

*Parallel editing, multi-positionality and maximalism: cosmopolitan effects as explored in some art works by Melanie Jackson and Vivienne Dick*

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# PARALLEL EDITING, MULTI-POSITIONALITY AND MAXIMALISM: COSMOPOLITAN EFFECTS AS EXPLORED IN SOME ART WORKS BY MELANIE JACKSON AND VIVIENNE DICK

**Rachel Garfield**

*Garfield produces a critique of neo-minimalist art practice by demonstrating how the artist Melanie Jackson's *Some things you are not allowed to send around the world* (2003 and 2006) and the experimental film-maker Vivienne Dick's *Liberty's booty* (1980) – neither of which can be said to be about feeling 'at home' in the world, be it as a resident or as a nomad – examine global humanity through multi-positionality, excess and contingency. Jackson and Dick thereby begin to articulate a new cosmopolitan relationship with the local – or, rather, with many different localities – in one and the same maximalist sweep of the work. 'Maximalism' in Garfield's coinage signifies an excessive overloading (through editing, collage, and the sheer density of the range of the material) that enables the viewer to insert themselves into the narrative of the work. Garfield detects in the art of both Jackson and Dick a refusal to know or to judge the world. Instead, there is an attempt to incorporate the complexities of its full range into the singular vision of the work, challenging the viewer to identify what is at stake.*

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# PARALLEL EDITING, MULTI-POSITIONALITY AND MAXIMALISM: COSMOPOLITAN EFFECTS AS EXPLORED IN SOME ART WORKS BY MELANIE JACKSON AND VIVIENNE DICK

Rachel Garfield

## Abstract

*Garfield produces a critique of neo-minimalist art practice by demonstrating how the artist Melanie Jackson's *Some things you are not allowed to send around the world* (2003 and 2006) and the experimental film-maker Vivienne Dick's *Liberty's booty* (1980) – neither of which can be said to be about feeling 'at home' in the world, be it as a resident or as a nomad – examine global humanity through multi-positionality, excess and contingency. Jackson and Dick thereby begin to articulate a new cosmopolitan relationship with the local – or, rather, with many different localities – in one and the same maximalist sweep of the work. 'Maximalism' in Garfield's coinage signifies an excessive overloading (through editing, collage, and the sheer density of the range of the material) that enables the viewer to insert themselves into the narrative of the work. Garfield detects in the art of both Jackson and Dick a refusal to know or to judge the world. Instead, there is an attempt to incorporate the complexities of its full range into the singular vision of the work, challenging the viewer to identify what is at stake.*

In this essay I will be looking at the artworks *Some things you are not allowed to send around the world* (2003 and 2006) by Melanie Jackson and *Liberty's booty* (1980) by Vivienne Dick. I aim to think through the relationship between the formation of subjectivity, art, and the cosmopolitan. In drawing together these two artists in a responsive way, I am identifying a visuality that I would suggest posits a kind of parallel editing as multi-positionality.<sup>1</sup> This argument has less to do with situating these artists within a singular art historical framework (as they inhabit very different milieus) than thinking about what is at stake for an artist in making choices in the production of art. In this case, as in general, my motivation as an artist and writer

<sup>1</sup> I take liberties with the terms here as much as I do with the trajectories of the artists – as I explain through the text.

is to problematise notions of origin, hierarchies of victimhood and assumptions of belonging in art. In this text I am particularly focusing on ways in which art opens up possibilities for imagining the cosmopolitan as it is discussed below.

In the first instance, the cosmopolitan is a useful term to think one's way out of a limiting nation-state-ism, or as a way of thinking about polity in the post-colonial metropolitan centres. It is a term that has undergone a process of recuperation from the nineteenth-century attack on the Jew, the 'rootless cosmopolitanism',<sup>2</sup> to the reconfiguration of the 'nomad' by Chantal Mouffe (1994, pp.105–13) and Iain Chambers (2003, pp.169–78), for example. As Maren Tova Linett has explained:

■ In the first half of the twentieth Century, Jews were often viewed as moderns *par excellence*. Like modernity itself, they were seen as cosmopolitan, rootless and urban. ■

(Linett, 2007, p.80)

The term cosmopolitan has gone from the slur of the rootless cosmopolitan as directed at the Jewish communities, during a period where the nation state was the aspiration and the norm to a contemporary metaphorical figure that represents our epoch of global travel and aspirational internationalism. In art it has recently been reapplied in Marsha Meskimmon's *Contemporary Art and the Cosmopolitan Imagination* (2010) as, among other things, the quintessential contemporary figure for finding oneself 'at home' anywhere in the world. In this way she posits the nomad as central to her framing of the cosmopolitan within the art world.<sup>3</sup> More pertinent to Meskimmon's cosmopolitanism is the notion of the artist whose art represents a symbolic home that is carried with them everywhere through the poetic symbolism of their artistic practice.

My intention here is not to argue for a redefinition of cosmopolitanism. My interest in the concept arises out of the difficulties of finding a way to talk about the Subject from within current debates on cultural diversity. Often art focuses on personal narrative

and the self as a conduit for portentous experiential perspectives on the world, fuelling a tendency towards what Werner Sollors has termed ethnic insiderism. As Sollors suggests, "You will never understand me, don't you understand?" – is the gesture with which cultural interaction seems to function; and even the smallest symbols of ethnic differentiation ("she called herself Kay Adams") are exaggerated out of proportion to represent major cultural differences' (Sollors, 1986, p.13) – as well as hierarchies of victimhood where communities vie for 'special case' position. Neither of which questions subject positions, but only serves to assert them. Through the examples introduced in the following I explore how art can reconstitute the relationship between the subject and reality, between the subject and her relationship to place and belonging, against the dominant trend in work that arises out of minimalism and the 'long look' in film.

