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Elegy to an Oz Republic

First Steps in a Ceremony of Invocation towards Reconciliation

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In this essay I focus on three paintings from Robert Motherwell's series 'Elegy to the Spanish Republic' (1963–1975): *Five in the Afternoon,* (1949), *Elegy to the Spanish Republic 100* (1963–1975) and *Reconciliation Elegy* (1978). I do so to address the question of how an artist might 'borrow' from Motherwell's images to engage in an act of reconciliation in Australia today. What is at stake in such an act? Can one, ethically, invoke not just the name or the sentiment embodied in Motherwell's 'Elegies', but also the force that operates in the series? Can one do so to address the question of reconciliation now?

In 2012, I completed a series of drawings and paintings that, while figurative in form, were structurally based on and derived their inspiration from the abstract paintings and lithographs from Motherwell's series. A large drawing, *Black with No Way Out (after Motherwell*) (Figure 1), 'borrowed' Robert Motherwell's name ('after Motherwell'), the title (*Black with No Way Out*) and compositional structural elements from Motherwell's lithograph *Black with No Way Out* (1983) (Figure 2).

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The line work and massing repetition of shapes in the drawing *Black with No Way Out (after Motherwell*), rhyme the rhythms of Motherwell's works to create what Ashley Crawford has deemed, an 'apocalyptic *mise on scène*'.[1] A second series of drawings, *Study for Bourke Street 5pm* (2012) (Figure 6) and *Elegy to an Oz Republic (after Motherwell)* (2012) (Figure 8), appropriate the form of Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic 100* (1963–1975) (Figure 7). This wholesale 'borrowing', 'quotation' and 'citation' raises a number of questions. What does it mean to engage in acts of appropriation now? And, more importantly, can such acts of appropriation draw on the spirit of the 'original' work to make a (political) difference?[2]

Here, I examine whether it is possible to draw on and activate the expansive forces operating in Motherwell's *Reconciliation Elegy* as a gesture towards reconciliation. I argue it is necessary not only to attend to what is pictured, but to also address the conditions through which these works *work*. I propose that, figured performatively, appropriation or citation of Motherwell's 'Elegies to a Spanish Republic' is not about re-presenting or re-producing forms, but rather is concerned with invoking the imperceptible forces beneath perception. Thus, the task of working with Motherwell's compositions is not just technical, nor is it merely undertaken to invoke the name and history of Robert Motherwell.[3] The act of appropriation asks that the artist doing the appropriation attend to the ghosts operating in and through the work, unleash them and allow them to come to bear upon the viewer.

Appropriation and its relation to reconciliation remains a vexed issue, particularly in the Australian context where the legacy of colonisation on Indigenous culture is so forcefully felt. Nowhere in the Australian art world has this played out so clearly than in Imants Tillers' infamous appropriation in his painting *The Nine Shots* (1985) of Indigenous artist Michael Jagamara Nelson's *Five Dreamings* (1982–84). The appropriation, and the fact that it was made without Jagamara's permission, prised open a deep cultural wound. It led to a scathing reappropriation of *The Nine Shots* by Indigenous artist Gordon Bennett in his *The Nine Ricochets (Fall down black fella, jump up white fella*) (1990). Howard Morphy notes, in a catalogue essay for the exhibition *Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions*, that Tiller's appropriation and Bennett's response had revealed a simple fact:

Figure 1: Barbara Bolt, *Black with No Way Out (after Motherwell*), 2012, charcoal on arches, 114 cm x 390 cm

Figure 2: Robert Motherwell, *Black with No Way Out 1981,* 1983, lithograph printed in black and red from two aluminium plates, sheet 38.4 x 95.4 cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Gift of Kenneth Tyler, 2002 © Dedalus Foundation, Inc./VAGA. Licensed by Viscopy.

> all that has happened in the recent history of Australia has been made possible by the colonisation and often the deaths of Aboriginal Australians … the idea that there was a wrong that needed to be acknowledged and addressed.[4]

However, there is a difference to be articulated between Morphy's essay of 2006 and Tillers' earlier writings about his appropriative paintings. In 'Locality Fails', written three years before the controversy erupted over *The Nine Shots,* Tillers provides a context for understanding his attitude towards appropriation and cultural borrowing.[5] Two threads are apparent in this article. First, Tillers is very critical of the romance with 'Aboriginality' pursued by Australian artists in the 1970s and 1980s.[6] For Tillers, 'Aboriginality' adopted in these guises was not rooted or

connected to any spiritual base, but was, according to Rex Butler, 'a cynical marketing device for an art that has long lost its associations with ritual and religion'.[7] Second, Tillers rejected the concept of 'local or indigenous Australian art' that is located in 'a specific time and place'.[8] In commenting on Tillers' position, Butler notes two specific reasons for this rejection. He observes that for Tillers there could be no local art, since local conditions are always already under the influence of the global because of the impact of technology on the distribution of information, images and ideas.[9] Further, Butler refers to Tillers' provocation, drawn from quantum physics, that there is no such thing as an original and that instead of the 'original' influencing and being imbricated in the appropriated image, an appropriation has the potential to affect the original.

