Tracing/Tracking History's Nightmares. The Wreck of the Batavia as Australian Foundational Myth

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𝒯his paper is an exercise in cultural critique. It focusses on texts, icons, objects which capture and manipulate a supposedly documental history and refashion it into a source of continuous reverberations.

The 'island girt by sea' and the (hi)story of travels and explorations which *discover* it to European eyes are laid out on a metaphorical and literal map. That map, though, is fragmented, a palimpsest needing continuous rewritings. Australia, the mythical *terra australis*, filters through European imagination and literally invades it as a romantic, exotic land of possible utopia or dystopia; but Australia, of course, is also the site of innumerable invasive and very real contacts whose traces are dispersed within the cultural, ritual, and – according to some – genetic memories of continental tribal groups. Among those contact times and zones, one event is recorded with maniacal frequence in (white) Australian history books, but above all, in numerous popular re-creations and appropriations: the story of the wreck and subsequent mutiny of VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie) Batavia, lost on its maiden journey in June 1629 off the Western Australian mainland. This event and the textual and documental apparatuses linked to it trigger a series of discourses and reflections on concepts and ideological practices, such as nation, historical and cultural heritage, authenticity and identity politics.

I. First Encounters, More or Less

The celebrated and heatedly debated beginnings of British Australian history traditionally date to 1770, when James Cook landed at Botany Bay (Sydney) and later suggested that harbour might be a suitable location for a settlement. The second, more impressive date is, of course, 1788, which has come to indicate the arrival of the so-called 'First Fleet' at Botany Bay first, and later at Port Jackson, further north. As it is well known, the fleet was commanded by Captain Arthur Phillip, it comprised 11 ships among which six vessels transported male and female convicts and their children onto Australian soil. On 26 January that same year, Phillip celebrated "Foundation Day", which is still the official national festivity of the Australian Federation. Already in 1938, though, and with large international resonance in 1988, Aboriginal communities strongly and publicly protested against such celebrations, which totally obliterated their own presence and the dispossession of their lands, languages and lives that the setting of the first British penal colony at Sydney Cove had inaugurated.

So far, Anglo-Celtic myths of origin, unsafe as they are in their marking, as Robert Hughes made very clear in his beautiful *The Fatal Shore*, white Australian colonies as petty criminal, class-ridden and poverty-stricken. Other beginnings, other encounters have long been kept beneath the surface of official history. First, the continuous and long-standing tradition of contacts between Australian Aborigenes and their Asian counterparts, namely the Mocassan peoples, who had certainly been fishing in Northern Australian seas and trading with various Aboriginal groups for an unspecified length of time. Furthermore, other Europeans had already had contacts with Aborigines, as the very recent celebrations of the Dutch-Australian connection in 2006 made visible. The very first European contact with the Australian continent and First Nations recorded took place during an exploration journey specifically aimed at charting new naval routes east of the Dutch spice ports in South East Asia. In 1606, after victoriously fighting against some Portuguese ships in the areas close to Bantam (Java), Captain Willem Janszoon was sent aboard the *Duyfken* and eventually reached what is nowadays the York Peninsula (cfr. Mulvaney). Other encounters were simply accidental. The Dutch had discovered a new and faster route to reach nowadays Jakarta (which they named Batavia, the Roman name for their own land): after rounding Cape Good

Hope, their ships could attempt to move east with the very dangerous help of the strong winds in the so-called 'Roaring Forties' and then turn swiftly northwards. The coast off Western Australia was extremely insidious, with its coral reefs, rocks and swift currents menacing any vessel daring to come too close. Already in 1622, the British East India Company *Tryall* had been wrecked off the northern coast of Western Australia. A long list of shipwrecks signal this haphazardous phase of maritime history and colonial expansion. Many of them are Dutch and document the predominant role of the United Provinces in seventeenth-century Asia. It is true, in Paul Doolan's words that:

