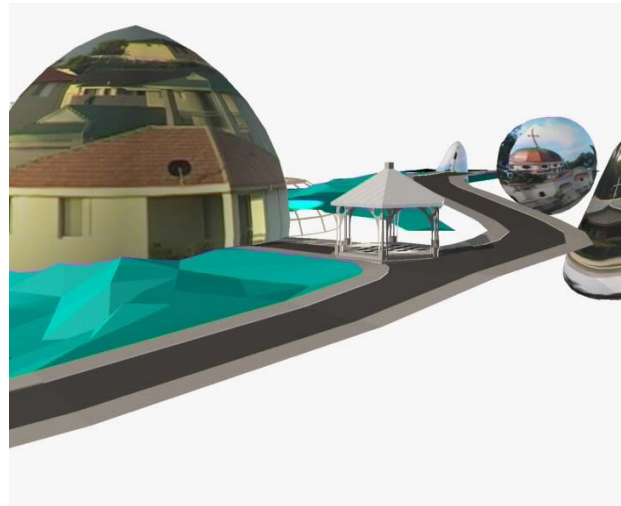


## A REMAINDERED REALITY

Beth Jackson

“The equation of everything and nothing, the subtraction of the remainder, is totally false. It is not that there is no remainder. But this remainder never has an autonomous reality, not its own place: it is what partition, circumscription, exclusion designate ... what else? It is through the subtraction of the remainder that reality is founded and gathers strength ... what else?” (1)



Peter Alwast's exhibition project *Delivery* attempts to trace the trajectory of a partition, the process of the remainder. Beginning from a point of radical inclusion, notions of 'community' and 'democracy' and 'nature', a point of 'everything' and of open invitation, Alwast traces the movement of a partition, the remainder becoming reality. *Delivery* then is a set of relations whose object and aim (or form) is 'social' rather than aesthetic or philosophical or even political, though of course it involves these forms also. *Delivery* does not seek to address the nature of the social inasmuch as it is itself a social address. And through this 'mirroring' of the social (which is beyond an aesthetic duplication or portrait), we receive a social production, a residue which in turn becomes a new social reality.

The *Delivery* project begins with the staging of a community event. Alwast issued invitations to the residents of a particular street, which included many private residents and also a number of community groups and organisations – an Islamic mosque, an Orthodox Serbian church, a Freemasons retirement home, a cricket field, a Christian church, and a New Wave religious house. Located within the suburban sprawl of the Gold Coast, this street called Allied Drive, is also the address of Alwast's family home, the place where he grew up. Individuals and community groups were invited to attend a community gathering, a small celebration for local residents, in the Colgate Palmolive Park, also located in Allied Drive. Despite Alwast's invitations which included personal phone calls to the community leaders, attendance at the event was poor and the small group which did attend did not reflect the diversity of the community. In its efforts to activate, mobilise or even just 'make appear' a residential suburban community, the event was a failure.

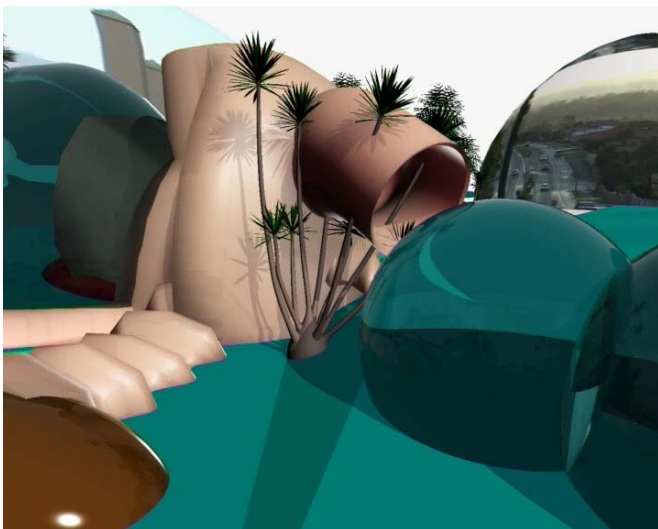
The event, which we see in projected video recording in the gallery space, consisted of three speeches: firstly from the local State member for Parliament, Peter Lawler; secondly from Nicole Haj, Corporate Affairs Officer for Colgate Palmolive; and finally from 'Spirit of the Plains', a student theatre group. The entire event including the speeches delivered from the charming podium of the park's rotunda, the documentation of the speakers through the slow circling camera and crew, the small audience gathering, the marquis with catered food and drinks, and so on, became a theatre of the Real where the tension between concept and affect was palpable.