Tillers draws on quantum physics to argue that similar events don't need to be co-located, but rather similar events occurring in different places can be seen as linked, even in the absence of any rational or logical connection.[10] He draws on Bell's theorem of the 'irrational' nature of subatomic phenomena, whereby similar events can be produced in unrelated times and places (what he refers to as a 'space-like separation'). Using the logic of Bell's theorem, Tillers proposes, for example, that it may be possible to speculate that Arnold Böcklin's painting, *The Island of the Dead* (1880), *could have* been a direct result of the extermination of Tasmanian Aborigines by white settlers—even though Böcklin did not have any direct knowledge of this event. As Butler puts it, 'it is always possible to read the events *as though The Island of the Dead* were a response to that massacre'.[11] In other words, through offering a pataphysically inspired hypothetical argument, Tillers provocatively proposed that 'for any assertion of locality (locatedness) … there also arises the equal and opposite possibility that this metropolitan culture (the original) is the "unconscious" or inadvertent imitation of provincial culture (the copy)'.[12] Thus, Butler observes that Tiller's appropriations are underpinned by the view that:

> by means of the … recontextualisation of a[n] … original … he is able to show that that … original was itself only a copy, that the meaning of any single image is never given in itself but only as an effect of its context; different readings of the same text produce different texts.[13]

While his more recent appropriations of Indigenous art and collaborations with Indigenous artists, including Michael Jagamara Nelson, may be in some ways viewed as acts of reconciliation, at the time Tillers appropriated *Five Dreamings* his attitude to appropriation was thoroughly postmodern.[14] He borrowed willy-nilly, and without conscience, from such artists as Sigma Polk, Anselm Kiefer, Jiri Goerge Dokoupil and George Baselitz, Julian Schnabel, David Salle, Sherrie Levine and Philip Taaffe, Giorgio de Chirico, Sandro Chia, Arakawa and Richard Long. Their images become already 'ready-mades' for his use. According to Butler, Tillers' aim was to send the images 'back to their place of origin in order to render indistinguishable the original and the copy, to show that the original itself was only ever a copy'.[15] In doing this, Tiller's 're-make' evacuates the 'original' of its context and power, so that his appropriations become the default against which the so-called original is seen. This attitude is summed up in an interview Paul Foss conducted with Tillers for *Art & Text*, two years after *The Nine Shots* was painted and a year after the image was reproduced in the catalogue for the Sydney Biennale.[16] In the interview, titled 'Mammon or Millennial Eden?', Tillers spoke of his appropriation of Sigma Polke's work in the following way: 'The reason I chose it was that it could quite easily have been a composite painting done by me. It was a ready-made Tillers done by Polke.'[17] And so it may also be that Michael Jagamara Nelson's *Five Dreamings* is now forever known in terms of Imants Tillers' *The Nine Shots*: a ready-made Tillers done by Jagamara Nelson.

However, what many commentators at the time did not understand was that in appropriation it is not merely the image that is taken. To 'invoke' an image effectively activates the spirits that inhabit the image. In Indigenous culture, this always means enacting the performative or *methexical* power of the image.[18] One is the custodian of particular symbols and imagery and this brings with it onerous responsibilities. As Morphy writes:

> While 'borrowing from', 'being influenced by', 'finding inspiration in', 'learning from', and 'building upon' other people's artworks is always going to be an integral part of art practice, it is never going to be without its dangers since art is not limited to particular kinds of objects. It is the case that some Aboriginal art produced for sale is sacred art; it is the case that under Aboriginal law the rights to produce those works might be

> limited to a small group of individuals; it is the case that the rights in such works might be vested in a group; it is the case that the breach of rights in and the unauthorised use of such artworks can be seen as a form of sacrilege that affects the fabric of the artist's society. This does not mean that the works concerned are not artworks. It means, as has been the case throughout human history, that a work of art can be other things besides itself—in the case of some Aboriginal art it is a mark of identity, a title deed to land, a sign or instance of ancestral presence.[19]

And, as Robyn Ferrell tells us, the painting's 'intensity is … perceived through the figure of the artist, as their law, their history, their Dreaming' and its enactment as painting is to effect an order through aesthetic means.[20]

The 'postmodern' moment that saw the flowering of appropriation did not initially appreciate the power of picturing. In his 2007 article 'Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art', Jan Verwoert discusses the iconoclasm of the 1970s and 1980s in the face of postmodern discourses that rehearsed the death of modernity, the death of history and historical meaning, the death of painting, and the arbitrariness and emptiness of the signifier.[21] In all of this, the appropriative gesture of postmodernism mistook life forms for dead matter to be endlessly circulated and re-used. This, as I will argue, is no longer the case in a post-appropriative context.

So, let's return to my own appropriations of Motherwell's imagery introduced at the beginning of this essay. What am I bound to execute? What do the images command? What are the 'ghosts' in Motherwell's work and how might I attend ethically to them and (to cite Derrida) give them back their voice and allow them to speak?[22] Here, we need a context. Between 1949 and 1991, Robert Motherwell painted more than one hundred and seventy abstract works that constitute what is now known to us as the 'Elegies to the Spanish Republic'. Central to my ongoing investigation of Motherwell's 'Elegies' is a specific work in this series, *Reconciliation Elegy,* painted in 1977 and hung in 1978 (see Figure 3). *Reconciliation Elegy* was commissioned for the opening of the East Building of the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

Of the painting, Robert Motherwell writes:

> The Washington Painting was entitled *Reconciliation Elegy* for several

Figure 3: Robert Motherwell, *Reconciliation Elegy*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 304 cm x 914.4 cm; © Dedalus Foundation, Inc/VAGA. Licensed by Viscopy, 2015.