The tiny Dutch nation can boast of a host of great seamen who made major contributions to charting the Southern Land in the wake of the Duyfken's voyage, men like Willem de Vlamingh and Abel Tasman. The continent still carries their names, or the names of their ships, in places such as Tasmania, Arnhem Land, or Dirk Hartog Island (named after the man who surveyed the western Australian coastline in 1616). But the Dutch failed to settle the inhospitable, dry continent... (3)

Among the feats the Dutch can boast of, the case of the *Batavia* represents the quintessential history of ambitious trade venture, dangerous sea travel, untrustworthy seamanship, and shocking wreck and mutiny. As such, it seems to inflect the encounter between Europe and Australia with the almost archetypal marks of (Western) sin, lust and murder.

II. Documentary Authenticity, Historical Fixations[1]

The *Batavia* was a flagship of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the VOC was undoubtedly the most powerful and rich trading company based in Europe; its main business was the spice trade centred on the fertile tropical islands comprising what are today Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Malaysia (Aykut 2005). In Asia, the VOC operations were centred on the Dutch depot-city of Batavia on the key Indonesian island of Java, modern-day Jakarta. Encouraged by the successful return of General Carpentier earlier in 1628 with five richly laden vessels, the Directors of the VOC had ordered that eleven vessels be equipped for further voyages that year (Henderson 17). The *Batavia* was

constructed for the Amsterdam Chamber of the VOC and sailed from Amsterdam for the east Indies on her maiden voyage on 27 October 1628. Described as a 'retour' ship, she was a large merchant vessel designed for return voyages to the East Indies (Henderson 13). The *Batavia* was the flagship of a fleet of three vessels, along with the *Dordrecht* and the *Assendelft.* The President of the fleet and senior VOC commander was Francisco Pelsaert, who travelled on the *Batavia.* He was accompanied on the vessel by the skipper Ariaen Jacobsz and the supercargo (officer in charge of the cargo) Jeronimus Cornelisz, who was to become the archetypal malevolent antihero of (white) Australian history. Three hundred and twenty-two people were on board, but the ship also loaded a quantity of trade goods. Among the usual gimcrakery aimed at trading with native peoples, it also carried 12 chests of silver coins worth 250,000 guilders and a large quantity of jewels valued at 58,000 guilders (Henderson 17). It was certainly a treasure ship, which also included two beautiful antiquities that the famous Dutch-Flemish artist and diplomat Peter Paul Rubens was shipping to the Moghul ruler of India, Shah Jehangir. The intent was that of convincing the Moghul emperor to grant the VOC more access to India for trade. One of the treasures on board the *Batavia* was a Roman cameo known as the Great Cameo of Gaspar Boudaen. Carved about 312-15 A.D., it bore the effigy of the Christian Roman Emperor Constantine. It was recovered from the wreck and is now in the Royal Coin Museum at the Hague in the Netherlands. The other treasured relic was an onyx vase, known as 'the Rubens vase', carved with images of Pan. The Rubens vase was cut from a single agate found in the Byzantine period and is now in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, USA (Aykut). The *Batavia* also transported what should have been the carved stone portico at the Dutch headquarters at Batavia.

Such a trove of riches was coveted by many, namely Jacobsz, the pilot, and the larger-than-life Jeronimus Cornelisz, an apothecary with Anabaptist Antinomian leanings and a past as disciple of the heretic painter Torrentius. His high social rank would have made this journey as a company officer almost impossible, were it not for the fate of Torrentius, who had recently been accused, tortured and convicted as blasphemous Rosicrucian heretic. Maybe his arrest in 1627 and his trial in 1628 were among the reasons for venturing upon the eastern journey which was to change the lives of so many people. In a story which is almost excessively laden with evil deeds, Cornelisz conspired with Jacobsz and other offi-

cers to mutiny, planning to seize the ship and devote their lives to piracy. Pelsaert had been sick for most of the trip, and had lost the respect of the crew, so that most of them were easily convinced to take part in the mutiny (Aykut 2005). But, before the mutiny could actually take place, the ship ran aground on Morning Reef in the Wallabi Group of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands during the night of 4 June 1629. The skipper, Jacobsz, had seen white foam on the water some distance from the reef but was soon convinced that there was no danger and insisted on that route (Henderson 17). As a result of his carelessness, forty people drowned in swimming from the wreck, while over 250 managed to reach three small islands nearby (Henderson 17-18).

