unsettling political and ethical force by conjuring the spectre

of the nation's foundational incursion by sea, the ghostly image of a still unsettled

colonial past that present-day fantasies of 'invasion' seek to exorcize. Indeed, the

incarceration of refugees in detention camps across Australia reflected the nation's own abject origin when the island-continent itself served as the gulag repository for 'convicts' from its 'homeland,' Great Britain, to which it still pledges allegiance and fealty. In contrast to *Muffled Protest*, the intervention's injunction to practice hospitality towards those nominated as 'strangers' is predicated on the assertion of an (self-) interpellative pronoun, 'We,' that is unequivocally equated to a homogenizing 'ALL.' As such, it problematically assumes a national integrity that is difficult to sustain, particularly in a settler and multicultural society like Australia marked by the privileging of the Anglo mainstream as well as the absence of a formal acknowledgement of, and engagement with, indigenous sovereignty (Hage 1998; Moreton-Robinson 2000).

In her discussion of the fraught protocols and ethics of 'sovereign hospitalities,' Katrina Schlunke critically explores the complexly entangled enunciative positions and modes of address that underpin the call to offer refuge in a country that has yet to acknowledge Aboriginal presence and indigenous sovereignty. According to Schlunke:

> The indigenous person, the refugee and the new and old 'settler' sit in an awkward arrangement of relationship which is radically exposed through the reality of indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous sovereignty insists the question is asked: Who are strangers? The situation of the refugee insists the question is asked: Who is able to practice hospitality? All of these questions within Australia move between the imaginary of a continent simultaneously surrounded by beaches and shores. (2002: part 1)

From this perspective, the *unheimlich* appearance of the abject body of the refugee on the ambiguous shores of the island-continent of Australia poses a traumatic question about the identity of the Australian subject and the ground upon which it stands. The interrogation that emerges from the presence of the stranger is thus—in a deeply ontological sense—a fundamentally unsettling one. To confront this radical interrogation or questioning is neither simply a case of belatedly acknowledging the history of negated bodies nor one of offering succour to alterity (Chambers 1998: 34–38). Rather, it entails examining the very *ground* upon which one stands in defining and excluding the other and offering it hospitality. As Chambers puts it:

> [B]eyond the immediate response that may offer temporary hospitality to alterity, a more adequate and sustained reply to the question of exile and migrancy can surely only emerge from considering *the ground that place*—both the previous place from which the migrant comes and the present place that hosts it body, her history, their culture—*nominates* (1998: 38, my emphasis)

In a postcolonial settler society such as Australia, the question of how place is grounded, how it is conceived and constructed—in short, what and how it 'nominates'—inevitably focuses attention on the question of sovereignty and the practices of hospitality it predicates. Indeed, the fraught political and ethical ambiguities of hospitality has precipitated what many have referred to as a 'crisis' of a certain idea and formation of sovereignty (Burke 2002; Nicoll 2002; Pugliese 2002; Watson *et al*. 2002). In particular, the complex ambiguities of hospitality calls into question the modern idea of sovereignty that prescribes 'a bounded territorial realm in which national authority is absolute [and] which provides a representative and political principle through which states and their people can manage and control the forces that affect their lives' (Burke 2002: part 1). That is to say, the idea of sovereignty, as it was imagined within modernity and tied to the bounded and exclusive territorial authority of the nation-state (as the embodiment and agent of sovereign power), have been called into question by the figure of the refugee precisely because of its reliance on a fundamentally essentializing claim: that the state's sovereignty forms a legitimate site of authority based on its status as a representative signifier for the nation, 'the people.' Significantly, such a status—and the authority and legitimacy it confers to those who invoke it—is particularly difficult to sustain in a settler society like Australia, whose very modernity rests upon the illegitimacy of its colonial foundations.

Indeed, the existential fiction of a sovereign Australian nation and identity is both asserted and questioned in the high seas in ways that not only exposed the moral bankruptcy of the form and exercise of Australian territorial sovereignty, but also revealed its very reliance on the constitutive violence that attended the trespasses and incursions of the nation's still unsettled—and unsettling—colonial past. In this context, the figure of the refugee interdicted in the open seas both affirm and undo the logic of the border, reinforcing the line in the sea while also, importantly, marking the possibility of complex and multiple histories and spatialities, ones that acknowledge the past and present struggles for indigenous sovereignty. To put it differently, the southward-bound figure of the refugee both affirms and confounds a bounded and territorial conception of the space of the South in ways that helps to engender new relationalities and alternative geographies of sovereignty and social and political responsibility. As McKenzie Wark has observed: 'those who seek refuge are a critique of the limits of sovereignty … it is the rule of the border itself that every refugee

challenges … it is the justice of national sovereignty itself that every asylum seeker refutes' (2001: xix).[1]