My own recuperation of the term 'cosmopolitanism' aims not to make the contentious issue of belonging 'all right' through referencing the nomadic, as does Chambers, nor to elevate the home as a site of safety (for it may well be a site of ambivalence, claustrophobia or threat, especially for women), but to hold on to the discomfort of *not* belonging as a radical possibility for subjectivity. I agree with Sara Ahmed (2000, p.80) that the nomad as paradigm is a figure of privilege that excises the politics of lived relations, which endows it with both specificity and urgency. In art, it does this by means of readings that through symbolic or poetic gestures elevate metaphor and gloss over an often-brutal reality.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the artist as globetrotter engaged in the business of biennale exhibiting (i.e. as someone with the financial means to fly around the world) is a good example of how class is conveniently put aside in assumptions about the conditions of identity and victimhood where the global marginality or skin colour of the artist elides their privileged class conditions. In any event, the artist who gets to travel the world belongs to a privileged class of artist: most artists work under precarious local conditions to support themselves and their practice. Sara Ahmed criticizes Iain Chambers and Rosi Braidotti for using the metaphor of the nomad rather than actual nomadic people and in so doing eliding the cultural specificity of different nomadic peoples (as well as the difference between nomadic peoples and Western conscious nomads), 'such that nomads come to represent something other than themselves' (Ahmed, 2000, p.82). By setting the artist who travels around the world

2 Michael L. Miller, Scott Ury (2012) 'Dangerous Liaisons: Jews and Cosmopolitanism in Modern Times', in Gerard Delanty (ed.) *Routledge International Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, pp.550–62, also cites Jews as 'the quintessential cosmopolitans', p.558. In the same volume Pnina Werbner in 'Anthropology and the new ethical cosmopolitanism', argues 'against the slur that cosmopolitans are rootless' p.153.

3 This builds on Chantal Mouffe (1994) 'Politics for a Nomadic Identity' in the influential volume, *Travellers Tales: Narratives of Home and Displacement*, ed. by George Robertson et al, pp.102–10.

4 The same argument was used in Laura Marks and Bryan Cheyette (1998) with regard to the Jew as the paradigmatic other in modernity. The Jew as paradigm elides real Jews.

taking their home with them as the cosmopolitan paradigm, Meskimmon is using the same manoeuvre as Chambers and Braidotti: one must be careful of the slippage between real people and a trope.

The dominant model of art that addresses issues to do with race, gender and belonging across the global art world exemplified by the world's biennales could be described as neo-minimalist. A contested category and the subject of many critical investigations, minimalism was defined largely in the US by a group of artists during the late 1960s, notably Karl Andre, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris and Sol LeWitt. Central to my own critique is not so much minimalism itself as its legacies that persist in contemporary art practice, which may best be described as neo-minimalism. As David Batchelor has argued, minimalism has become a catch-all term: 'Almost any approximately geometric, vaguely austere, more-or-less monochromatic, and generally abstract work has been or is likely to get labelled Minimal at one time or another' (Batchelor, 1997, p.7). Batchelor identifies the legacies of minimalism in contemporary art practice as what I, too, see as the dominant aesthetics currently aspiring to the cosmopolitan, which is an aesthetics that identifies itself strictly against excess. Minimalism, Batchelor asserts, 'is historically important ... because it substantially changed what art could look like, how it could be made and what it could be made from. And ... over three decades later, a great deal of contemporary art is built out of the same materials and by similar means, whether or not it is made to serve the same or similar ends' (p.7).

Miwon Kwon equally identifies an ongoing link between minimalism and contemporary art in her influential study *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2004) in which she delineates the journey in site-specific sculpture from Richard Serra through to Gabriel Orozco. Her study is particularly pertinent to ideas of cosmopolitanism as it outlines the historic links between site specificity, the embodied subject and biennale culture. Kwon describes the shift from the assumptions of a universal viewing subject of a white European disposition to a more globalised subjectivity:

■ Informed by the contextual thinking of Minimalism, various forms of institutional critique and Conceptual art developed a different model of site specificity that implicitly challenged the 'innocence' of space and the accompanying presumption of a universal viewing subject (albeit one in possession of a corporeal body) as espoused in the phenomenological model ... If Minimalism returned to the viewing subject

a physical corporeal body, institutional critique insisted on the social matrix of class, race, gender, and sexuality of the viewing subject. 7

(Kwon, 1997, p.87)

Another feature of artistic practice that is allied to minimalism and which has assumed almost hegemonic status within international art circles over the last few decades is the 'long look' of the documentary turn whose singular visuality is confluent with a neo-minimalist aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> There has been a predominance of the 'long look' in photography within lens-based gallery artwork in the UK and the US and in biennale culture, mirrored by the 'long shot' in cinema. Although photography and film are significantly different art forms and would usually deserve to be considered each on its own terms, many artists who use these tropes work flexibly between the two media, such as Zarina Bhimji or Zineb Sedira. These two in particular represent a trend among artists who were trained within photography departments, but produce video as their signature pieces. They also exemplify a dominant trend in art that claims to speak to the globalising forces in contemporary culture where lens based media is the norm of global critique.<sup>6</sup>

