



## Sublime Futures: eco-art and the return of the real in Peter Dombrovskis, John Wolseley and Andy Goldsworthy

Ian McLean

Transformations, No. 5 (December 2002)

<http://www.cqu.edu.au/transformations>

ISSN 1444-377

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**Abstract:** The paper examines the relationship between earlier nineteenth century aesthetic representations of nature through a romantic subjectivity and its tropes of the sublime and freedom, and contemporary ecological values. The focus of the discussion is the work of three very different artists: Peter Dombrovskis, John Wolseley and Andy Goldsworthy. While each emerged in the 1970s in three very different places with three very different aesthetic agendas, they shared two deeply held convictions: a highly developed ecological consciousness that sought to aesthetically subvert the anthropocentric values of Western civilisation, and a commitment to working far from metropolitan centres. The paper diagnoses in their work a desire for renewal and redemption on the edges of civilisation that has preoccupied modern art since the late eighteenth century. It argues that a wild nature was the locus for thinking about the great themes of Enlightenment: domination, freedom and subjectivity. The ecological turn might seem to turn against the anthropocentric conventions of Enlightenment's progeny, capitalism and modernity, but in fact it reinforces (through a repetition) the overall project. Wilderness always was and still is a site from which modernity imagines the origins of its discourses of freedom and redemption.

**Key terms:** redemption, Goldsworthy, Wolsley, Dombrovskis, sublime, subjectivity, nature.

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Landscape was the dominant genre of nineteenth century European urban artists, many of whom made frequent journeys to outlying regions for inspiration. The return to nature that has characterised a considerable part of contemporary art practice since the 1970s can be seen in a similar light; as a time when nature and non-urban regions assumed a cultural importance for highly urbanised populations. How then does nature make its presence felt today, and why?

The presence of nature in contemporary art is not always self-evident. Even when its subject is nature, the primary interest of most contemporary artist is the cultural codes of representation. This is why, in an essay on the landscapes of the contemporary German painter Gerhard Richter, Jean-Philippe Antoine declared landscape an obsolete genre. He went on to argue that Richter's considerable interest in landscape art actually subverted the values and conventions of the genre. In addressing the reproductive technologies of nineteenth century landscape art, Richter's blurred images of landscapes deconstructed the photographic dream of

nature being able to picture itself. He thus critiqued both the reproductive technologies by which nature was objectified in the scopic regimes of nineteenth century science and art, and the nineteenth century ethical 'aspiration to landscape' in which natural presence represses its staging by codes of representation.<sup>1</sup>

Antoine's structuralist critique is typical of contemporary criticism. Yet a residual objectivity remains in the obdurate realism of Richter's landscapes that Antoine does not account for. It haunts their cloudy surfaces like a ghost in the machine of mechanical reproduction. A similar point can be made about Grace Weir's video installation *Around Now* (Venice Biennale, 2001). It also focuses on the objectifying practices of photographic technology, yet in this work nature is always already outside of the picture, doing its own thing indifferent to her whirring camera. Here, as in much recent art, the real seems to have the uncanny ability to insinuate itself in the picture in defiance of the frame – be that frame the technologies and language of art or science, or the apparent deconstructive intentions of the artist. Barthes has a word for this effect: *punctum*. The *punctum* is that unexpected sublime flash that disturbs, wounds or punctuates the banal *studium* or artful representations of the work, and in so doing draws the viewer and picture into a dynamic field of re-created subjectivity.<sup>2</sup> In this respect the *punctum* is like a natural force (be it a bolt of lightning or a gentle scent) that unsettles our civilised composure and its codes of seeing and knowing.

In 1996 Hal Foster identified this contemporary turn from the postmodern ubiquity of language, as the return of the real. He misleadingly (but not incorrectly) characterised it as 'a reconnection with a past practice.'<sup>3</sup> The reconnection was not, as might be implied, with previous codes of representation, but with an un-coded reality that seemed more like nature than culture. Like Barthes' *punctum*, it punctured contemporary codes. According to Foster, it was due to the uncanny repetition of a previous trauma that simultaneously screens and points to its origin. An example Foster gave was the effect of the muffled luminescence of Richter's paintings.<sup>4</sup> However, unlike Barthes, for Foster the immediate function of this return was not to map a site of subjectivity, but was avant-gardist in intent: 'a disconnection from a present practice and/or a development of a new one'.<sup>5</sup> No matter how natural this real was, the effect of its return was cultural (even if, for Foster, its cause was that ambiguous natural/cultural psychic force Freud called the oedipal complex).