> reasons. Partly from a conversation the same year with the Spanish artist Tàpies *chez moi* about the new hopes for humanism in Spain—my *Elegies to the Spanish Republic* had been meant, on one level, as an elegy for the tragically missed opportunity of Spain to enter the liberal world in the 1930s. And for its tragic suffering then and for decades after.[23]

Reconciliation Elegy points back to a specific event in history, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Historically, Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), which addresses the bombing of the Basque town Guernica by German and Italian war planes at the behest of the Spanish Nationalist forces on 26 April 1937, is seen as the most powerful anti-war painting of the twentieth century, specifically for the way it captures and expresses the horrors of war. The power of Motherwell's 'Elegy' paintings, on the other hand, was nullified by the discourse of abstract expressionism and cold war politics (abstract expressionism is the art of a 'free America') and the reduction of abstract expressionism to 'mute abstract shapes' that are purely aesthetic.[24]

This 'reading' remains alive and well. In his review of the exhibition 'Robert Motherwell: At Five in the Afternoon', held at the National Gallery of Australia in 2014, art critic Christopher Allen writes of the 'questionable claim to meaning made by the Elegy series (which) is intended to recall the Spanish Civil War'. Allen struggles to find 'meaning' in the works, suggesting, for example, that in Motherwell's lithographs 'one senses a certain frustration that the abstract gestural marks are ultimately gratuitous and can never have the depth of meaning of calligraphy' and that his work is 'trying to mean more than it can'.[25] In Allen's assessment, Motherwell's abstract shapes become reduced to 'muteness', and in this,

he argues, can offer no access to the viewer. But what if the 'Elegies' are not *just* about meaning? What if their concern is with invoking a/effects? For Deleuze and Guattari, for example, art is not concerned with meaning or communication and a work of art is never trying to mean more than it can.[26] This is not its job. Rather, art's task is expressive; it is to summon forth the 'invisible forces of gravity, heaviness, rotation, the vortex, explosion, expansion, germination and time … make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world'.[27] Perhaps this expressiveness enables us to think differently about Motherwell's works and the appropriations it inspires.

How can one make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world? It may at one level seem like a Faustian desire to know all, to reveal all. Here, though, I am not concerned with what is represented or what a painting 'looks like'. Rather, at stake are the conditions through which picturing works, and how the image may affect us through the operations of the work-of-art.

So I come back to my earlier question. What does it mean to invoke the ghost of Robert Motherwell in a series of figurative images? What is the injunction that the Spanish 'Elegies' invoke? It is not just a question of invoking the name and history of Robert Motherwell through the linguistic sign 'after Motherwell'. Nor is it an appropriation in the sense of a copy or a restatement of an original 'Motherwell', or even a question of a technical application of Motherwell's compositions. To invoke Motherwell's 'Elegies to a Spanish Republic' involves acknowledging the conditions through which the 'Elegies' work and putting to work the expansive and compressive forces that operate to undo 'the image' and produce something true-to-life.

Motherwell's first work in the series that we now know as 'Elegy to the Spanish Republic' was originally titled *At Five in the Afternoon* (1949). This elegiac titling of the work has, for some, put into question the political impetus for the work. As Elisabet Goula Sarda notes:

> in all the different interpretations critics have offered of the series, none has focused on what the title really expresses: the fate of the Spanish Republic. One of the main reasons for the scant success of a reading that

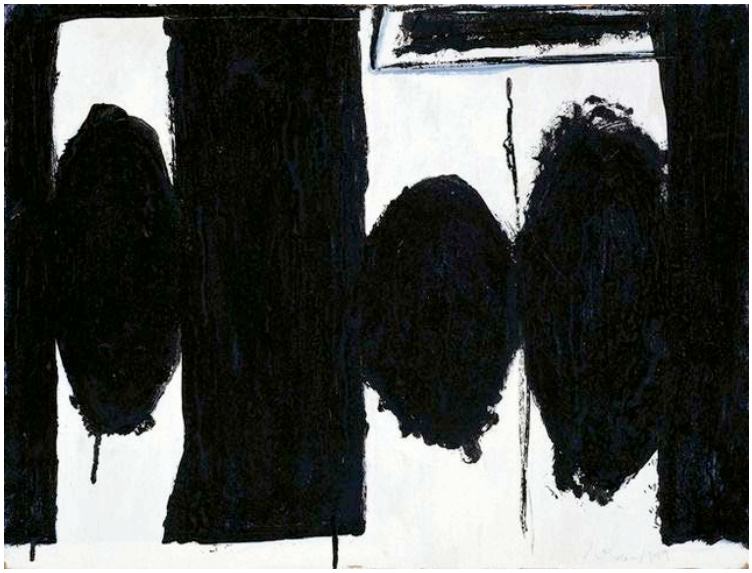

Figure 4: Robert Motherwell *Five in the Afternoon,* 1949, Casein and graphite on paperboard, 38.1 cm x 50.8 cm; © Dedalus Foundation, Inc/VAGA. Licensed by Viscopy, 2015.