What I mean by the 'long look' in photography is a technique that can be found in work that is made using a large-format camera to take an image of great detail through an increased depth of field. This shows a clear affinity with the long, unedited shot in cinema. Some of the original aims of the 'long look' or 'long shot' were to encourage scrutiny of the quotidian and to foreground the authenticity of the image in opposition to the artifice of the edit. Andre Bazin, in *What is Cinema?*, set a framework that was to have a lasting legacy on film and video work, particularly in the UK. In opposition to montage he set out the case for what was to be called the long shot, and heralded a return to the contemplation of reality through a deliberate lack of editing and a 'depth of focus' on the single image, using examples such as *Citizen Kane*, in which a single shot is used to film a whole sequence (Bazin, 1967, pp.35–7).

In photography the long shot represented a turn away from the humanist documentary photography of

5 The 'documentary turn' is the expansion of documentary film practice into the sphere of fine art. It developed in the late 1990s out of the 'ethnographic turn' problematised by Hal Foster (1996, pp.171–204).

6 See, for example, the predominance of video and photography in *Documenta 11* (2003), curated by Okwui Enwezor.

Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment',<sup>7</sup> its relationship to the cinematic, and particularly the problems associated with the relationship between the camera and the subject. One possible response to the debates on the power relationship between the artist and her subject, which were ubiquitous in the 1970s and 1980s, was for the artist to turn the camera onto the self as an act of humility, as in the photography of Jo Spence, whose work on interrogating herself, society, and her own subject position as a working-class woman was to define the work of a whole generation in the UK. In the US, the pioneering work of Eleanor Antin, as exemplified by her earlier photographic piece 'Carving: A traditional sculpture' (1972), questioned the role in art of the nude and the male gaze.

Another response of artists and documentary photographers was to interrogate momentous events of human experience through photographing depopulated *landscapes* as in the work of Richard Misrach who photographed the Arizona desert in the aftermath of the American nuclear bomb tests.<sup>8</sup> Forty years on, despite its initial radicality and historical importance, more recent uses of this 'long shot' gaze have become mannered and often visually indulgent, now representing the tourist gaze as outlined by John Urry,<sup>9</sup> which enacts a post-Said notion of the power relations of the viewing subject: the self as a special case of victim, or the trace of the traumatic event (such as the *Shoah*; Hiroshima; or whatever historic site of trauma) as a nostalgic lament, which characterises much contemporary artwork reflecting on the *Shoah*, for example.<sup>10</sup> A convergence has taken place between the long look and neo-minimalism that places the discourses of otherness in an authentic site elevated in

its symbolism through the lingering look of the camera, such as in the work *Out of Blue* (2002) by Zarina Bhimji or *The Sovereign Forest* (2012) by Amar Kanwar.

In contrast I would contend that 'long look' work has the opposite effect. It foregrounds the primacy and uniqueness of what it lingers on and elevates it to the exclusion of all else. In this way it re-inscribes a hierarchy of victimhood and the special case politics of ethnic insiderism as well as the tourist gaze. While this kind of work relies on the viewer's imagination to fill in the gaps through their own experience, it does not require the viewer to question their own subjectivity or subject position. It also often claims to appeal to the notion of the universal, as when, for example, the evidence of the atrocity cited in the image (any given image of this type) stands in for all other atrocities, so that the Holocaust could equally become any other genocide. This became particularly vivid for me when Susan Hiller made the claim in a talk at the Cornerhouse Gallery in Manchester in 2006 that her artwork, *The J Street Project* was about all genocides, not just the Holocaust. When questioned, she insisted on it, stating that Jorg Heiser in the catalogue also made this claim (Heiser, 2005). Zarina Bhimji makes similar claims in *Out of Blue* (2002), the film that relates a vision of the devastation of the Idi Amin expulsion from Uganda of the population of Asian origin. She quotes of this film in her website that it 'attempts to link to similar disturbances that have taken place in Kosovo and Rwanda.'<sup>11</sup>

I want to suggest an alternative to this hegemony of neo-minimalist 'long look' work by envisioning cosmopolitanism in a forward-thinking way rather than from the relatively safe vantage point (for the artist and the viewing public) of critiquing past atrocities such as the Holocaust, which is often re-visited by contemporary artists.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, I would like to argue that although the position put forward by Bazin is now the norm in much art practice, the critique of montage he put forward does not apply for the kind of contemporary work I will be talking about here. His argument was premised upon linear narrative film (such as *Citizen Kane*), and not the experimental models that eschew any notion of a forward driving narrative, such as Vivienne Dick. This work also eschews an aggregation of meaning through the edit. Bazin champions neo-realism arguing that montage as set out by Sergei Eisenstein is instrumentalised through Eisenstein's

7 This is the moment when everything converges including the awareness of the photographer that that is the precise moment for a photograph to be taken. It is a moment of decision by the photographer. See Steve Edwards (2006, p.56), for a succinct explanation.

8 See Richard Misrach and Myriam Weisang Misrach (1990), *Bravo 20: The Bombing of the American West*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press.