Those islands also bear memories of exploration and maritime charting journeys: they are commonly referred to as "The Abrolhos Houtman" islands, after Dutch Commander Frederik de Houtman, who came across these coral-reef fringed small islands in June 1619. "Abrolhos" is possibily a derivation from the Portuguese expression *Abre os olhos*, meaning "keep your eyes open". The Abrolhos lie 60km west of Geraldton on Western Australia's midwest coast. They are grouped into three main clusters – Wallabi, Easter and Pelsaert – and spread from north to south across 100km of ocean. The Dutch castaways first landed on Beacon island, in the Wallabis, which are barren and virtually waterless, therefore many of the survivors began to die of thirst. In the meantime, President Pelsaert set sail in a long boat in search of water, taking with him the skipper (and prospective mutineer), Jacobsz, and 35 other people. Ten other survivors followed on a yawl. Finding no water nor help on the Australian mainland, they decided to sail on to Indonesia, 900 nautical miles away, to get help. This journey, made in small open boats, was a remarkable navigational feat but Pelsaert's unexpected desertion was seen as treachery, as testified by the name given to one of the islands, Traitor's Island. (Aykut). Being the highest representative of the VOC left on the islands, Jeronimus Cornelisz took charge, in a self-appointing gesture that would definitely prove fatal. He chose a group of young men he could easily lead and manipulate and reverted to his original plans of mutiny and buccaneering. The few able-bodied and armed men were sent on another island, West Wallabi, and instructed to look for water in the not-so-secret hope that they would not survive.

With nobody to stop him and his young criminals, Jeronimus inaugurated a realm of terror, mass rape and murder. Children and the sick

were among the first to be killed, apparently to save on their food rations. But irrational bloodlust had taken hold of the murderous group, so wholesale, useless slaughter took place with very little secrecy and decency. Many women were also forced to become the concubines of the mutineers. On Wallabi Island, a mercenary soldier called Wiebbe Hayes eventually led the group of soldiers and fugitives to capture Jeronimus; he also managed to warn the rescue ship commanded by the returning Pelsaert early in September that year, so that he was able to prevent the attack on his *Sardam* and force all mutineers to surrender. A rough sum of 125 people had been killed by the paranoid group of ruthless men led by Jeronimus. Seven among the culprits were tried on the spot, their confessions extorted by torture; after signing those confessions, their right hands were cut (Jeronimus had both hands cut off) and they were hung on scaffolds that can undoubtedly be remembered as among the first European constructions in Australia. Among the mutineers tried on the Abrolhos, only two escaped hanging. They were Wouter Loos, a soldier who had led the rebels once Cornelisz had been captured, and Jan Pelgrom de Bye, whose death sentences were turned into being marooned on the Australian mainland. They were offered some provisions and were told to explore the land and to try and make contact with Aborigines. They were put ashore at the mouth of an inlet which historians believe to be the mouth of the Murchison River (Henderson 21), with the instruction of waiting for a vessel that was supposed to take them off after two years. No further news is extant as to their destiny and many consider them Australia's first known European residents (Pearson, *A Great Southern Land* 39)

III. Shaping the Past. Diving into Relic History

> Absolutely *nothing in this book is invented*. It is closely based on contemporary sources, and direct quotes... are drawn from those same documents. (Dash ix, my italics)