> would seem so obvious is that the title was the second choice after the original one of *At Five in the Afternoon*. Hence many critics never went beyond seeing Lorca's poem as the essential, only reference for the series.[28]

The poem to which she refers is Lorca's *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, a deep outpouring of grief written by Lorca at the death of his friend, the bullfighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, who was mortally wounded by a bull in a bullfight in 1934. In the first section of the poem Lorca uses the power of repetition in the refrain, 'At five in the afternoon', as both an incantation of mourning and a force that relentlessly drives home the finality of death:

The Goring and the Death

At five in the afternoon.
It was just five in the afternoon.
A boy brought the white sheet
at five in the afternoon.
A basket of lime made ready
at five in the afternoon.
The rest was death and only death

at five in the afternoon.

The wind blew the cotton wool away
at five in the afternoon.
And oxide scattered nickel and glass
at five in the afternoon.
Now the dove and the leopard fight
at five in the afternoon.
And a thigh with a desolate horn
at five in the afternoon.
The bass-pipe sound began
at five in the afternoon.
The bells of arsenic, the smoke
at five in the afternoon.
Silent crowds on corners
at five in the afternoon.
And only the bull with risen heart!
at five in the afternoon.
When the snow-sweat appeared
at five in the afternoon.
when the arena was splashed with iodine
at five in the afternoon.
death laid its eggs in the wound
at five in the afternoon.
At five in the afternoon.
At just five in the afternoon.

A coffin on wheels for his bed
at five in the afternoon.
Bones and flutes sound in his ear
at five in the afternoon.
Now the bull bellows on his brow
at five in the afternoon.
The room glows with agony

at five in the afternoon.
Now out of distance gangrene comes
at five in the afternoon.
Trumpets of lilies for the green groin
at five in the afternoon.
Wounds burning like suns
at five in the afternoon,
and the people smashing windows
at five in the afternoon.
At five in the afternoon.
Ay, what a fearful five in the afternoon!
It was five on every clock!
It was five of a dark afternoon![29]

Deleuze and Guattari propose that the refrain is a movement that both territorialises and deterritorialises.[30] At one level, it calms and stabilises, offering some centre in the heart of chaos.[31] On another level, through improvisation, the refrain allows us to open out onto the chaos of the forces of the world; 'one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth'.[32] For Deleuze and Guattari, to improvise is to deterritorialise and meld with the world, to lose boundary and feel as and with the world.

In her article 'Grieving as Depicted in Federico Garcia Lorca's "Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías"', Shelley Rockwell discusses the effects of the repetition in opening the personal out onto the world. She observes that this opening out builds a sense of shared grief, and in doing so is the first step in a collective act of mourning.[33] She analyses the building of momentum through repetition and demonstrates how the variations on a refrain in the last five lines of the section create discontinuity that in turn works to 'form a new continuity'.[34] She points to the fourth refrain, 'It was five by every clock!', as implicating each of us in the bullfighter's death. This, she says:

> asserts the deadly hour as a communal event by all. As though by virtue of owning or reading a clock that reads 'five in the afternoon' one too suffers the 'fatal' hour. The mourner longs to believe that his loss is universal.[35]

The final refrain, 'It was five of a dark afternoon!', offers a poignant finale for this section of the poem. While it may symbolically represent the end of the day, the end of a life, and the beginning of despair and mourning a passing, its significance also relates to the place of 'black' in Lorca's lexicon (and in Motherwell's use of 'black' in his 'Elegies'). For Lorca 'black' relates to the Spanish spirit of the *duende*.[36]

In his lecture 'Theory and Play of the *Duende*', Garcia Lorca speaks of the *duende* as a very specifically Spanish sensibility that is haunted by death. For the Spanish people, Garcia claims, *duende* is a 'mysterious force that everyone feels' but which no one can harness or describe.[37] It is not something that one can consciously appropriate or perform; rather, one is taken over by *duende. Duende* 'charges itself with creating suffering by means of a drama of living forms, and clears the way for an escape from the reality that surrounds us'.[38] Lorca is clear: 'it is a force not a labour, a struggle not a thought'.[39] How then might this spirit operate in and through a work of art?

This brings us back to Motherwell. In Motherwell's *Five in the Afternoon*, we become caught up and implicated in the insistent and fractious refrain of the repetitive black oval forms that jostle against each other and against the formidable verticals that impede their movement. In this heightened sense of tension, we don't so much view the works as kinesthetically experience and become affected by the work. We become implicated. We must not forget that, for Motherwell, all the 'Elegies' speak of a terrible death that must not be forgotten.[40] While specifically they may refer to the Spanish tragedy, we should not merely fix them in this time and place. As E.A. Carmean points out: 'Reconciliation has multiple meanings … Reconciliation … of the Spanish peoples, reconciliation with Death and Life … The Reconciliation Elegy is not less for Spain but is also for all (*hu*)mankind.'[41]

We can now, finally, return to the questions raised at the beginning of this essay. What does it mean to invoke the spirit of Robert Motherwell in a figurative work? How might—or, more to the point, how can—an artist 'borrow' from Motherwell to engage in an act of reconciliation NOW? In his 2007 article Verwoert argues that the task for the contemporary artist who appropriates the work of another is to 'approach the ghosts in such a way as to do justice to their complex nature … [to] learn to live with ghosts'.[42] Further, he argues that artists need to learn how to let the ghosts speak and, more importantly, give them back their speech.[43] To

do that, he says, we need to 'acknowledge the performative dimension of language'.[44]