Frame three: Terror Australis

This is particularly true if the justice of national sovereignty is anchored in the *territorial logic of terror*. For at this point one may reflect upon the etymological ambiguity of the word 'territory.' William Connolly has argued that while the word 'territory' is usually taken as a derivative of the Latin *terra* (earth or land), it is also derived from *terrere*: to frighten, or—to use a term with wild currency—to terrorize. In this sense, 'territory' is a place from which people are warned (1995: xxii). I want to suggest, however, that the assertion and maintenance of sovereignty over national territorial space is not just a violent act of exclusion that requires constant vigilance and the mobilization of threat; it is also *symptomatic* of the national geo-body's own tremulous sense of fear and anxiety in relation to space and place.

Historically, a utopian and phantasmic space, the space of the South nominated as 'Australia' now appears—from a different cartography, though in an equally phantasmal register—as a 'safe haven' or refuge for those seeking succour from the ravages of war, famine and economic collapse. Yet, as we have seen, the geo-imaginary of the South has also historically been a space invested with complex racial anxieties that articulate with fantasies of invasion and engulfment.

This sense of anxiety and fear about the invasion of national space, along with the attempt to re-assert sovereign control over the nation's space and territory is well captured in *Trepidation Continent* (figure 5), a work that was produced in 2003 by Guan Wei, an artist whose own journey from China to Australia in the late 1980s followed the archetypal migratory trajectory from North to South (but also from a differently loaded set of bearings, from East to West). In this body of work, Guan Wei explores notions of space and identity by figuring the geography of Australia as a site of migration in an increasingly fraught and racialized, geo-political world. His work depicts a continental landmass that is both strange and familiar, overlaying the rational representational forms

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[1] For Wark, the figure of the refugee also calls into question the 'justice' of the global economic order. According to him: 'Migration is globalisation from below. If the overdeveloped world refuses to trade with the underdeveloped world on fair terms, to forgive debt, to extend loans, to lift trade barriers against food and basic manufactured goods, then there can only be an increase in the flow of people …T he most telling human critique of globalisation is not the black-clad protestors in Seattle or Genoa, it is still the silent bodies of the illegals, in ships, trucks or car boots, passing through the borders' (2001: xix).
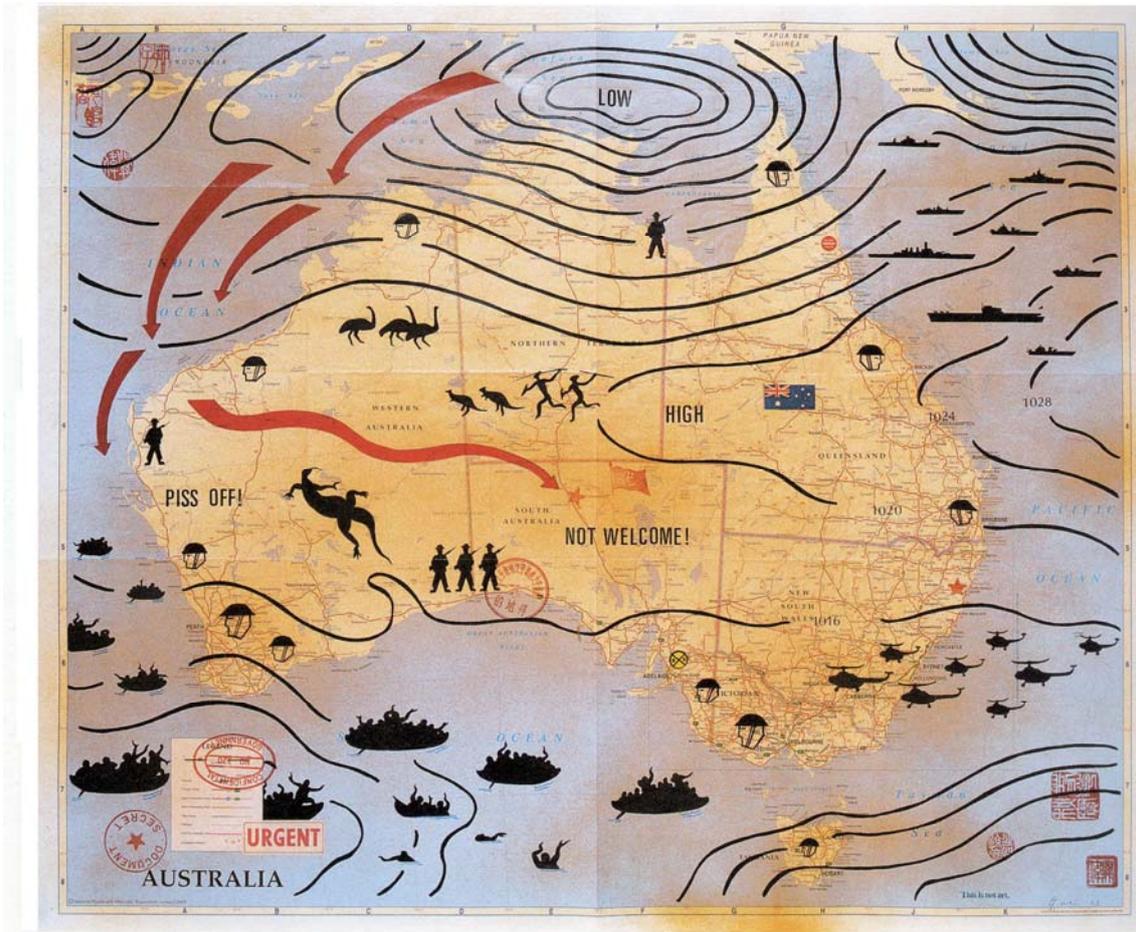
Figure 5: Guan Wei, *Trepidation Continent 2*, 2003. Drawing on map, 98 x 82 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist.