A tragi-comic quality pervades the event and the video recording. Is this theatricality the 'joke' of the work as Art? Do we, as exhibition viewers, laugh or snicker at the poor participants (speakers and audience and crew) who were suckered into this non-event which seemed to be set up to fail from the outset? Is this irony generated by art, in the name of art, because the intention of the artist could never have been 'pure' or 'true'? I would argue rather that it is generated by the social and that this condition which borders on our own disaffection is definitional in our relation to the contemporary social, to the residual production of reality.

As part of Peter Lawler's opening speech at the event, Alwast requested he read part of Pericles' Funeral Oration. The Funeral Oration was delivered to the Athenians by the brilliant and charismatic politician and general Pericles at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War (after 490 BCE). It is the classic statement of Athenian ideology and has been described as enshrining the highest ideals of democracy. The speech has also been condemned as blatant propaganda on behalf of a warlike, imperialistic state, which (despite what Pericles says) was heartily detested by its allies. (2)

It seems that from its very beginnings, the concept of democracy functioned as both a social ideal and political propaganda. Western civilisation, founded on this lie or paradox, perpetuates itself in this manner – which is not a tension between the real and the ideal, the territory and the map, truth and fiction, but of everything and nothing, of simulacra and simulation. As Western social subjects we are accustomed to this feeling of duplicity, that a moment of radical inclusion could only be accompanied by radical scepticism. Concepts of democracy and community carry within them not only their own downfall, the proof of propaganda which keeps the ideal in tact, but an output or surplus which is reality, a remaindered reality of the social.

“Who can say if the remainder of the social is the residue of the nonsocialised, or if it is not the social itself that is the remainder, the gigantic waste product ... of what else? Of a process, which even if it were to completely disappear and had no name except the social would nevertheless only be its remainder. The residue can be completely at the level of the real.” (3)





The Colgate Palmolive park in which the event takes place is so named because when the Gold Coast City Council allowed the Colgate Palmolive Corporation to establish their factory, they did so on the condition that the Corporation create an adjacent parkland. Colgate Palmolive retained naming rights over the park, their title visible on the steps of the rotunda. In the event, the speech by the Colgate Palmolive Corporate Affairs Officer functions as a zone of 'slippage' between the politician's address and the costumed play of the students, a people's address. Symbolically and literally, the discourse of advertising becomes the centre, absorbing all modes of expression. "All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. Triumph of superficial form, of the smallest common denominator of all signification, degree zero of meaning, triumph of entropy over all possible tropes." (4) Whatever else the event marked, it was also its own shadow, a promotional opportunity for Colgate Palmolive.

In advertising's zone of confusion where signs proliferate in lengthening chains of equivalence until meaning is attenuated but still operational, we now encounter notions of the public and the consensual. Alwast's event does not politicise the Colgate Corporation, on the contrary, it manifests the everyday acceptance of the corporation's presence within the social. *Delivery*, as an exhibition project funded by Arts Queensland with its event financially supported in part by Colgate Palmolive, enacts the dissolution of political discourse as a condition of the contemporary social.

For the event's third and final speech, costumed performers read out a section entitled 'Of voice and sound: in fishes, birds, and certain other animals' from Aristotle's *The History of Animals* (350 BCE), in which Aristotle describes his observations of animal anatomy and his theories as to how they are able to make noises. His technical and arcane language becomes an impasse for communication and the event becomes Dada-esque in character. Rather than represent Nature to the world (to speak for the trees as the Lorax did in Dr Seuss' children's story), Aristotle's dialogue relegates it to the realm of the 'outside', to the unintelligible and nonsensical. The notion that animals communicate, that communication may extend well beyond the bounds of the human, becomes an hysterical exterior to the contemporary social. The park itself, with its biodiversity and flows of plant and animal activity, can only be read as a location, a container for the human. Further, utilised within the social, the park cannot be separated from the Factory and from the Naming Rights which join them. Nature, processed