Verwoert's 'call' to artists to acknowledge the performative power of the image and hence take responsibility for the images they produce signals a significant shift in the way that appropriation has been thought about and written about by art theorists and historians *and* in the way it has been practiced by artists. Two key anthologies dealing with appropriation, Rex Butler's *What is Appropriation: An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the '80s and '90s*, published in 1996, and David Evans's *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art* (2009), are both imbued with a postmodern 'spirit', a sensibility and a theoretical and political positioning that rejects modernist notions of authorship, originality and identity. For them, the thought of acknowledging the ghosts in the work and allowing them to speak would appear an anathema. Evans identifies the exhibition 'Pictures', curated by Douglas Crimp at Artists Space in New York in 1977, as the defining event that brought into focus a disregard for modernist values. In this pluralist postmodern epoch, photographically based mass media made a mockery of notions of origin and copy and, as Evans observes, images became a 'resource to be raided and re-used'.[45]

The influence of 'cultural theory' on the making and interpretation of art through the 1970s and 1980s invigorated the debate around the conditions of possibility of 'art' and the strategies employed by artists. Walter Benjamin's article 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) and his essay 'The Death of the Author' (1968), Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author' (1977), Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Jacques Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (1978), Jean Baurillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) and Gilles Deleuze's essay 'Plato and Simulacrum' (1983) became seminal texts that were compulsory reading for art theorists, art historians and artists alike.[46] In sum, art became meta-aware *and* invested in art as a form of cultural critique; a form that took into account the operations of power, the death of historical meaning, the impossibility of originality, the death of authorship and the role of spectator in the production and the multiplicity of meaning. The anti-aesthetic drive of postmodernism saw artists adopting appropriation in its various guises—parody, allegory and bricolage—as what Evans calls a 'double-voiced' strategy through which art could offer a cultural critique of consumer society.[47]

However, as Evans notes, what was at stake in the 1980s and what is at stake now are quite different:

> One of the most fundamental distinctions between appropriation art in the 1980s and post-appropriation art today revolves around history itself. A recurrent theme in postmodernist debates of the 1980s was the supposed death of historical meaning, but major events like the implosion of the Soviet Union resulted in the 're-emergence of a multiplicity of histories in the moment of the new 1990s. The challenge for the appropriationist artist now is to discover new ways of dealing with these 'unresolved histories'.[48]

The question of 'unresolved histories' relates to Verwoert's arguments about the change in the stakes around the act of appropriation with an acknowledgement that words and images don't just signify, they also have real material effects in the world. Verwoert identifies the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 as the historical moment that enabled the recognition that words and images, even though they may be arbitrarily constructed, may also 'produce unsuspected effects and affects in the real world'.[49] Thus he says:

> The shift in the critical discourse away from a primary focus on the arbitrary and constructed character of the linguistic sign towards a desire to understand the performativity of language and grasp precisely how things are done with words … how language through its power of interpellation and injunction enforces the meaning of what it spells out … binds that person to execute what it commands.[50]

Realising the performative power of words and images, acknowledging that not only do they signify but they also produce manifest effects and affects in the world, has (if taken seriously) a critical impact on how we think and practise our imag(in)ings and our picturings.[51] And, for Verwoert, this also means 'to understand the responsibility that comes with speaking … to engage in the procedures of speech and face the consequences of what is being said'.[52] He is critical of both the approach of art historians and theorists who write about appropriation as if it was merely the 'reshuffling of a basic set of cultural terms' and artists who engage in appropriation willy-nilly.[53] Given the performative power of picturing, appropriation can no longer be approached by analysis alone nor can staging an object of appropriation 'be contained within a moment of mere contemplation'.[54] Rather, Verwoert argues,

appropriation is an active and ethical encounter that needs to take into account the ghosts that hover within the original appropriated artwork. This requires the artist to take responsibility for the 'practicalities and material gestures performed in the ceremony of invocation'.[55]

To suggest that that appropriation is a 'ceremony', or 'invocation', draws us to ask, 'what are the responsibilities that one has in doing ceremony so as to do justice to the spirit of the event?' The issue of artists taking responsibility for the images they make does not necessarily sit comfortably with postmodern and contemporary artists who have seen their appropriation of other's images as a strategy to provide a cultural critique. In this strategic use, images are resources to be used for political and cultural ends.

And so I now turn to my own appropriative acts and the ghosts that may lurk in *Elegy for an Oz Republic (after Motherwell)* (Figure 8) and *Study for Bourke Stree*t, *5pm* (Figure 6). Both these works draw their structural, materialist and political inspiration from Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic 100* (Figure 7). However, their political motivation and rage derives from the regressive political landscape in contemporary Australia, which takes us back to the conservativism of 1950s' Australia and imaginatively to John Brack's iconic painting, *Collins St, 5p.m.* (1955) (Figure 5). It is perhaps no surprise that the titles *Collins St, 5p.m.* (Brack) and *At Five in the Afternoon* (Motherwell) (Figure 4) should mark such an elegiac time of the day—sad, melancholic, plaintive, lamenting—an elegy in fact.