The long story I have resumed in the previous paragraph is reproduced in a variety of texts, in which the confines between historiography and fiction are markedly unstable. From institutional webpages (to name just two, the ones published by the Australian Ministry of Education and the Western Australian Maritime Museum), to history books and docu-

mentary films, from adult and juvenile fiction to opera and radio drama, the story of the *Batavia* has gone through a process of continuous rewriting. Remarkably, notwithstanding the declarations of 'authenticity' quoted above from Mike Dash's impressive *Batavia's Graveyard* (2002), 'serious' historical writing is never innocent, of course, from rhetorical sophistication. Every history is a *situated* history, a narration whose research tracks are bent by and leave traces of located knowledge and expectations. In fact, all the works on the *Batavia* perused share a common romantic slant; with telling frequence and slight variations, these texts are marketed as insights into "the true story" of "history's bloodiest mutiny" (Dash, cover jacket) and as, to quote just one case, "the most exciting adventure" (Edwards, cover page). In the nineteenth century, in full imperial times, explorer Ernest Favenc wrote *Marooned on Australia*, a fictionalized rendition of the adventures, explorations and discoveries of Diedrich Buys, a fictitious Dutch mariner who is castaway on very inhospitable shores (1897). It is worth mentioning a relevant twentieth-century case, Henrietta Drake-Brockman, whose research contributed the information necessary to find the site of the wreck. She authors both a fictive account of the events and the 'scientifically' documented *Journey to Disaster,* and this testifies to the apparently irresistible nature of the *Batavia* legacy.

It is one thing for historical writing to fall into the mimetic fallacy of fiction, creating a world bound to the real world "in the same way… that the trompe l'oeuil blends into the tangible objects among which the spectator moves" (P. Valéry, "Masters and Friends")… It will be necessary to rid historical writing of its own implicit theatricality, its tendency to stage events… (Carter 160)

As Paul Carter makes quite clear in this excerpt, the romanticized theatricality of historical writing is "implicit" and coextensive with the act of writing itself, be it history or fiction. The *Batavia* exemplifies, in my view, a symptomatic instance of a search for mythological foundations often resulting in acts of parodic duplication. First of all, the much-vaunted authenticity of the archival material, used by many of the historians and creative writers alike, is predicated at its very roots. The main source for the mythical replication of the *Batavia* legend is, in fact, the second volume of the *Batavia* logbook published in Amsterdam in 1647. Commandeur Francisco Pelsaert died in 1630, soon after those dreadful events, his reputation still much tainted by his doubtful behaviour after the wreck. His

Ongeluckige Voyagie, van't schip Batavia, *nae de Oost-Indien* (The Un-lucky Voyage of the Batavia in the East Indies) relates the story of the mu-tiny on the islands, yet Pelsaert was not an eye-witness to those 'facts'. He can do nothing but 'report' events, details, impressions told by starving, desperate, furious survivors who were certainly not keen upon forgivance nor objective truth. In compiling his journal, Pelsaert, who had decided against the Company's general rules to try Jeronimus and his fellow muti-neers on Beacon Island, was undoubtedly trying to clear his conscience and career from the infamy of abandoning his ship, crew and passengers to their destiny. Whose truth, therefore, is inscribed within the pages of the *Ongeluckige Voyagie*? In what way was it being used, already within a few years from the mutiny? In what ways is the historical *authentic* stance assumed in the journal and in some other contemporary memoirs by sur-vivors which were also published in the wake of the commotion the *Batavia* provoked in Europe of any use at our times?

To refer to just a few instances, Hugh Edwards produces a textual con-coction with his romanticized version of the events linked to the *Batavia* facing the equally romanticized tale of the discovery of the wreck in 1963. 'Heroes' abound in both texts and historical planes. In the seventeenth-cen-tury *Batavia* section, Edwards construes a story on well-known 'facts', by reporting easily recognisable quotations taken from Pelsaert's journal. The second section, set in the twentieth century, is equally 'factual', with photo-graphs and detailed lists of human and material relics (Edwards 1966). The quest for truth is romantic, again; brave divers and expert archaeologists coalesce to unveal the mystery marking Australian territory and history. Among the results of the excavation operations, in fact, stone huts on West Wallabi Island signal their presence as the first European artefacts on the continent. As anticipated above, gallows, tombs and skeletal remains also comprise this very happy record of landmark feats.