In the outmoded genre of landscape art, the return of the real is most literally and abundantly<sup>6</sup> evident in the works of artists that address ecological concerns – and it is the work of three such artists that I discuss here. The three artists, Peter Dombrovskis, John Wolseley and Andy Goldsworthy, emerged in the 1970s in three very different places with three very different aesthetic agendas. However they shared two deeply held convictions: a highly developed ecological consciousness that sought to aesthetically subvert the anthropocentric values of Western civilisation, and a commitment to working far from metropolitan centres. While modernist art has not been known for its ecological consciousness, the double desire for subversion and peripheral objects/sites marks their works as modernist and avant-gardist. If modernism understands itself as subversive – one might call it the originary fiction of modernism –, traditionally art is an unlikely site of subversion, and in the past has usually been made to buttress large urban centres of power. Since time immemorial, art has pictured ideologies that entrench the status quo, which is one reason why a subversive modernism sought inspiration in the most degraded and peripheral sites.

We might, as Slavoj Žižek is, be sceptical of art's subversive potential. 'The dispersed, plural, constructed subject hailed by postmodern theory', warns Žižek, 'far from containing any kind of subversive potentials', 'simply designates *the form of subjectivity that corresponds to late capitalism*.'<sup>7</sup> My purpose is not to question the ethical or subversive dimensions of either modernist art or the ecological consciousness of Wolseley, Dombrovskis and Goldsworthy, but to ask what form of subjectivity they picture in their return to the real, and whom it serves. What is the culture of this return to nature in art.

The commitment of eco-artists<sup>8</sup> (as I will call Wolseley, Dombrovskis and Goldsworthy) to non-urban sites follows the postmodern and postcolonial interest in the margins and borders of contemporary power. This desire for the other began well before postmodernism, and originates in romantic rebellion and modernist avant-gardism. British city-based romantic artists and poets sought inspiration in the wildernesses of Wales and the Swiss Alps. Likewise Gauguin fled Paris for Tahiti, and throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many other French artists looked across the Mediterranean to Africa and the Middle East for inspiration. However, if these artists drew inspiration from the provinces of non-urban regions in order to subvert European traditions and social structures, the verdict of history is that their art only reinforced the traditional locus of power and capital in Western urban centres. One way they did this was by entrenching the symbolic capital of Western subjectivity. In this respect, the Achilles heel of eco-art is that it speaks in old metaphors of wilderness and the sublime that originally staged the modern Kantian subject.

While eco-artists are generally hostile to the scopic regimes of nineteenth century landscape art and post-Enlightenment scientific practices that objectify nature, many also return to its desires, and especially its ecological values. The idea of ecology has its origins in the new cosmologies of the late eighteenth century fashioned by nineteenth century romantics and naturalists. Then its most influential advocate was Alexander Humboldt, and his most famous disciple was Charles Darwin who first outlined a scientific theory of ecology. Other Humboldt enthusiasts included many landscape painters and poets of the time (though Darwin's influence on art has been negligible for reasons that cannot be discussed here). The real returns in eco-art in the form of a fuller phenomenological relationship with the earth, rather than a return to nineteenth century aesthetic codes and genres. However the genuine love of wilderness felt by Dombrovskis, Wolseley and Goldsworthy is grounded in a psychology of redemption first formulated in the eighteenth century. They seek in wilderness a transcendental principle, a sense of wholeness that has been lost in the fragmentation, inequality and alienation of contemporary urban society and its discursive and technological practices. In returning to wilderness, these artists hope to recover a psychic memory of a primeval unity between nature and mankind.

The recovery is generally conducted under the aegis of the sublime, an idea that never lost its hold on modernist artists despite the waning of romanticism.<sup>9</sup> As such, these artists resurrect a late eighteenth century debate about liberty and subjectivity that galvanised revolutionary thought at the time. The sublime and wilderness are interchangeable ideas, and are figures of the Enlightenment's search for universal freedom. Put most simply, wilderness means nature that is free; a pure nature, or a nature for nature's sake free from the shadow of culture. Since the eighteenth century, sublime wilderness has been the principal site of liberty and individuality. The aim of eco-artists, working 200 years after the Enlightenment, is no less than the return of the subjective realm of modern culture to its origins in wilderness or

free nature, with the hope of reclaiming a new fullness and freedom of being. Paradoxically, a sense of sublime terror – which might be called the face of the real – is the stage for freedom and the origin of subjectivity.