and symbols of modern cartography with stylized animal, humanoid and mechanical figures. More ominously, Guan's work also feature military cross-hairs or target points as markers of death and destruction, overlapping with weather isobars whose tremulous ripples appear as a portent of the renascent threat of 'invasion' from the North.

Significantly, *Trepidation Continent* depicts not just the flows and itineraries of human movement across the vast terrestrial and maritime territory of Australia, but also the enunciative acts of sovereignty that attends the militarization of the nation's borders. In this series, local vernacular interdictions—'Not Welcome,' 'Piss Off'—are inscribed onto the continental territory, alongside the injunctions of officialdom—'Urgent,' 'Confidential,' 'Secret Document.' In this way, Guan foregrounds the *performative* character of both the sovereign's powers of decree and the collective national assent to the exercise of these prerogative powers under the mantle of sovereignty. In her account of the concept of performativity, Judith Butler argues that 'performative acts are forms

of authoritative speech: most performances, for instance, are statements that, in the uttering, also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power' (1993: 225). Moreover, the power of the performative act of sovereign enunciation lies in its capacity to 'produce the effect it names.' One such effect that is installed in the act of sovereign nomination is the dissolution of categories—refugee/illegal immigrant, human/non-human—through such legal contortions and sleights-of-hand as the excision of parts of Australia's territories from its migration zones to create a 'space of exception,' a place that is 'not-Australia' (Perera 2002b; Agamben 1998).

In Guan's work, then, the once fabled island-continent of Australia is figured as a place marked by both anxiety and fear as it seeks to violently reassert control over its territory through a performative assertion of its sovereignty in an increasingly turbulent and dislocated world order. Taken together, the disparate visual signs, figures and markers of *Trepidation Continent* coalesce into a narrative of invasion and engulfment while simultaneously making an oblique reference to bad *feng shui*, a ghostly geo-elemental trope aggravated by the forces that have unsettled the balance and harmony of the environment.[2] In this fictive scenario, the imagined geography of Australia is figured as a site of haunting, where spectres of both purity and contagion ominously cast their shadows. In particular, 'Australia' as the space of the South is figured as haunted as much by the spectre of invasion from its North—a haunting that resonates with earlier anxieties about the spectre of Asianization (as well as Sinicization) of Australia that the White Australia policy sought to exorcize—as by the ghostly presence of Chinese geo-elemental forces that flow across the anxious landscape of the nation. In this way, Guan's work points to not just the complex entanglements of multiple histories, but also the possibility of imagining other kinds of spatial relations.

Indeed, *Trepidation Continent* figures the bounded and heavily militarized space of Australia as a *contested* space. In particular, his graphic reworking of the map of Australia challenges the claims to singularity, stability and closure that characterizes the modern cartographic representation of the nation. In contrast to this modern practice of cartography, Guan's work foregrounds precisely the very conditions that have given rise to the modern map of Australia. In this way, *Trepidation Continent* can be viewed as a

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[2] Guan Wei had explored the Chinese practice of geomancy—the discipline of arranging space in order to affect the flow of energy and currents—in his earlier work '*Feng Shui*' (1999).

form of *anamnesis*, a recollection of the spatial practices of colonialism (such as the violent 'naming' of indigenous land by the early settlers) that the modern-day map of Australia has—through its taxonomic and ordering procedures—sought to forget or consign to the order of (repressed) memory. In particular, it highlights the way in which the journey towards, and across, the space of the South is not just an unsettling echo of Australia's own violent history of settler colonialism, but is also a revenant of the nation's own founding incursion by sea. Significantly, this southward-bound migratory journey towards Australia also fundamentally reconfigures both the space and time of the South, giving rise to new spaces of relationality and differing planes of temporality that defines the condition of diaspora in Australia.