Arabella Edge's *The Company* also derives much of its texture from archival material. Since its very title, though, her text claims its fictive sta-tus. This is a novel, a declared invention which is nevertheless based upon the assumption of the diffused knowledge of Pelsaert's journal, which she keeps as pivotal matter to rewrite the story from the point of view of arch-villain Jeronimus. I shall also quote the example of *Strange Objects* by Gary Crew, a novel apparently addressed to a juvenile audience which was awarded the 1991 Australian Children's Book of the Year Prize. This short

text is in line with much romance fiction of the late Victorian times, namely Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, in deploying narrative strategies apt at filing up documents, records, newspaper cuttings, journals, phonographic recordings. As in the case of Stoker, Crew relates the most incredible story with the aid of microtextual richness and complexity to produce an effect of vertiginous verisimilitude. An adolescent boy finds some relics connected with Pelgrom and Loos, the usual marooned mutineers, and vanishes into the Australian bush. He later finds himself immersed in Aboriginal dreaming and thus witnesses the past, sees its protagonists and their first arrival on the continental shores. Two mythical imaginative constructions coincide, in this text: the *Batavia* and its legacy of evil onto Australian land, on the one hand, and, on the other, the stories of lost, castaway children recent Australian literature has frequently featured (as the literary production by David Malouf can confirm). In both cases, the intriguing vicinity of fact and fiction is similar to the historical work by Dash, Edwards and Drake-Brockman, who fictionalize their purportedly unsophisticated histories and transmute them, whether consciously or not, into a tale, a spellbinding yarn. If the fiction on the Batavia myth can be read as faction, fiction interspersed with truths from various sources, the histories of the *Batavia* (all histories, I suggest) turn out to be indicted on the same textual predicament.

IV. From Texts to Objects. Or, Marketing History...

> Parody is a form of imitation, but imitation
> characterized by ironic inversion... (Hutcheon 6)

The case of 'Shakespeare's Globe Theatre' can be taken as *the* example of the paradigmatic quest for origins in Western culture par excellence. Sam Wanamaker's attempt at building what was on some occasions named a 'replica' Globe, and, on others, a 'new' Globe was a cultural and economic venture which touched on the Bard himself, his (and Britain's and Europe's and Western culture's) place in the past, present and future ages. Historical 'documents', archaeological 'evidences', literary 'testimonies' were employed to (re)produce a securely successful enterprise, which construed and constructed a dreamed-of 'original' 'authentic' location. From

the late '60s until its fist openings in the '90s, reconfiguring that site has been paramount, so much that both public and private funds were allocated to such a mythical appropriation of the past. Visualizing and sensually experiencing the past (theatre) was carefully planned, and marketed, as the ultimate goal for any right-thinking citizen. A material object was eventually presenting the 'English' and Anglophone cultures with the actual, ocular proof of their majesty and dominant role. I anticipated my position on this question by simply quoting a short passage from Linda Hutcheon's seminal *A Theory of Parody* (2000). As is also suggested by her words and work, being unescapably framed, objects of/from the past lose their original use value and mean *otherwise.* Such is the case of historical shipwrecks, both in Australia and elsewhere.

The Australian public are seemingly very interested in shipwrecks and related finds that suggest that James Cook was not the first European to visit the east coast of Australia. The most famous example is the Mahogany Ship, which has taken on almost mythological significance in the Warrnambool area of Victoria. In brief, the remains of an old wooden shipwreck were exposed along the coast between Warrnambool and Port Fairy in 1836, but were reburied and 'lost' again by the 1880s. (Colley)

The fate of the famed wreck of the sixteenth-century Mahogany Ship is revealing. Searching for origins is no easy affair, as exemplified by this legendary ship which haunts Australian memory. Documents record its presence and display, but any trace of its materiality has eventually vanished in and out of history. As for Western Australia, both amateur divers and professional treasure seekers and archaeologists have long devoted time and money to land and sea excavation campaigns. In 1840, H.M.S. *Beagle*, just a few years after Mr Darwin had travelled on it, stopped close to the Abrolhos to verify the existence and scientific value of the wreck of the *Batavia* (and of other vessels equally lost in the area). That search has not ended yet, each new excavation campaign offering further items for inspection and display.