The sublime, Kant realised, is a psychological state. It 'must be sought', he said, 'only in the mind of the judging Subject, and not in the Object of nature that occasions this attitude.'<sup>10</sup> Kant drew this distinction in order to emphasise the purpose of the sublime; which is to guarantee a free subjectivity and hence a space for critical judgement. It arises when the subject, apprehending from relative safety awe inspiring scenes, imaginatively feels the limits of not just its own existence, but of the conditions of subjectivity itself – that feeling of being individual and fully alive. Hence the sublime emotion is usually characterised as a terrifying pleasure: terrifying because of our inadequacy before the vast magnitude of a sublime object, but pleasurable because we narrowly escape its might. Death is the price many pay for their love of wilderness, including one of the artists under discussion. Two conclusions can be drawn from the sublime. Firstly, its inherent ambiguity: it is pleasurable for deeply ambivalent and psychological reasons. Secondly, its effect is essentially redemptive; it retrieves salvation from crisis.

Explaining his love for the Australian wilderness, John Wolseley said that artists have so worked the English landscape that it is difficult to experience it in 'a full-blooded way'. England is too much a cultural landscape; 'whilst here [Australia], I go to places where no European has ever been.'<sup>11</sup> Such ideas are hardly new. The Eden complex – the urge to find a kind of Arcadia uncorrupted by society – is integral to the Western landscape art tradition. If the aesthetic values of Western art originated in the orderly anthropocentric ratios of classical idealism, since the eighteenth century it has been sought in wild scenery far from urban Roman ruins. Since the eighteenth century many Western artists have travelled widely to make first hand studies of remote places unaffected by either classical values or modernity. Like Wolseley, they developed ways of painting that responded to the supposedly unique ecology of these places. They were motivated by eco-centric rather than anthropocentric principles.

Because many Europeans believed that the New World was still as God had originally made it, it was a rich source of the sublime. Here the *punctum* of the real was not a pin prick in the artful design of European manners that intrigued Barthes, but a great tear that spilled across the landscape, threatening the old World with oblivion. Just as Darwin discovered in the New World completely different ecosystems from the Old World that provided the basis for a new ecological theory of creation, so here artists hoped to discover new types of beauty that challenged Old World precepts.<sup>12</sup> A wild nature, not orderly classical ideals, became the arbiter of taste, especially in the nineteenth century.

For example, the nineteenth century US landscape painter Thomas Cole wrought from the dissonance of craggy landforms, torn and jagged trees, dark light and autumnal colours, a distinctively localised Hudson River landscape, yet one that evoked universal associations of a free and transcendent nature. Cole's immersion in and subjection to wilderness – his eco-centrism – produced a corporeal presence that belied the scopic space of his art, and carried with it a heightened moral commitment and sensibility that has often been commented upon. Here wilderness and freedom were considered metaphors of each other. This is how one US scholar describes the meaning of Cole's paintings: 'The style of his landscapes ... was nature's own – simple direct, the product of a democratic culture .... Like democracy, unpretentious American art had sprung from the soil, from an honest, open spirit that pervaded the

land.<sup>18</sup> Cole disdained those whose Eurocentric eyes depreciated American scenery, accusing them of reading too much about 'Grecian mountains, and Italian skies, and never troubling themselves to look at their own.' Cole's vision was essentially a moral one, finding in American scenery a wilderness that, compared to European landscape, showed more directly the handiwork of God.