Here I return to Verwoert's comments that staging an object of appropriation requires an active negotiation to accommodate the ghost, or should I say ghosts of the original. *Elegy for an Oz Republic (after Motherwell)* draws on both Brack's and Motherwell's works to stage an act of reconciliation.

In front of us—in *Study for Bourke Street 5pm* (Figure 6) and *Elegy for an Oz Republic (after Motherwell)* (Figure 8)—we have what at first glance looks like a group of people assembled, waiting for either a train or a tram. It is Bourke Street Mall at five in the afternoon on a cold and wintery Melbourne evening in 2012. Here, we need to get beneath the representation being presented to us for, as Deleuze tells us, the function of painting (and drawing) is never representational. It is 'never a matter of reproducing or inventing forms', observes Deleuze, but rather a question of 'capturing forces and producing affects'.[56] This occurs through the expressivity of

the material. By expressivity, Deleuze and Guattari mean the conditions 'under which the arts produce affects of stone and metal, of strings and wind, of line and colour, on a plane of composition of a universe'.[57]

So what are we to experience here? While loosely 'composed' using the dynamics of Motherwell's *Elegy to the Spanish Republic 100*, it doesn't convey the force and power of the massing black shapes pushing and shoving and weighing

Figure 5: John Brack, *Collins St., 5p.m.* 1955, oil on canvas, 114.8 x 162.8 cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Figure 6: Barbara Bolt, *Study for Bourke Street 5pm*, 2012, watercolour on arches, 45 cm x 113 cm

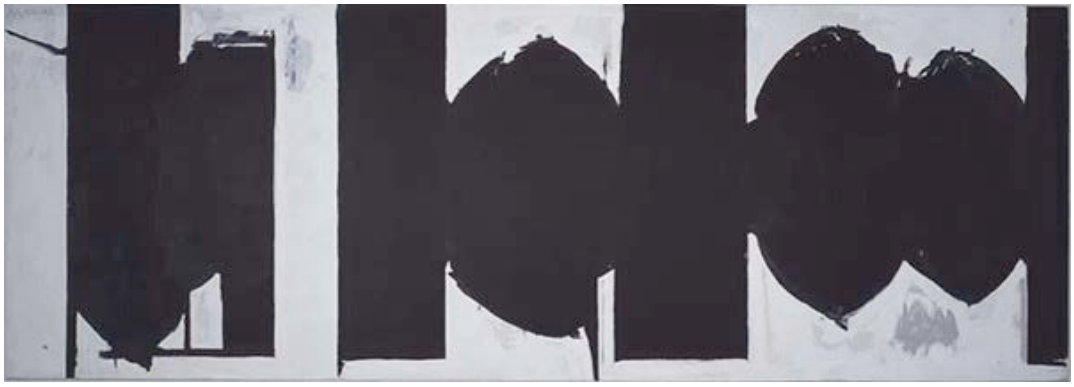

Figure 7: Robert Motherwell, *Elegy to the Spanish Republic 100*, 1963–1975, acrylic on canvas, 213.36 x 609.6 cm; © Dedalus Foundation, Inc/VAGA. Licensed by Viscopy, 2015.

Figure 8: Barbara Bolt, *Elegy to an Oz Republic (after Motherwell)*, 2012, charcoal on arches, 114 x 310 cm

heavily on us that Motherwell's painting has. Nor does it display the tightly compressed figures that make up John Brack's oppressive *Collins St, 5p.m*. But what it does do is produce an almost imperceptible shift in perspective, one that operates through the rhythms and perspectives of the work.

> As writer Marion Campbell has observed, this produces:
>
> echoes of impressionists like Caillebotte and Renoir … in the chromatic shimmer on rain-slicked surfaces, and the rhythmic treatment of the accessories of weather, like the angled umbrella or the hood. These rhythms (are) amplified through the design of the negative spaces … where a virtual 'arcade' is formed by the legs, straight, bowed, or at ease, in the group at the tram-stop in the foreground. The triptych references, in its title and its parallel frieze structure, John Brack's famous parade of

> hatchet-profiled, jaundiced workers in *Collins St 5 pm*. Here, however … the compositional structure and the play of shadows in these works always intimates their propensity for dynamism and even for dance.[58]

This is not the seamless one-point perspective image where the omnipresent viewer is placed at the centre of the universe as in a 'disinterested' Kantian viewer, nor is it an image simply ripe for postmodern readings of signs. Each figure has its own positionality, its own rhythmic dynamic and vanishing point and we, as viewers, are required to accede to and acknowledge (even if at first unconsciously) the different viewpoints that the rhythms move us through. Here I refer to the shifting and multiple perspectives of David Hockney's photographs, Picasso's simultaneous perspective and earlier still to Cezanne's inexplicable still life paintings that hover and quiver under our gaze.[59] *Elegy for an Oz Republic (after Motherwell)* asks us to consider our own positionality, not just as viewers but also as political beings. It niggles at us and gives (me) hope that imaging does have the power of interpellation and injunction, a power that places heavy responsibility on us as both makers and viewers of images.