In a report for the Western Australian Maritime Museum, Sarah Kenderdine summarizes the institutional and managerial position as far as heritage and the preservation of historical objects are concerned:

Social and cultural values emphasise shipwrecks as sites that are linked to *the fabric of our society*. For example, a site may be *celebrated* and become *enshrined* in the folklore or oral history of a community. A wreck event may have been of such significance that it remains associated with a region for decades after the incident. Wrecks often generate songs, literature, art, poems and films. Wreck sites also have particular *aesthetic or romantic connotations* for the community in general and *as symbols*, they have the power to evoke intense feelings and images. *As ruins*, they are an integral part of a cultural landscape offering the opportunity *to access the past*. Aesthetic appeal of shipwrecks gives added reason for their protection *in situ*. The full restoration of shipwrecks can be financially prohibitive and tends to offer *a sanitised view of the past*. However, excavated material does offer the opportunity for a comprehensive interpretation of history when conserved, researched and displayed in an appropriate manner. (Kenderdine 9, my italics)

In a passage richly laden with tropes which are obviously relevant to my discourse, Kenderdine also suggests that historic shipwrecks are "time capsules" which comprise the past and consign it to the present. In her professional view, they are at the same time "symbols" and "ruins", whose status is inextricably linked with policies and practices meant to build and reinforce *some* sense of a national past. Museum studies have long stressed the relevance of public invention and intervention in the curatorial practices charged with the salvaging, preserving, displaying of 'objects' that are assumed to signify national belonging. If, as Ernst Gellner suggested, nations are willed inventions, powerful imagined and imaginary communities, they can and must be offered a variety of mirrors in which to see and desire themselves. Museums serve such a function, together with what is currently termed 'cultural tourism', both funded to propose, among other things, patterns of identity politics in the selection and fruition of specific sites and objects.

Tourism is often regarded as a symptom of modernity – that is, epitomizing the search for places and experiences that are up-to-the-minute, stylish and oriented towards the future – and for others, postmodernity – that is, fusing past, present and future in a liminal timelessness and spacelessness characterised by *pastiche, simulacra and iconography* (Rojek and Urry 1997)… alongside its experiential and representational aspects, tourism must also be seen in relation to institutional and governmental arrangements and processes of nation building. (Craik 90, my italics)

Shipwrecks can either be contained within Kenderdine's "sanitised view of the past", i.e. held and displayed within traditional museums with variously didactic aims, or can remain open-air (and deep sea) locations where a more complex and experiential involvement is demanded on the part of the audience. In both cases, though, the curatorial frame is present in cutting the site and the objects related to it *off* contemporaneity. Their original shape and function are readable, but obviously forever unreachable. The example which I shall relate is that of the Western Australian Maritime Museum at Fremantle, which holds some of the relics from the excavation sites on the Abrolhos, as well as part of the reconstructed hull of the *Batavia*. In what I deem a purely parodic gesture, that hull poses as unfit model for a tiny facsimile reconstruction lurking in front of it. Or viceversa. The original is incomplete and will remain so, it plays 'the ruin', by offering the viewer's senses a glimpse of the past as grand and distant. But, again, in another parodic turn, shipwrecks can and do represent a fruitful example of pastiche, easily marketable simulacra of a forlorn but 'useful' past. Museumization is a Janus-faced ideological strategy, whereby revered objects are framed and frozen out of the present but also reproduced and sold as replicas – like the new/old Globe – or as portable amenities and souvenirs.

