In the preceding section we have attempted to establish the more general aspects of the encounter between a text and its viewer. However, when we begin to introduce the simple model to the full richness of the aesthetic circuit, it becomes much more complex.

A text always represents itself to a viewer from somewhere. That is, the Art object (even in the form of a reproduction), will always be encountered in a concrete situation, be it a room, gallery, or on a wall. We must now turn our attention to the place - the somewhere - where the viewer encounters the image and the ways this can affect the ways in which it is read.

**Mediation in general**

Returning to the relation between Box I (the artist) and Box II (the Art work), we are now aware that the process of **coding** involves the producer assembling or reactivating a number of elements - the signs and codes - in order to produce a symbolic object. We will call this stage **primary coding** - a process whereby the artist produces a text which will have a meaning of some sort, or at least move between certain desired limits. We will call the aim of primary coding the **preferred meaning** of the work. Here the artists are the arbiters of this preferred meaning. But as we have seen, it is in the nature of texts to shift across a varying set of meanings, particularly when the source of the preferred meaning, the artist, is no longer available to provide the spectator with a
works definitive interpretation. (That the artist is the best witness of his, or her, work is not a universally accepted idea.) Between Boxes II and III - the Art work and the viewer - a process of secondary coding, or mediation, can take place and this can deflect or totally transform the nature of the preferred meaning.

To illustrate the nature of mediation we will use an example taken from architecture. One of the key buildings in the story of modern European architecture is the Fagus Factory, designed and built by Walter Gropius (1883–1969) and Adolf Meyer (1881–1929) in Germany in 1911 (see illustrations 24 & 25). As neither of us has ever visited the factory, we have had to rely on photographs for our knowledge of it. These photographs are reproduced in most of the standard works of architectural history. In almost every instance, the building is photographed from a particular position, and the same area is selected for emphasis. It is always the façade that is depicted, presumably because it is here that one encounters the building's most modern stylistic elements - the use of glass, cubic form and unclad corners. But there are other, less modern looking aspects of the building (see illustration 25, p. 162). Which of these two photographs most 'truthfully' portrays the Fagus Factory? The answer is both. However, if one had to rely solely upon photographic evidence, it would be the one that occurs most frequently. (In this case illustration 24.) The result is that the most commonly occurring depictions eventually 'stand in' for the whole building, and thereby effect the significance they have for the viewer.

These two photographs can be seen as elements of secondary encoding, in that they mediate between the factory and the viewer. The factory depicted in each of these photographs does not differ in its physical dimensions or in its material construction, but through a process of mediation it can appear differently and therefore mean different things to the viewer. Mediation, then, refers to the processes whereby meanings are transmitted from one point to another.

The crucial thing to remember is that such agencies of mediation are not passive mediums that carry an original set of meanings to their destination unscathed. They can be active, capable of making radical interventions into the sense that the decoders make of a text:

Mediation in the Visual Arts

Titles

To begin this examination of the processes of mediation, we will look at the title of the work. Throughout this book we have referred to illustrations and specific
examples in two ways. Wherever possible, a reproduction of the work has been included along with the supplementary information of its title, the artist and its date of completion. You have in your possession, then, two sets of information - a reproduction of the work, and a title. Under ‘normal’ operating conditions, these two pieces of information will be in close relation so close that it is impossible to separate them, as in the statement, ‘That is The Bathers by Courbet’. As a corollary of this, one set of information can stand in for another. Almost always it is the title – the words – which substitute for the image. This simple exchange of title for image hides the degree to which we are dependent upon the title for our initial grasping of the work. The title of an image becomes the first mediation that the work is subjected to. Most of you have perhaps been the victims of an experiment beloved of Art History teachers, where a work is displayed with the real title being withheld, or with a different title substituted. In the absence of this crucial piece of information, visual images are capable of sliding across a wide range of meanings. Despite the desire of much Modern Art to banish the codes of language from the visual image, our dependence upon titles continues unabated, to the point where it is often the case that the stand-in nomination, ‘Untitled’, can become the title, Untitled, by default. We expect there to be a particular and fixed relation between image and title. Normally it is placed underneath the image, and is thought to describe what is in the work or somehow it gives us a summary of its content.

René Magritte (1898–1967) was one artist who attempted to disturb this relationship between image and title. Magritte realised that it was impossible to banish completely language from the image and proceeded to take the question of a work’s title to the core of what he was doing. He broke with the idea of the title being a description or summary of the picture.

In Hegel’s Holiday (Place 12), Magritte has altered the normal operating relationships between the image and the title. Rather than image and title being substitutable for one another, the image and its title are now equal elements. The ‘whole’ work is now representable by the simple equation:

\[ \text{image} + \text{title} = \text{work}. \]

This simple shift places us in a vertiginous condition where we are no longer certain as to what comes first – image or title – or even whether we should regard either as being potentially translatable into its other element.

Even where the artist is aware of this insinuation of language into the visual image, it is difficult to break with it absolutely. Some contemporary artists have opted for giving their works numbers instead of linguistic titles. The difficulty with such a strategy is that the coded language of numbers is not neutral, but carries with it a set of associations with mathematics, science, impersonality and coolness. These associations inevitably migrate across to the work, leaving numbered footprints that mediate the viewer’s interpretation.