9 This term is taken, in part from Urry (1990) where he posits a particular relationship between the traveller and difference. I am not here implying that artists are literally tourists but that, following Foster, who in 'The Artist as Ethnographer' (in *The Return of the Real*, 1996, pp.171–204), mapped a critique onto an ethnographic methodology for artists, a similar mapping of power relations from tourism of the 'nomad' artist would seem a transparent manoeuvre.

10 I refer to Edward Said's (1972) notion of the way the West constructs the middle and far East in representation (notions of East and West that have themselves subsequently been critiqued as problematic).

11 <http://www.zarinabhimji.com/dspseries/12/IFW.htm> accessed 31 May 2013.

12 such as the *J Street Project* (2002–2005) by Susan Hiller; Judy Chicago's *Holocaust Project*, (1992); Shimon Attie, *The Writing on The Wall* series (1992–3).



notion of the dialectic. 'While analytical montage only calls for him to follow his guide, to let his attention follow along smoothly with that of the director who will choose what he should see, here [in depth of focus] he is called upon to exercise at least a minimum of personal choice' (Bazin, 1967, p.36). His claim for the long look is that 'Neorealism by definition rejects analysis, whether political, moral, psychological, logical, or social, of the characters and their actions. It looks on reality as a whole, not incomprehensible, certainly, but inseparably one' (p.97).

In contrast, the work that I will discuss here offers possibilities for thinking about living in a world of difference through what I call a maximalist aesthetics that would reject Bazin's claims. Through the collage and the edit, the maximalist aesthetics offers multi-positionality, excess and contingency in contrast to the singular or sequential camera work of the long look of Bazin and that has become the dominant trope.

*Liberty's booty* by Vivienne Dick (1980) and *Some things you are not allowed to send around the world* (2003 and 2006) by Melanie Jackson rejects the neo-minimalist trajectory and in so doing posit a polyvalent nuanced subject that reconstitutes the image of the cosmopolitan. Both works problematise labour conditions within different geographical locations. However, the key point here is that the different locations are presented concurrently, and this parallel positioning of the subject-in-the-world, as I will explain further below, is the beginning of a process of imagining a condition of the reconstitution of the subject. Dick's and Jackson's works overload the senses and the mind through collage and assemblage, defying totalising frameworks. This is what I define as their maximalist aesthetics. Their works exude a generosity to their subjects, an enjoyment even in their discomfort and criticality. Dick and Jackson are from different generations and their works clearly come out of different artistic movements. Dick's 'no wave' work was made in the late 1970s whereas the work



Figure 1: Vivienne Dick, Film Still of Greer with Doll in *Liberty's booty*, 1980. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

by Jackson belongs to the 1990s. The paradigm shifts marking each generation do not fully explain their different methodologies of making, however, as Dick's practice is embedded in experimental film and Jackson is identified with Fine Art, although there are significant crossovers in these histories and increasingly so. For example, experimental film makers like John Smith<sup>13</sup> or Jonas Mekas<sup>14</sup> exhibit in museums and galleries (as well as film festivals) and artists like Omer Fast screen their work at film festivals (as well as museums and galleries). Vivienne Dick herself has shown in both contexts such as Oberhausen 2010 and the Crawford Art Centre (2010).

In sum, it is the bringing together of subjects held in geographical distance as simultaneous encounter that accentuates the two artists' importance for debates about cosmopolitanism as critical and creative practice.

Vivienne Dick has been making films since the late 1970s. She first came to critical attention in New York as a member of what is now identified as the 'no wave' group of film makers, who shared a home-made aesthetics tracing its heritage through Punk back to Dada. As I have argued elsewhere, the themes in her work have been prescient in their figuring of globalisation. Saskia Sassen describes a space, created through discontinuity and simultaneity where 'two systems of representation intersect' (Sassen, 2002,

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.johnsmithfilms.com/texts/biography.html>.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://jonasmekasfilms.com/diary/>.



p.110), which she calls an 'analytic borderland'.<sup>15</sup> The 'borderland' described here may also have a metaphorical articulation in art, through form in ways that I will discuss below but for the moment I would claim that both artists that I look at here, Dick and Jackson, think about the condition of marginal people in their work. Sassen is concerned with 'the multiple presences and articulations of race and gender in the city'.<sup>16</sup> She is particularly interested in marginalized people who work outside of the mainstream economies and are, she argues, crucial to the creation of global cities as well as the constitution of the marginal subjectivities, as I have argued elsewhere in an essay on Dick's work:

■ The global city, as Sassen would posit, is a place of simultaneity, that is, of recognition for the politics that is mobilized through a transnational awareness: what is happening here, is happening there but in a way that 'partially by-passes nation states'. This is constituted through the aggregation of formerly subaltern voices. These voices come together in newly configured social formations that cross, not just geographical boundaries but also the domestic space with the work place, the street with the home and so forth. ■

(Garfield, 2009, p.39)

In the following I want to talk about the formal aspects of this discontinuity in relation to the disruption of the indexical trace in photography and what it at stake in photo montage, as theorised by Rosalind Krauss (1985, p.24). My second focus of concern is parallel editing in film.<sup>17</sup> I will then bring these two discussions into dialogue with one another through a reading of Dick's *Liberty's booty*.