Like today's eco-artists, Cole was acutely aware of the erosion of history and culture on nature, and painted many allegorical paintings that directly addressed this theme. Even his 'pure' landscapes evoke a primeval Edenic past that redeem the crisis of modernisation. 'I took a walk, last evening, up the valley of the Catskills, where they are now constructing a railroad', he wrote. 'This was once my favourite walk; but now the charm of solitude and quietness is gone. It is, however, still lovely: man cannot improve its craggy hills, nor well destroy all its rock-rooted trees: the rapid stream will also have its course.'<sup>19</sup>

Peter Dombrovskis's photographs clearly owe much to the nineteenth century tradition of New World painting and its resistance to history, culture and modernisation. As with Cole, Dombrovskis makes wilderness an ecstatic place in which the subject can be re-born. A well-known Tasmanian environmentalist photographer; his photographs were widely used in environmentalist calendars and posters in the 1980s. His most famous photograph, *Rock Island Bend, Franklin River, South-West Tasmania* (1983), is credited with saving a river system from damming, and defeating a federal government. In the immediacy of political debate at the time, Dombrovskis's obvious point was that this place would shortly disappear beneath the waters of the planned dam. However, the photograph's political success lies in the hope it engendered, not in the political anger it may have generated. The effect of *Rock Island Bend* lies not in its direct call to political action, but in its spiritual power to heal alienated urban populations by recalling, in its wilderness imagery, the universal sublime space of creation. Like Cole's paintings, *Rock Island Bend* asserts that 'man cannot improve its craggy hills, nor well destroy all its rock-rooted trees: the rapid stream will also have its course.' Dombrovskis makes wilderness real a metaphor for the sacred and for creation itself.

Taken with a large format camera, Dombrovskis's photographs are unusually detailed. However, in *Rock Island Bend* the detail is more like a vivid dream than a lived bodily experience. A primeval scene magically appears from the mist as if an allegory of both creation and the photographic process itself. The two cliffs might frame the picture in picturesque fashion, but this frame provides no stable perspective or platform for our viewing. We are not quite placed in the scene, but we are made to feel it intimately, as if we are there. Photographed between the cliffs just above the swirling waters, we are placed deep in the wilderness, as if we too have trekked our way in. However the effort of such a hike is kept out of view, for the picture is more like a vision than a lived experience. No human bodies are present, and there is no ground under our feet. It is sometimes said that humans are not included in his photographs because there were none to photograph – Dombrovskis hiked alone. But this misses the point. Tim Bonyhady is closer to the mark when he writes that Dombrovskis's 'message implicitly was that wilderness was purest – and best – when there were no people in it. Wilderness, he seemed to say, was to be seen ... and revered, but not touched.'<sup>20</sup> Dombrovskis is not providing direct bodily or lived memories of the place that might anthropomorphise the scene, but psychic memories (dreamings) of the cosmological (and ecological) genesis of place and subjectivity. He makes these memories compellingly real or present, but at the same time surreal and dreamlike. As such, these memories cannot be touched or

named; only, like YWH, revered and remembered. *Rock Island Bend* was politically effective because, in picturing this fragility of existence and subjectivity in a time of social crisis, it also pictured the possibility of recovery. The sublime is an aesthetic of both catastrophe and hope.

The primeval dreamlike quality of *Rock Island Bend* is a typical characteristic of sublime imagery because in it echoes the undifferentiated space that precedes creation and the founding of the subject. Ancient Greek cosmologies referred to this formless space of pre-creation as *chora*, which means empty space or receptacle. In these terms, *Rock Island Bend* memorialises a cosmogenesis in which the waters of the Franklin River, swirling between the cliffs of 'Mother Earth's' supine body, suggest the originary *chora* or womb from which life is born. The effect is intrauterine rather than sensory, and creates an ambivalence of place – by which I mean an uncertainty of where one is grounded. It is what Elizabeth Grosz named 'the space in which place is made possible'.<sup>18</sup> It is, then, a space of hope, of possibility and expectation.

Not all eco-art is made in such a spiritual register. In Wolseley's paintings, for example, nature is a much more quotidian and phenomenological place. At first sight nothing could be further from Dombrovskis's photographs (or Cole's paintings). While Dombrovskis's images are without people (including signs of his own body), the presence of Wolseley's body is evident in every mark he makes. *Rock Island Bend* is, like many nineteenth century landscape paintings, an arresting visual composition designed for a sublime effect. Wolseley's paintings, on the other hand, seem to buck this tradition. If Dombrovskis orders the scene through his viewfinder, Wolseley orders it through the ways in which he bodily inhabits the place.