Frame four: The boat—refuge, refugee, refuse

The complex configuration of relations and trajectories that constitute the multiple spaces and times of diaspora is evident in Dacchi Dang's *The Boat* (2001) (figures 6 and 7), a life-size reconstruction of the boat in which the artist and several of his siblings undertook their southward-bound journey to Australia. An austere yet imposing work, Dang's *Boat* can be viewed as both a presence and a narrative. The presence of the boat is registered by its enormous wooden frame that was clad entirely with rice paper, which functioned as a fragile and permeable outer membrane wrapped around the solid

Figure 6: Dacchi Dang, *The Boat*, 2001. Plywood and silk print.
Site installation, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney.
Image courtesy of the artist.

surface of the boat's structure. Projected onto the rice paper in the hull of the boat were a series of photomontages depicting the sea and the sky, bound hands as well as families separated or reunited by their voyage across the high seas.

Figure 7: Dacchi Dang, *The Boat*, 2001. Plywood and silk print.
Site installation, 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney.
Image courtesy of the artist.

This visual narrative of loss and hope, composed from the fragments and imaginary glow of memory is re-enacted and dramatized by the very act of encountering the work. In order to view these images, viewers had to enter through a hatchway at the rear of the boat, whose passage across was such that one had to crouch down, and thus vicariously experience the claustrophobic swell of bodies confined in a space often reeking with urine (which in the high seas is a lot more drinkable than sea water) and the stench of fear as the boat to freedom also held out the grim possibility of turning into a coffin, one of many floating sarcophagus that never made it to shore.

Indeed, the presence and narrative of Dang's *Boat* resonated in ways that elicited identification with both the pleasure and pain of a cultural memory, one that is understood neither as an individual memory writ large nor as a buried memory that is 'recovered,' but as a particular constellation of shared memories that is negotiated and mediated through one's own present corporeal encounter with the work. By registering and embodying affect through memory, Dang's work engages in what Jill Bennett refers to as a 'poetics of sense-memory.' Bennett describes the workings of sense-memory in this way: '[S]ense memory is about tapping a certain kind of process experienced not as

a remembering of the past but as a continuous negotiation of the present with indeterminable links with the past. The poetics of sense memory involves not so much *speaking of* but *speaking out of* a particular memory or experience' (Bennett 2005: 38).

In Dang's *Boat* the poetics of sense-memory is engendered by the complicated positioning of the work, the artist and the viewer(s) across and between the 'present' and the 'past,' 'here' and 'there.' This complex positioning and negotiation across differing planes of temporality and spatiality, moreover, speaks of a particular kind of double-consciousness and ambivalence afforded by the condition of diaspora. By registering and embodying the southward-bound journey from Asia to Australia, Dang's *Boat* thus presents an alternative geo-cultural configuration of the South, one that foregrounds its complex and heterogenous topographies of difference, identity and belonging. In so doing, Dang's work refigures Australia, not as an island-continent entirely unto itself and separate from Asia, but as a landscape of encounters, a site constituted by its multiple and complexly entangled histories, spatialities and trajectories. Dang thus participates in what Derrida calls a 'politics of memory and inheritance,' a form of remembering that challenges the boundaries between Australia and Asia by creatively reconstructing the past and reinserting it within the vastly different context that his present being inhabits (Derrida 1994: xix).

Conclusion

In this paper I have shown how the various frames through which the passage of boats heading south to Australian shores converge on the wider question of the space, place and identity of the South in an increasingly globalized world marked by geographically extended and uneven spatial flows of peoples, objects and cultures. Through its critical focus on works of art that engage with and reflect on the heavily mediatized spectacle of boats arriving on Australian shores, these frames highlight not just the complexities of mobility, hospitality, sovereignty and memory; they also draw attention to the complex and shifting geo-imaginaries of the South as a symptom of Australia's paradoxical geographical location as a white settler colony, far from Europe and on the edge of Asia. At the same time, they also foreground the way in which 'Australia' and 'Asia' are not two separate and distinct entities, but are entangled in a complex set of historical, social and cultural relations that gives rise to new spatial and temporal configurations. In this context, the space of the South needs to be viewed as not just a historically and

geographically constituted site, but as a temporary constellation composed of the unstable, open-ended co-existence and interweaving of a multiplicity of trajectories— what Doreen Massey (2005) has referred to as a 'simultaneity of stories-so-far.' The trope of the South is thus a space-time configuration that is both a historically and geographically constituted site *and* a dynamic, relational and multiply-inflected spatiality.

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