According to Mary Ann Doane, there are three types of editing in early cinema, each of which creates its own drama. The first is shot followed by reverse shot, using repetition to create narrative coherence. The second is the chase, popularised through comedy and thrillers, which serves to re-inscribe linear time. The third is parallel editing (Doane, 2002, pp.187–94), which creates a jump in space and time, implying that two events occur simultaneously. This is what Dick does in all of her works. While the chase edit 'aggregates regularity' (Doane, 2002, p.193) and so constitutes a

kind of normality for the viewer, parallel editing creates suspense through desire and fear, which, according to Janet Harbord, 'displaces the temporal logic of film, creating a simultaneity that requires the spectator to insert herself into the relationship between images, to forge connections' (Harbord, 2007, p.72). Parallel editing is essentially a kind of montage that can offer an effect of collage through contingency like no other cinematic form, which is itself an effect (contingency, that is) of the simultaneity as described by Harbord. In ways that I will explore below Dick's *Liberty's booty* is an example of how through such a reworking of time and space a new conceptualisation of subjectivity can emerge and take shape for the viewer through the connections made in the film.

Unlike the long look that denotes seeing more – more depth, more detail – the collage (or montage) focuses on the radicality of contingency through simultaneity: that is the lack of linearity as the focus. This opposition in some ways reflects the divergences between the film director Sergei Eisenstein's theories of montage as a dialectic at the heart of the importance of film,<sup>18</sup> on the one hand, and André Bazin's assumed authenticity of the 'long look' and antagonism with what he saw to be didactic expressionism of montage, 'The means used by Rossellini and de Sica are less spectacular, but they are no less determined to do away with montage and to transfer to the screen the *continuum* of reality' (Bazin, 1967, p.37).

Interestingly Kobena Mercer, drawing on the African-American writer Ralph Ellison, has argued for collage to be identified as a diasporic concern registering inequality through 'sharp breaks, leaps in consciousness, distortions, paradoxes, reversals, telescoping of time, and surreal blending of styles, values, hopes and dreams' (Mercer, 2005, p.125). Ellison notably developed this technique from Romare Bearden's projected photomontages. Mercer suggests that the disjunctions in the imagery across the collages and photomontages cut (as they are themselves cut) through the meanings of Blackness (and the power of those meanings) as it traverses the twentieth century through different assignations from 'Negro' to 'coloured' to 'Black'. The cut then stands as witness to 'the dialectical flux of historical becoming' (Mercer, 2005, p.126). In this way, photomontage and collage could be seen to be of particular interest to artists working in the diaspora.

<sup>15</sup> Analytic borderlands are discussed in a more focused way by Sassen in 'Analytic Borderlands: Race, Gender and Representation in the New City' in Anthony D. King (ed.) *Re-presenting the City* (1996), New York, New York University Press, pp.183–203.

<sup>16</sup> Sassen (1996), p.183.

<sup>17</sup> As analysed by Mary Ann Doane (2002, pp.187–94).

<sup>18</sup> In his chapter 'A Dialectic Approach to Film Form', Sergei Eisenstein outlines his thinking on montage such as '[t]his same principle – giving birth to concepts, to emotions, by juxtaposing two disparate events – led to: IV. Liberation of the whole action from the definition of time and space', [http://interactive2.usc.edu/blog-old/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/film\\_form.pdf](http://interactive2.usc.edu/blog-old/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/film_form.pdf).



Figure 2: Vivienne Dick, Film Still of New York Playground, *Liberty's booty*, 1980. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

Another way of reflecting on the relationship between montage, maximalism and the cosmopolitan is through thinking about Krauss's claims in her work on surrealist photography. Collage and photomontage are not interchangeable terms, and Krauss makes the distinction important in her analysis, where she argues that collage was 'a too willing surrender on photography's hold on the real' (Krauss et al, 1985, p.28). In order to reflect on my concern with the multivalent image I will put aside some of these important differences.<sup>19</sup> Krauss argues that photography normally aims to offer a seamless version of reality which photomontage then disrupts as a critique of the indexical. Through the disruptions of the blank spaces or gaps between one 'shard of reality and another', meanings are created through a language effect of self-contained structures which allows one to 'infiltrate reality with interpretations' and particularly through photo montage due to its seamless surface but disjointed imagery (Krauss et al, 1985, p.24). Drawing Krauss and Mercer together, one may infer that it is the disjunction between images that re-interprets the world *in effect*. Krauss cites John Heartfield who states that photo-montage 'expresses not simply the fact

<sup>19</sup> Krauss makes a distinction between photomontage and collage (Krauss et al, 1985) p.28: photomontage creates a seamless surface with a fragmented imagery whereas collage is what it appears as, namely cut up. There is no conflict between the form and the image. However, at times Krauss herself brings the two together in her question 'In what sense, we might ask, could the very act of collage/montage be thought of as textual?' (1985) p.25.

and artistry. *Liberty's booty* makes use of parallel editing to great effect, offering a considered awareness of several locations in a single sweep of film. The main foci of the film are labour and prostitution, showing how they overlap and correlate. There is nothing 'cool' nor minimal about this vision.<sup>20</sup> It takes place in pre-corporate, bankrupt New York, specifically the Lower East Side (which incorporates what is now called the East Village), stripped of its glamour. At the time living in the city was either a sign of poverty or resistance,<sup>21</sup> and while Dick's milieu does acknowledge glamour in the disarray, it is a different kind of glamour to the cool minimal glamour as cited above, using irony that shows an awareness of living in a late capitalist environment. True to the spirit of Punk, Dick envisions a world of mess that people create through form as much as content. For example, the film starts off with a surreal passage of hand-held footage of a woman (who had previously been a man) unpacking a parcel that contains a smaller than life-size cloth doll. The woman proceeds to pull a string of cloth 'babies' out of the hole between the doll's legs after which she hugs the doll (which also has a penis). With a sudden jump cut the opening credits begin accompanied by the image

<sup>20</sup> Batchelor in *Chromophobia*, Chapter 1: 'Whitescapes', equates the 'cool' of whiteness with stripped down décor in a home, positing it throughout against the excess and uncontainable nature of colour. This is what I mean about 'cool' here.