Our perceptions of the sea have changed dramatically in the last few decades. In a First World country, such as the Island Nation of Australia, where the vast bulk of the population lives within an easy drive of the shore, it is part of recreational life. Many people have their own boats... Celebratory occasions often feature the Tall Ships, some of their sails emblazoned with the logos of their sponsors. Children 'check the surf' every day after school. Historic replicas of more or less authenticity are popular. One example is the replica of the *Batavia*… Indeed, this part of the... coast has been christened, with an eye to the tourist market, the 'Batavia coast', complete with marinas, souvenirs, and expensive development projects. The replica was built in the Netherlands between 1985 and 1995 (the original was built in seven months in 1628) and has become a popular sight around the Australian coast. (Pearson, *The Indian Ocean* 1)

The replica of the *Batavia* was built at the Bataviawerf in Lelystad in the Netherlands. It was reconstructed with 'traditional' materials, and with the tools and methods of the time of the 'original' ship. For the design, historians and craftsmen used the remains of the original ship displayed in Fremantle WAMM (Western Australian Maritime Museum) as well as

17th century building descriptions, plus artistic prints and paintings. On 25 September 1999, the 'new' *Batavia* was transported to Australia by barge and moored at the National Maritime Museum in Sydney. In 2000, the *Batavia* was the flagship for the Dutch Olympic Team during the 2000 Olympic Games, thus representing a paradoxical *double entendre*: whose heritage does the ship represent and constitute? Whose ship, whose material remain is entitled to symbolize the past? During its stay in Australia the *Batavia* was towed to the ocean once, where it sailed on its own on 12 June 2001. The ship was then returned to the Bataviawerf in Lelystad and it remains there on display. The new *Batavia*, *original* as it may be, was not made nor meant to sail. Its function is only representational, its material status is that of a vaguely national(ized) exhibitionary artefact which, occasionally, can carry the ensigns of global brands such as Coca Cola, as was noticed by many during the 2000 Olympics. But whose image is the replica, *any* replica, meant to diffuse? And for whose eyes? The new Batavia celebrates craftsmanship and the legal agreement on the part of the Dutch and Australian governments as regards the ownership of Dutch shipwrecks in Australian territorial seas. What is, instead, the role that must be played by the *true* 'original' ship? Must it metaphorically hover about and haunt Australian premises, precincts and texts? Tony Bennett recurs to Kimberley Webber's work on historical collections in Australia when he deals with "the cultivation of a serious sense of Australia's past" (Bennett 146). For Webber, this sense can and "must rest upon a clear distinction between the rhetoric of the relic and the reality of the artefact". (Webber 170; quot. in Bennett 146). The utter predicament intercepting such use of "rhetoric" and "reality" is, in my view, unresolved and irresolvable. The terms "relic" and "artefact" both relate, for instance, to the coins, jewels, everyday objects, bones, journals and other various materials connected to the *Batavia* and forming its heritage and legacy. Benjamin taught us long ago that, in an era of mechanical reproduction, new technologies of mass reproduction destroy the aura of the high culture work of art that fetishizes origin. I rather tend to believe that contemporary manipulations of the *Batavia* literally transfer that aura onto mass-produced, portable *simulacra* of national recollection and romanticized sense of belonging. Perfect in every detail, in small-scale and in Tall-ship version alike (though produced with very different systems and tools), reproduced *Batavias* function not so much as objects in their own right,

but as parodies, as Hutcheon explains when she states that "... parody offers a much more limited and controlled version of this activation of the past by giving it a new and often ironic context, it makes similar demands upon the reader..." (Hutcheon 3). The *Batavia*, therefore, activates the past and circulates in the present as past, or, rather, as a handy, portable, slightly 'different' past.

Note, Notes, Anmerkungen, Notes

1   I owe much gratitude to the very interesting paper read by Leigh Travis-Penman (The University of Melbourne-Max Planck Institut fur Geschichte) at the *Imagined Australia* Conference held at Prato, Monash University Centre in May 2007 ("Invisible Brotherhoods and Secret Histories. The 'Batavia Legacy' and the Quest to Re-imagine Australia"). His introduction and presentation of a rich historical and historiographical repertoire obviously helped my reading, which is more culturally than historically oriented.

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