If his pictures are phenomenological, they are not anthropocentric. Rather they are centred or ordered by the ecology of the place. Combining close up and more distant observations, Wolseley builds into his drawings the micro and macro processes of his peripatetic journeys through these places and their effects on him. Sometimes the habitat imprints itself on the drawings; the real literally returns to stain and tear the *studium* of his designs. The result is a hybrid style that resembles fragmentary notes in explorer journals rather than finished paintings. They often lack the unified space typical of paintings organised around the dominant visual paradigm of perspectival space. Fragments of maps, botanical studies and written notes are casually tacked together, and are to be read as much as looked at. Paul Carter's descriptions of explorer journals equally apply to Wolseley's paintings: 'narratives that fan out inconclusively as they proceed, they strangely resemble the country they describe.'. They 'do not proceed smoothly towards the longed-for denouement ..., but consist of a multitude of fragmentary asides, speculative observations, scraps of dialogue, reminiscences which struggle inconclusively for definition and dominance.'<sup>19</sup>

Wolseley's cure for the ecological crisis of Western civilisation derives from sensory memories embedded in bodily sensations of wild places. Rather than imposing a language on nature, he mimics its rhythms and forms. He makes himself at home in a wilderness space not yet secured by culture. What is gained, says Carter, is the re-discovery of the rudiments of spatiality itself – or, that is, 'chora'. In other words, the effect is much the same as that sought by Dombrovskis; a universal primeval wilderness is discovered in which the subject is yet to be born. Carter characterised it as 'a return to an earlier state';<sup>20</sup> to a 'latent' 'deeper poetics' that he believes are 'suppressed' 'within the ritualised performances of language'. Wolseley's homely wilderness is thus also sublime. It ends up in the same spiritual register as a

Dombrovskis photograph. Neither entirely escapes the colonialist and explorer nostalgia for the virgin territory of the real.

The similarity between Wolseley's paintings and explorer journals is due to their shared empiricism. Bernard Smith has convincingly argued that explorer art is a scientific rather than aesthetic activity. If the Royal Academy sought to further entrench the neo-classical conventions of the Italian Renaissance 'Masterpiece', the Royal Society called for empirical first-hand observations of things and their ecological relationships. 'Under the influence of science,' said Smith, 'ecological principles began to determine increasingly the forms of unity which the landscape-painter imposed on his material.' The effect was revolutionary on artistic practice, because 'analytical and empirical observation' disrupted neo-classical principles of aesthetic harmony, 'forcing the artist to look at the world as a world of disparate things.'<sup>48</sup> The inaugural President of the Royal Academy, Sir Joshua Reynolds summed up the difference well. It was, he said, due to the 'the influence of two different principles, in which the one follows nature, the other varies it, and sometimes departs from it.'<sup>49</sup> This perceived difference between nature and the traditions of high art is also the hallmark of eco-artists. For example, Hamish Fulton, another pioneer of an ecological approach to art, wrote:

Some people don't think about ... the reality of things, only the way reality has been transformed through songs or poems or photographs or paintings. Instead of thinking about the object itself, they only think about an image of the object. This is the problem with many landscape photographs – they're not about the landscape but more about other landscape photographs.<sup>51</sup>

This desire to embrace the land itself as if it is beyond or before culture is the shared impulse of colonialists, explorers, scientists and ecologists. Like the anatomist, they have a desire to make someone else's place into a *terra nullius* that is ripe for dissection. Wolseley's paintings are directly descended from this imperial age of exploration. As if an explorer seeing a country for the first time, he draws the flora and fauna, and surveys, maps and documents his journey through the country. In dissecting the country, he prepares the country for both settlement and for preservation as a wilderness park.

While the country might be a wilderness to Wolseley and Dombrovskis, it has long been mapped and worked by Indigenous peoples. However Wolseley is well aware of this, and to accuse him of a colonialist vision as I have somewhat crudely done, is too simplistic and misleading. The Western urban concept of 'Wilderness' presumes, in its very formulation, a binary distinction between nature and culture that Wolseley, Carter and Dombrovskis want to dispel. While Wolseley calls much of Australia wilderness even though it has been occupied and worked by Aborigines for tens of thousands of years, he wants to redefine the meaning of wilderness, and to move beyond the nature/culture dichotomy that is initially responsible for its conception. For Wolseley the Indigenous landscape is a wilderness. However wilderness is not a place without humans or culture. Rather, it is a metaphor for the hopeful unity of nature and culture that, in his art and life, he works to substantiate.