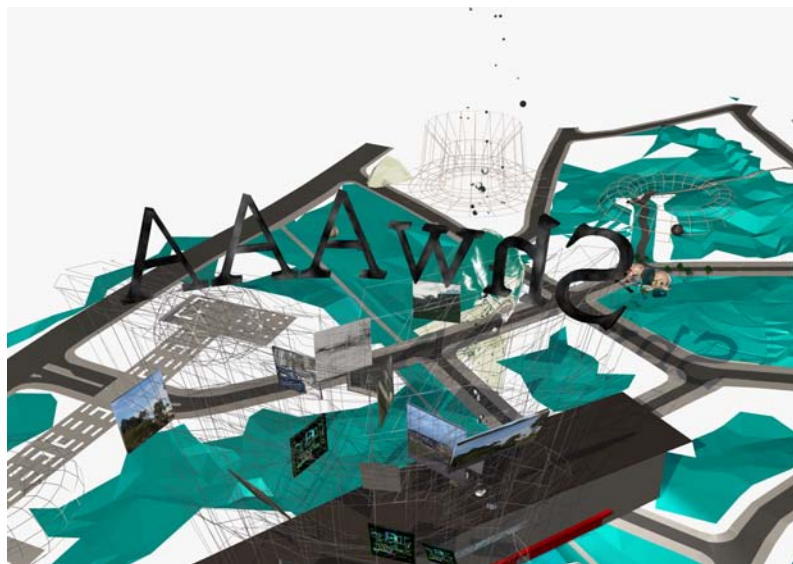


as a symmetrical equation of everything and nothing, remains a reality which is the Colgate Palmolive park.

“As a medium becomes its own message (which makes it so that now there is a demand for advertising in and of itself, and that thus the question of ‘believing’ in it or not is no longer even posed), advertising is completely in unison with the social, whose historical necessity has found itself absorbed by the pure and simple *demand* for the social: a demand that the social function like a business, a group of services, a mode of living or of survival (the social must be saved just as nature must be preserved: the social is our niche) – where formerly it was a sort of revolution in its very project. This is certainly lost: the social has lost precisely this power of illusion, it has fallen into the register of supply and demand, just as work has passed from being a force antagonistic to capital to the simple status of employment, that is to say of goods (eventually rare) and services just like the others.” (5)

The zero degree of advertising as sign language, the bite-sized grabs of image, sound and word, which are combinatory and exchangeable, is further compressed and propelled by computerisation. The digitisation and micro-processing of everyday life promotes the circulation of signs with ever greater efficiency. The terrain of the virtual has superceded physical space as the dominant signifier. The factory no longer functions primarily as an autonomous structure (workplace), but as an automated interface, an implant into the social body. The factory, like the hypermarket/shopping complex, or the new university, corresponds to a deterritorialised mode of work issued from a corporate enterprise, around which flows of suburbanisation aggregate.

In a second projection in the exhibition space, Alwast features a computer-generated video work of a virtual suburban landscape. The central towering architectural structure is the factory, inserted with virtual screens showing footage from the Colgate Palmolive plant. It spews forth objects, units of suburbia, into the surrounding landscape. On the outskirts the absurdist performances of ‘Spirit of the Plains’ remain unintelligible, unintegrated and yet inseparable. These performances echo as a mimicry and parody of the factory centre, unable to be seen ‘as they are’ because they are inseparable from the total, existing only as a remainder. Neither animal nor human, neither virtual nor filmic, their residual reality defers the total dissolution of the social.



Within the *Delivery* exhibition, there is a corresponding line of deferral, a transparent partition which divides the space while focussing it in upon itself. On one side of this screen, the artworks, on the other side an empty space and blank wall - an equation of everything and nothing. Alwast's drawings are presented as architectural maps along this division, or as the suspended screens within the computer-generated video. They are the residual traces of Alwast's work (his presence) (just as the performance event may be a residue of Alwast's childhood spent in Allied Drive), remaindered from the equation everything/nothing. The drawings, as a fallout of the essential, are traces left from Alwast's own mind/body. In this equation there is no telling which has primacy (the mind or the body, the body or its shadow). In the fallout of the essential, by the terms of the essential, there is an incessant defeat of meaning before what remains of it ... a delivery ... of what else?

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