<sup>21</sup> The city here refers to the working class areas of the city, particularly in this case downtown (The Lower East Side).

which it shows, but also the social tendency expressed by the fact' (quoted in Krauss et al, 1985, p.24). It is the concern with this social tendency and its effects that brings both Dick and Jackson to maximalist collage (as distinct from, say, the collages of John Stezaker, such as *The Marriage* series).

Dick's film *Liberty's booty* was made in 1980 in New York. The stylistic sources of her oeuvre are the underground New York film-makers of the previous generation, such as Jack Smith (1932–89), whom she worked for, and Kenneth Anger. Her work has an impressionistic and rough-hewn feel although on scrutiny, of course, it reveals nuanced and careful structuring

of some bikers roaring down an East Village street. The next sequence is of a woman being interviewed, speaking directly to the camera, which roams across fragments of her body as well as fragments of objects in the room. Throughout the film, genres are interlaced: the viewer never knows who is an actor and who is the subject of a documentary camera; who is the performer reciting an elliptical monologue to camera; or why, in the finale, the characters are dancing in a makeshift night club. The film is populated by figures edited in, seemingly without reason and certainly without explanation, interrupting the flow of the film into opaque meanings that ensure an absence

of totalising narrative. Furthermore, the sustained use of jump cuts alongside the dramatic shifts of location, tempo and imagery builds a literal disruption of seamlessness that is everywhere apparent, echoed by the use of sound suddenly starting or stopping with each cut. Thus the method, subject and form follow each other emphasising the contingency of film and the contingency of the subject in the world.

The film depicts a group of young women, who are making a living from prostitution. A multiplicity of methodologies are used in the construction of the film. The dominant strategy is fly-on-the-wall documentary to describe their day-to-day lives in New York's Lower East Side. The apartments filmed are all furnished with second-hand vintage furniture and the actors are wearing a self-consciously second-hand style of clothing.<sup>22</sup> The narrative, such as it is, is constantly disrupted by a shifting visual pace as well as the deliberate breaking up of the desultory or experimental documentary genre into poetic performance. At the centre of the film is a series of passages that crystallises the subjectivity that is being constituted through the film. This sequence makes the link between the timelessness of casual labour (because prostitution has been part of every known society) and the pivotal moment of the expansion of the McDonald's brand



Figure 3: Vivienne Dick, Film Still of Nan and Bobby, *Liberty's booty*, 1980. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

and its toll on workers' rights in an increasingly neo-liberalised world. *Liberty's booty* speaks of the processes that bind these different instances together. First we see the women in a McDonald's outlet in New York, chatting. Up until that moment the viewer has been following a marginal New York narrative. Then a barely noticeable shift takes place as an Irish male voice cuts in to tell us of the strikes in McDonald's outlets in Ireland. The film then goes via a few shots from a plane to Ireland to the Phoenix Park fair in Dublin (where preparations for the Papal visit were ongoing) to images of the Papal visit on TV and, finally, to children standing in the doorways of their homes. Suddenly the viewer sees the same women we saw in New York, but now walking up a mountain in Donegal, immersed in an apparently idyllic scene. Yet the footage is undermined by sound that offers resistance to it by the sudden method of its insertion. We can hear the song 'She's Not There' by the Zombies and at the same time a woman's voice from New York details the conditions of working as a prostitute in all its abjectness, jolting us back to America.

Both of these filmic shifts use sound and image in combination as well as sequencing to make the point of the impossibility of considering one condition without the other. The comparisons do not stop there: next we are addressed by an Hispanic woman of African descent talking about McDonald's in Spanish, without translation, leaving an Anglophone audience uncomprehending, forcing them/us to experience our own marginality and exclusion. (The rest of the film is

<sup>22</sup> As Dick recently explained, 'some of the clothes and interiors are genuine 70s style of the day, some outfits are what we were wearing – yes – either 'vintage' especially an early 60s look – clothes found or even remade' (email to the author, 9 October 2012).



Figure 4: Vivenne Dick, Party Detail (Margaret), *Liberty's booty*, 1980. Reproduced by kind permission of the artist.

in English, thus assuming an Anglophone audience). The fast cutting, the lack of denouement and the dearth of conventionally coherent film language keep the viewer in the present at all times. In other words the filming reinforces the experiential while the fragmented simultaneity offers a different subjectivity that has to let go of a safe orientation while, at the same time, paradoxically creating that critical distance that makes sure one stays aware of being an active spectator. Key to this sequence is both the positing of home as a disparate simultaneity of features, and the idea of home itself as a place of ambivalence. Both places are sites from where freedom is fought. In Ireland this is clear from the imagery of the Pope, superstition and inequality. A belief in the US as the 'land of the free' is disturbed, inequality is shown to be ubiquitous, through the poverty seen in the areas of New York filmed here and as exemplified through the portrayal of prostitution that exists here, as everywhere.<sup>23</sup> By juxtaposing these two scenarios of the social inequalities in both countries, the experience of simultaneity is coupled with a destabilisation of home as a cipher of safety. Neither the US nor Ireland is portrayed as a safe place but as one of corruption and struggle. These are places of negotiation rather than home: where one makes one's life while aware of other places and the world in

all its contingencies and struggles.