Some eco-critics, well aware of a similar complicity and ambiguity in their own discourses, draw a distinction between wildness and wilderness. Wildness is that ultimate reality, a universal sublime abjectness which exists as an excluded residue in the heart of notions of culture, civilisation and art. 'Wildness', says eco-critic Gary Snyder, 'is not limited to the two percent formal wilderness areas ... it is everywhere.'<sup>52</sup> 'It has', he says, 'been a part of basic human experience to live in a

culture of wilderness. There has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several hundred thousand years.<sup>23</sup> For these reasons, Andy Goldsworthy, probably the most acclaimed and best known eco-artist, prefers to work in non-wilderness areas.

If Goldsworthy is not attracted to wilderness areas, he is, in his words, 'drawn to wildness'. 'I find wildness in what is often considered commonplace.' His aim is to make work that 'reaches deep into nature – drawing on the unseen – touching the living rock – revealing the energy inside.' This is why he prefers to work in a familiar place. His intimacy with it helps him to better experience the universal wildness that resides in the materials he works with. He is not interested in the discourses of things, but in their ecological support; the 'opening into the processes of life within and around it.' 'Movement, change, light, growth and decay are the lifeblood of nature, the energies that I tap through my work.'<sup>24</sup> Further, he refuses to distinguish between nature and culture, or between agri-culture and high art culture. To picture what he calls 'the nature that is in all things',<sup>25</sup> he often draws on traditional craft skills (i.e. culture), such as the dry stone masonry used in his walls. He makes these with the help of skilled wallers. Goldsworthy insists that he keeps 'the walls' roots firmly in agriculture and not art', and that they are not nostalgic. 'They are not backward looking. I live in a region that has many good wallers.' He even uses excavators, trucks and cameras.

If the art historical antecedents of Wolseley and Dombrovskis are self-evident, this is not the case with Goldsworthy. He deliberately works outside the traditions of fine art, preferring to connect with agri-culture. 'I enjoy the aesthetic of the practical' (though he insists his work is art).<sup>26</sup> However, like Wolseley and Dombrovskis, he seeks memories of the earth that have been excluded in the traditions of Western art. Like their work, his art exhibits a distinctly romantic impulse that seeks out pre-industrial places and practices. He searches for memories of a universal Edenic Nature. 'My work made indoors or with urban and industrial materials is an attempt to discover nature in these things also. It is more difficult to find nature in materials so far removed from their source, and I cannot go for long before I need to work with the earth direct – hand to earth.'<sup>27</sup>

The desire for renewal and redemption, to be born again, to tap a primeval origin, to return to the real, to be seduced by the *punctum*, or however modern theorists have tried to describe this singular desire, is not unique to eco-artists. It is shared by many modernists, and arguably, drives the psychic desire for New Worlds. Closer to our times, it has motivated feminist attacks on so-called masculinist discourses, and sought to retrieve what Grosz called 'the debt' masculinist discourses 'owe to the most primordial of all spaces, the maternal space from which all subject emerge, and which they ceaselessly attempt to usurp.'<sup>28</sup> Now this same impulse for the real is motivating eco-artists, as well as other contemporary artists. Here the project of Enlightenment and modernity - of individuality, liberty, fraternity and equality, as well as avant-gardism and taste - is renewed in the midst of its decay and crisis. Notions of wildness and wilderness are central to this renewal because they hold the key to trauma management. In moments of extreme trauma, said Julia Kristeva, 'the aesthetic task' is 'a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct ... closest to its dawn'. Hence, for her, 'great modern literature unfolds over' this terrain of the abject,<sup>29</sup> or for eco-artists, over the terrain of the sublime.