So where does the possibility of reconciliation come in? Let us return to the collaboration between Tillers and Jagamara. In 2012 Jagamara and Tillers staged a collaborative exhibition, 'Loaded Ground', at the Drill Hall Gallery at the Australian National University in Canberra. The curators, Michael Eather, Imants Tillers and Nancy Sever described this exhibition as addressing 'the controversial issues of cultural ownership, the relationship between indigenous and post-modernist art, and the reconciliatory power of collaboration'.[60] The exhibition emerged from a

Figure 9. Barbara Bolt, *Reconciliation Elegy*, 2015, charcoal on fabriano artistico, 140 cm x 420 cm

long-term collaboration between Jagamara and Tillers, one that was brokered by curator Michael Eather, and began in earnest in 2001 when they began working together in Brisbane as part of the Campfire Group.[61] This collaboration has provided a public demonstration of what Morphy calls a 'movement … towards reconciliation and mutual understanding'.[62] However, in the emphasis on the 'collaboration' between Tilllers and Jagamara, focus has been taken away from a concern that was at the heart of Tiller's initial appropriation of Jagamara's *Five Dreamings*. What does it mean to appropriate artworks of Indigenous artists? Tillers continues to do so, and while much is made of the fact that 'permission was granted and collaboration acknowledged', questions concerning invocation of the performative or *methexical* power of imaging are not addressed.[63]

The power of invocation is the central concern of this essay. I have proposed an argument for the reconciliatory power of imaging. Thus, in any imaging, we need to consider not just what the image is, but what the conditions are through which it works. If we can get beneath the re-presentation and enact the performative power of imaging, we may just be able to, as Verwoert says, 'invoke the ghosts of undisclosed histories in a way that allows them to appear as ghosts and reveal the nature of the ambiguous presence'.[64] And through this invocation we may just come in touch with and even glimpse the forces beneath perception, affection and especially opinion. *Reconciliation Elegy* (Figure 9) provides a site from which the ceremony of invocation and reconciliation may begin. However, like Motherwell's 'Elegies to a Spanish Republic' it is an unfinished project, one that requires the artist to take responsibility for the practicalities and material gestures performed in order to keep the question of reconciliation in Australia alive.

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[1] Ashley Crawford, *The Iconoclasts,* catalogue for 'Not Fair 2014', August 2014, p. 12.

[2] Rex Butler (ed.), *What is Appropriation?: An Anthology of Critical Writings on Australian Art in the '80s and '90s*, Institute of Modern Art and Power Institute of Fine Art, Brisbane and Sydney, 1996. Butler problematises the relationship between the original and the copy according to the logic of Deleuze's simulacrum in his introduction to *What is Appropriation?, s*ee pp. 13–15.

[3] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, pp. 65–6. Deleuze and Guattari differentiate between technical composition and an aesthetic plane of composition, arguing that on an aesthetic plane of composition it is the material that becomes expressive, not the artist.

[4] Howard Morphy, 'Impossible to Ignore: Imants Tillers' Response to Aboriginal Art', <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=5>. The complex issues around Imants Tillers's appropriation of Michael Jagamara Nelson's Five Dreamings are synthesised in the catalogue essays that accompanied the exhibition *Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions* at the National Gallery of Art in 2006. See particularly Howard Morphy's essay, cited above

[5] Imants Tillers' 'Locality Fails' was initially published in *Art & Text* in 1982 and was reprinted in Butler's anthology *What is Appropriation?* in 1996.

[6] Imants Tillers, 'Locality Fails', in Butler (ed.), *What is Appropriation?*, p. 141. Tillers criticised the 'privilege' given to Indigenous art by international artists, curators, historians and theorists. He writes that 'during the Sydney Biennale, 'European Dialogue', 1979, Australian artists were often dismayed by the interest in and knowledge shown about Aboriginal culture by visiting artists and the almost aggressive indifference they displayed to the Australian urban environment and its culture'. Tillers spoke in scathing terms of Marina Abramovich and Ulay's return visit to Australia to seek out the Aboriginal influences on their work.

[7] Rex Butler, 'Introduction', in Butler (ed.), *What is Appropriation,* p. 28.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.*,* p. 28.

[10] Tillers, 'Locality Fails,' p. 142.

[11] Butler, 'Introduction', p. 29.

[12] Ibid.*,* p. 28, My additions in parentheses.

[13] Ibid.*,* p. 33.

[14] Morphy.

[15] Butler, 'Introduction*,* p. 27.

[16] Deborah Hart, 'A Work in Progress', *Imants Tillers: One World Many Visions*', National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2006, <http://nga.gov.au/exhibition/tillers/Default.cfm?MnuID=4&Essay=1>. Deborah Hart writes that while *The Nine Shots* (1985) was not exhibited in the 1986 Sydney Biennale,

curated by Nick Waterlow, it was reproduced in the catalogue where it caused the most heated debate. See also Bridget Cormack, 'The Ethics of Cultural Borrowing', *Australian*, 18 December 2012, p. 15. Tressa Berman's edited book, *No Deal!: Indigenous Art and the Politics of Possession*, School for Advanced Research Press, Santa Fe, 2012, deals with cultural appropriation in the context of Australia and the United States.

[17] Paul Foss, 'Mammon or Millennial Eden? Interview with Imants Tillers', *Art & Text*, vol. 23, no. 4, March–May 1987, p. 136.