The work of Melanie Jackson addresses the cosmopolitan through a range of materials that grapple with the global through sculptural space. Although her work emerges out of a different context to Dick's, I would suggest that her work exists as a kind of parallel editing in space: through a range of materials and registers Jackson brings different images into dialogue with each other, leaving the viewer to make sense of them. *Some things you are not allowed to send around the world* (Jackson, 2003 and 2006) is part of a body of work that invokes cosmopolitanism through a

range of modes of address across diverse materials and formal strategies. Jackson went to art school in London and, younger than Dick, rose to prominence in the 1990s. Like *Liberty's booty*, her installation also defies genre, ranging from fly-on-the-wall documentary and animation to a sculptural installation made of 300 different newspapers from around the world, which Jackson sourced in her local neighbourhood. Her work uses similar strategies whatever its specific theme, showing a preference for focal multiplicity as well as a confluence of sculpture and video installation. She often adds drawing or printed matter into the mix. The work is placed in such a way that the viewer has to negotiate the physical space through multiple viewpoints. The effectiveness of her work relies on the contingency of different narratives, sutured together in space in order to draw links between the material and the imaginary as a point of resistance to the mainstream mediation of news. The aim is to activate the viewer's perception and physical participation in the critique that the work proposes. For example, in line with her overall oeuvre, *Some things you are not allowed to send around the world* is a multifaceted installation, consisting of video, animation, sculpture and posters. The multiple modes offer a different kind of disjunction than the work of Dick, which is broadly cinematic. The viewer has to literally insert herself into the gaps between the sculptural elements in the room as well as the different registers of a range of media which Jackson uses to connect the multi-localism of the macro with the geographical specificity of the micro.

<sup>23</sup> While prostitution is universal, in the film described here, the overlay of sexual politics, lack of unionized labour of McDonalds and the Hispanic labour activist, brought together in this sequence specifically make the point of the lack of equality in the US.



Figures 5 and 6:  
Melanie Jackson, *Some Things  
You Cannot Send Around The  
World*, Installation (detail),  
2003. Courtesy Matt's  
Gallery.



Jackson's conceptual starting point in this particular artwork was to explore the affect of news stories from locations she had never experienced in any other form. How much of the world could be encountered on a daily basis through the material cultures of storytelling circulating within her own fixed location? The quotidian is juxtaposed with the transitory: in the juxtaposition between the newspapers and the film footage, for example. However, the everyday encounters are not

like those experienced by the *flâneur*, looking in. On the contrary, the viewer's encounter with the work is multi-dimensional and requires the negotiation of different scales and genres in their journey through it. The work comprises documentary film footage, combined with posters and models made out of newspaper, in different scales and various positions around the gallery. Affect is an important part of the understanding of the presentation as these multiple

Figures 7 and 8:  
Melanie Jackson, *Some Things You Cannot Send Around The World*, Installation (detail), 2003. Courtesy Matt's Gallery.



shifts in modality and focus have a discombobulating impact. The models turn the viewer into a giant in scale. The TV sets with the documentary footage are placed on the floor while the animation is at head-height. The models are spot-lit and a cacophony of sound issues from several videos simultaneously.

The models are all temporary architectural or engineered structures quite literally made up of the newspaper stories, their language and design. In

collation the structures are not entirely transparent in their individual meaning, purveying a sense of random origination, but arranged in huddles: what looks to me like islands of togetherness. By contrast, the lens-based work is more explicit, even literal, commenting directly on the precarious nature of so many lives across the globe. One part of the installation is an animation derived from a news story describing the situation of a domestic worker who has been instructed to



Figures 9 and 10:  
Melanie Jackson, *Some Things You Cannot Send Around The World*, Installation (detail), 2003. Courtesy Matt's Gallery.



empty a cupboard of plates every night in order to create a place to sleep, as she has no bedroom attached to her 'live-in' employment. She refills it every morning in a tragic-comic cartoon loop. Another part of the installation is a multi-screened documentary of domestic workers hailing from the Philippines. It references the animation loop since it depicts the women, who have to sleep in cupboards where they work, holding tea ceremonies in the space beneath

the expansive HSBC building in Hong Kong.<sup>24</sup> Jackson insists on the importance of the HSBC building as the most expensive item of real estate in the world in stark contrast to the plight of the women as well as their resourcefulness and enterprise in recreating some semblance of community in this concrete environment.

<sup>24</sup> Designed by the acclaimed architect Norman Foster, the HSBC building in Hong Kong is a flagship edifice built on stilts to acknowledge the local architectural vernacular.