What sort of subjectivity is this? Is it, as Foster suggests, a subjectivity at the heart of the 'dialectic of modernism'?<sup>1</sup> – that is, of some Hegelian contest of ideological ideas that define modernity. Zizek seems to think so. For him, it is no coincidence that the emergence of eco-consciousness at the end of the twentieth century is contemporary with the West's enchantment with the rebirth of democracy in Eastern Europe, South Africa and South Eastern Asia.<sup>2</sup> This might go some way towards explaining the apparent continuity between eco-art and the late-eighteenth century appeal to wilderness. The retrieval of the sublime, like the reinvention of democracy, is a way for the West to reconnect to the time when those universal values of freedom and equality were first imagined and substantiated in political and aesthetic discourses, but which now have become corrupted. A wild nature was the locus for thinking about the great themes of Enlightenment: domination, freedom and subjectivity. The ecological turn might seem to turn against the anthropocentric conventions of Enlightenment's progeny, capitalism and modernity, but in fact it reinforces (through a repetition) the overall project. Wilderness always was and still is a site from which modernity imagines the origins of its discourses of freedom and redemption.

In a time when the logic of capital has not just overtaken the project of Enlightenment, but itself becomes universal, the only way forward for this project, says Slavoj Zizek, is 'to invent forms of political practice that contain a dimension of universality beyond Capital'. 'Their exemplary case today,' he says, 'is the ecological movement.'<sup>3</sup> The trauma that Foster believes repeats itself in this recent return of the real may be the (oedipal) trauma of avant-gardism itself, a diachronic structure in which each generation imagines its own subjectivity in an era without the universal synchronic constraints of traditional ethical commands. In the avant-gardism Wolseley and Goldsworthy practice (and Dombrovskis less obviously), wilderness is a type of ethics or necessary fiction through which the modern subject anticipates its own subjectivity. Whether it is ecologically sustainable is another matter?

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Philippe Antoine, 'Photography, Painting and the Real The Question of Landscape in the Painting of Gerhard Richter', *Gerhard Richter*, ed. Jacinto Lageira, Editions Dis Voir, Paris, 1995, pp. 53-89.

<sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, translated Richard Howard, Fontana, London, 1984, pp. 26-27, 40-59.

<sup>3</sup> Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. x.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp. 132-134.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps too abundantly to count in Barthes' and Foster's psychological aesthetic.

<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, p. 216.

<sup>8</sup> The term 'eco-art' refers to ecologically based art. As a term it has minimal currency, and as yet hardly exists except on a few websites (such as

<http://www.eco-art.com> and <http://www.coa.edu/ecoart/>). The term belongs to the new millennium, and is North American in origin. It surely derives from the popularity of the term 'eco-feminism'.

<sup>9</sup> For a good collection of essays by contemporary critics on the continuing relevance of the sublime to critical thought, see Jeffrey S. Lirett (ed.), *Of the Sublime: Presence in Question*, State University of New York, Albany, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, translated James Creed Meredith, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1952, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Sasha Grishin, *John Wolseley Land Marks*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1998, p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> See Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1989.

<sup>13</sup> William H. Truettner, 'Nature and the Native Tradition: The Problem of Two Thomas Coles', *Thomas Cole Landscape into History*, ed. William H. Truettner and Alan Wallach, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1994, p. 138.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in John R. Stilgoe, 'Walking Seer: Cole as Pedestrian Spectator', *Thomas Cole Drawn to Nature*, Albany Institute of History & Art, Albany, 1993, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Tim Bonyhady, 'The Photo that changed us', *The Australian Weekend Review*, April 20-21, 1996, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country*, Faber and Faber, London, 1992, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 20, 27.

<sup>19</sup> Smith, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Joshua Reynolds, 'Discourse XIII', *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark. Yale University Press, New Haven, 1988, p. 238

<sup>21</sup> Hamish Fulton, in *Landscape: Theory*, Lustrum Press, New York, 1980, pp. 83-84.

<sup>22</sup> Gary Snyder, 'The Etiquette of Freedom', *The Wilderness Condition*, ed. Max Oelschlaeger, Island Press, Washington D.C., p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Andy Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy: a collaboration with nature*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, c1990, np.

<sup>25</sup> Andy Goldsworthy, *Stone*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1994, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> Goldsworthy, *Andy Goldsworthy*, np.

<sup>28</sup> Grosz, p. 121.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror An Essay on Abjection*, translated Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> Foster, pp. x-x1.

<sup>31</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1993, p. 200.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 220.

**Note on the author:** Dr Ian McLean lectures in art history at the University of Western Australia. He has published widely on Australian art and postcolonial issues, including the books *White Aborigines* (Cambridge University Press) and *The Art of Gordon Bennett* (Craftsman House). He is currently researching issues associated with landscape art, nature and Darwinism.