[18] *Methexis* is a non-representational principle that Paul Carter invokes to understand the performative nature of Indigenous Australian cultural practices. It involves 'a concurrent actual production', or 'a pattern danced on the ground', see Paul Carter *The Lie of the Land*, Faber and Faber, London, 1996, p. 84. See also Jennifer Biddle, 'Country, Skin, Canvas: The Intercorporeal Art of Kathleen Petyaree', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2003, pp. 61–76; Barbara Bolt, 'Shedding Light for the Matter', *Hypatia*, vol. 15, no. 2, Spring 2000, pp. 203–16; Barbara Bolt, *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2004; Carter, *The Lie of the Land*; Robyn Ferrell, *Sacred Exchanges: Images in a Global Context*, Columbia University Press, 2012 and Brian Martin, Immaterial Land and Indigenous Ideology: Refiguring Australian Art and Culture, PhD thesis, Deakin University, 2014, for writings on the performative power of Indigenous cultural productions.

[19] Morphy.

[20] Ferrell, p. 144.

[21] Jan Verwoert, 'Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art', in *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 2007.

[22] Verwoert draws on Jacques Derrida's work on mourning in his *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, Routledge, New York and London, 1994; Verwoert, 'Living with Ghosts', p. 7.

[23] Robert Motherwell, *Reconciliation Elegy*, Skira and Rizzoli Publications, Switzerland, 1980, p. 77.

[24] See Frances Stoner Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, Granta Books, Oxford, 1999.

[25] Christopher Allen, review of 'Robert Motherwell: At Five in the Afternoon', *Weekend Australian*, 6 September 2014, pp. 6-7.

[26] Deleuze and Guattari don't believe that art is concerned with communication and argue that while art might be concerned with expression, it is not the expression of an artist's intention. In their thought, it is the material that becomes expressive, not the artist. Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?,* p. 196.

[27] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?,* pp. 181-2.

[28] Elisabet Goula Sardà, 'Someone Who Did Not Forget: The Reception of Robert Motherwell's Elegies to the Spanish Republic in Spain', *Revista d'estudies Comparatius: Art, Literatura, Pensament*, vol 00, Fall

2009, p. 85; Jane Kinsman, 'Painterly Prints: Robert Motherwell: At Five in the Afternoon', *Artonview*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, no. 78, Winter 2014. In her essay on the exhibition 'Robert Motherwell at Five in the Afternoon', Jane Kinsman observes that the profundity of the title of the work *Five in the Afternoon* was lost on the New York crowd who 'misconstrued the title as referring to the cocktail hour'.

[29] García Lorca, *Lament for Ignacio Sánchez Mejías*, trans. A.S. Kline, 2007, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Spanish/FiveintheafternoonLorca.htm#_Toc527959419>.

[30] See the section 'Of the Refrain' in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1987, pp. 310–50.

[31] Ibid., p. 311.

[32] Ibid., p. 311.

[33] Shelly Rockwell, 'Grieving as depicted in Federico Garcia Lorca's "Lament for Ignacio Sanchez Mejias"', <http://wdsreviewofbooks.webdelsol.com/Rockwell.html>.

[34] Ibid., p. 5.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 1.

[37] García Lorca, 'Theory and Play of the Duende', trans. A.S. Kline, 2007, <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/klineaslorcaduende.html>.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] 'Robert Motherwell: A Conversation at Lunch', cited in Sardà, p. 88.

[41] E.A. Carmean in Motherwell, *Reconciliation Elegy*, p. 77.

[42] Verwoert, 'Living with Ghosts', p. 6.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] David Evans, *Appropriation: Documents of Contemporary Art*, Whitechapel Gallery and MIT Press, London and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2009, p. 12.

[46] Given that all cited authors are male, it is not possible to be unaware of the gendered nature of the cultural theory that shaped postmodern practices, particularly when considered in the context of the identity and post-identity politics of the period.

[47] Evans, pp. 13–14.

[48] In talking of the changed context for the terms the post-appropriation era, Evans refers to Jan Verwoert's article, 'Apropos Appropriation: Why Stealing Images Today Feels Different', *Art and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 2007, p. 22, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/verwoert.html>.

[49] Verwoert, 'Living with Ghosts' p. 6.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Judith Butler's work on performativity and gender was to have a significant impact on the articulation of a performative paradigm in cultural theory and in the arts. See Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, Routledge, New York, 1993 and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, New York, 1999.

[52] Verwoert, 'Living with Ghosts', p. 6.

[53] Ibid., p. 1.

[54] Ibid., p. 6.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy*, p. 56.

[57] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?,* pp. 65–6.

[58] Marion Campbell, catalogue essay for Barbara Bolt exhibition, 'Streetwise', Catherine Asquith Gallery, Melbourne, 2012.

[59] David Hockney intimates this shifting perspective in the catalogue to his latest exhibition, *David Hockney: Painting and Photography*, at Annely Juda Fina Art in London, 15 May – 27 June 2015, <http://www.annelyjudafineart.co.uk/exhibitions/painting-and-photography-david-hockney>.

[60] Michael Eather, Imants Tillers and Nancy Sever, introduction to the exhibition *Loaded Ground,* 16 August – 23 September 2012, <http://dhg.anu.edu.au/events/the-loaded-ground-michael-nelson-jagamara-imants-tillers/>.

[61] Morphy.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Verwoert, 'Living with Ghosts', p. 7.

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