On their only day off they occupy and take over this vast site and the surrounding arteries of the business district where they drink tea, entertain, and groom themselves and each other. In the absence of any other place they can inhabit as home they create one here every Sunday. In their thousands, they are tolerated by the authorities because of their sheer number.<sup>25</sup>

This concrete HSBC home is both temporary and precarious, but a respite nonetheless. The footage is filmed as a 8mm-screen documentary and shows the actual women camped around the pillars: in the gallery, the TV sets are situated around the structures of the built installation and the pillars of the gallery. The footage was shot by a film student from the University of Hong Kong after an open invitation by email from the artist following a route she had pieced together from news stories – a kind of remote viewing and verification of what was reported.

A third part of the artwork, filmed by the artist on holiday in Almeria, Spain, comments on the country's hidden immigrant workers in the 40,000 hectares of plastic greenhouses that grow 90% of the fruit and vegetables destined for export to Britain.<sup>26</sup> These are all stories of hardship, but also stories of maverick and defiant occupations of architecturally significant spaces by migrant workers. The *plásticos*, as the greenhouses are called in Spain, originated in a kind of gold rush with farmers squatting on abandoned land and setting up temporary greenhouses that have now become a feature of the landscape. The piece that gives the installation its title is a hand-collated poster, which lists, according to the artist, every object that national governments have forbidden citizens to send to other nation states through international mail. The lists had been re-issued over many years without being revised and updated, revealing anachronistic prohibitions and the residue of former belief and trading systems, seemingly bizarre in a contemporary globalised context. Restrictions on the movements of people are prone to similar caveats and prohibitions linked to residual belief systems, trade agreements and the flow of capital. Among all of Jackson's artistic strategies contingency predominates.

Similar to the juxtaposition in Dick's work, where performance artists narrate oblique poetry alongside the documentary footage, Jackson's installation inserts fault lines between genres: the metaphoric

25 See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipinos\\_in\\_Hong\\_Kong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filipinos_in_Hong_Kong).

26 See <http://geographyfieldwork.com/CostadelPolythene.htm> and <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2011/feb/07/spain-salad-growers-slaves-charities>. The artist also conducted field trips interviewing 'growers, farmers, businessmen and "illegals" who do all the farm work' (artist's email to the author, 6 May 2013).

referent of the newspaper objects alongside the literal presentation of the unstructured documentary. It also creates a collage in space, which operates as the kind of language effect that Krauss associates with photomontage. Like many of Jackson's works, this installation tends towards overload, but it is this very overload that 'requires the spectator to insert herself into the relationship between images, to forge connections' (Harbord, 2007, p.72). It unsettles the differences between subjects, while preserving the specificity and lived relationship of each situation. Through the inclusion of objects made out of paper, literally made by her hand, Jackson posits the hand-made as resistance to the speed and slickness of professional exchange, singular experience and hierarchy (although it has to be pointed out that video is also handmade – since it is filmed and edited by someone's hand).

Jackson's use of different formats, height and scale serves to tease out differences as much as her use of newspapers often serves to conflate them. Her work therefore is not about establishing equivalences so much as forcing us to see the particularity in difference. Even more than Dick, Jackson is working the analytical borderland identified by Sassen as the complex zone of silence where 'two systems of representation intersect' (Sassen, 2007, p.191). This is a productive and potentially transformative mode of development in global culture which Sassen sees as dependent on this analytical borderland. Jackson is interested in the role of the imagination in envisioning the global while querying the kind of supplement required to what is easily seen. In other words she asks: what work does the viewer need to do in order to really see the global, to be affected by it, and to understand what is at stake?

It is a question that both Dick and Jackson pose in their work. They choose to do so through a maximalist approach that takes into account the importance of contingency in viewing artwork and deciphering its meanings.

Seen in this way, the practices that I have described here would not conform to the didacticism that Bazin finds in works of montage. Meanings in this work are much more diffuse and unassimilable than Bazin would recognise in his reading of Eisenstein's films. They are more clearly aligned with the shock that Benjamin talked about in relation to film where its very instability 'is potentially traumatic for the spectator and allows the cinema to embody something of the restructuration of modern perception' (Doane, 2002, p.15). I would argue that Bazin's observations on the didacticism of montage do not take into account the importance of narrative film structures in his

understanding of the limits and failings of montage as opposed to the long shot. Contemporary experimental work by Vivienne Dick eschews narrative structures of film language, thereby emphasising the shock effect of montage; it undercuts the aggregation of understanding that narrative film relies on and relies instead on an aggregation of experiences through the contingency of the edit. The result produces unstable meanings which are inassimilable to a single forward-driving movement of narrative intentionality. In view of these two points I would suggest that contemporary art uses montage to produce excess.

Finally, in considering what is *not* given to the viewer in a single, neat package, it may be said that both artworks unsettle geographical boundaries and the division of labour. They do so in order to posit a way of living in the world that is not easy, not comfortably placed, but with fault lines and disjunctions that signal a radical discontinuity. I propose that this contrasts importantly to a definition of cosmopolitanism as the condition of being at home everywhere.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, a radical cosmopolitanism comes from accepting that comfort and ease with, and within, the world is a fraught and always inevitably transient state. Holding yourself to account within the world, and through it, is what makes the cosmopolitan imagination such a productive force.

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27 See, for instance, Meskimmon (2010, p.18): 'Moreover, by making herself "at home" everywhere, [the artist in question] ... articulated global citizenship – cosmopolitanism – as a plurilocal subjectivity'. Sara Ahmed has noted in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodying Others in Post Coloniality* that Iain Chambers and Rose Braidotti have also pronounced on the virtues of the nomad (p.82).