Frames

The physical presentation of a work can also be a factor in the mediation of the Art work to viewer. In Western Art the convention of framing – for instance, placing an image within an ornate gilt frame – produces associations of age, importance, and ‘old master’. In Japanese Art the equivalent might be the use of an exceptionally fine piece of silk as the painting surface. This then moves the work towards the category of a precious luxury item available only to the elite. In turn, this re-contextualisation may also alter the cultural place thought appropriate for the work, it may shift from being a utilitarian object and become a luxury ‘Art’ item. There are fashions in framing and a great deal of Contemporary Art attempts to mark itself off from these associations by reducing the visibility of the frame, or by adopting materials which carry other types of associations. This can extend to making works that cannot be framed, let alone bought, such as sculptures that combust, or objects made of ice. Using straightforward wooden frames may imply a desire for simplicity, authenticity or ‘craftiness’. Modern industrial materials such as steel – much favoured for holding Art photographs – imply modernity, or utilitarian functionality. The materials used in the frame, particularly the use of precious materials such as gold leaf and jewels in Art objects of the pre-modern era were often a way of signifying the esteem with which the image was held. Religious icons are an example, as well as the social status of powerful figures depicted in portraiture.

Before photographic images became easily affordable, and even after this, they were placed in ornate frames to indicate either the aspirations of their owners – poor man’s paintings – or to signify the intimate and emotional relationship the owner had to the person photographed. Photographs placed
within frames often copied the frames from earlier forms such as miniatures. In such cases it is likely that the memories of the loved ones would include the frames in which they were set in much the same way that family photographs also call up a memory of their place – the family album. It seems probable that for those in developed countries, a digital portrait stored as data in a mobile phone will replace the framed photograph.

We suspect that the various framing devices used in European Art played a more significant mediating role than we now imagine and were important elements in establishing for the viewer certain general rules about what it was that we were looking at. No one who has visited an old theatre can ignore how integral the ornate proscenium arches (frames) were to the comprehension of the spectacles that were staged in such buildings. Nor was it by chance that a great deal of interchange took place between the theatrical devices of framing and the devices used in the Visual Arts. In both cases, the frame around the image/scene was important in suggesting to the viewer that they were in the presence of certain types of illusory space.

With sculpture, the religious origins of the objects have left their traces in the plinths and niches, which persisted long after their religious functions had disappeared. One only has to think of the supporting paraphernalia that are deployed in commemorative sculpture and war memorials to see how easily these archaic framing devices can be pressed back into service in the present day.

The mediating processes initiated by framing devices operate to encode the space where the object is placed. Frames provide the viewer with a set of very general signals as to where they should imagine the object residing in relation to other objects. That is, they mark it off as being a particular kind of object, inhabiting a particular kind of space. Such devices – again, at a general level – may suggest to the viewers the status of the view or scene that they are witnessing.

The medium

The medium in and through which the work appears can itself be a mediator in our apprehension of it. Throughout the 20th century, artists have questioned the values attributed to ‘Art’ materials and have evolved forms of Art, such as Performances and Happenings which create events that are deliberately open-ended, ephemeral and non-pictorial.

The materials thought to be most synonymous with Art are oil paint and canvas (which is both a specific designation, but is also used generically for woven surfaces such as linen and, more recently, polyester). Oil paint has been at the centre of European picture-making for over five hundred years. During that time it has become more than a superb substance for depicting the complexities of how things look, it has become an institution. An artist cannot set about painting in oil (or painting at all) without being placed in a position of comparison with one or another style, or artist, from the past. As a result, one could say that painting-in-oils-on-canvas immediately places the work, for better or worse, within a privileged tradition. We might say that the medium places the image on a 'plinth' and raises the 'picture-in-oils' to a higher level than other types of images.

The growth of non-material Art and digital Art since the mid-1990s has lead to a number of criticisms being levelled at the elevated status of oil paint. But whilst digital Art is now seen as the most 'contemporary' medium – that is, the medium most appropriate to our present time – painting, and oil painting in particular, are still very popular media. Those sceptical of the critical relevance of painting as a contemporary medium argue that the continuing popularity of painting is sustained by the commodity market that is most at home with unique, non-duplicitable and palpable Art objects. The supporters of oil painting counter this argument by pointing out that even if this is the case, more paintings are being sold and seen on an everyday basis than Art videos or installations.

The Museum

If we pursue the theme of encoded space as a crucial mediator of a work's meaning, then where we encounter an object will be an important element in shaping how we encounter it. This 'where' will enter into the interpretation that is made of the work. In the contemporary situation, it is the museum that plays a major role in organising our conceptions, and perceptions, of what is and what is not an Art object.

A museum is a fine example of an encoded space that specialises in owning, displaying and interpreting Art objects. Museums, in their modern form, have not always existed. Previously they resembled collections, in the literal sense, but were not regarded as being the very particular sorts of physical and cultural environments that they are now. We wish to suggest that museums and Art galleries operate in ways very similar to framing devices.
alerting us to the fact that we are in a physical environment within which we are likely to encounter Art objects. This sets in train a complex set of attitudes, assumptions and behaviours that are thought to be appropriate to the viewing of such objects. One of the reasons for the decline in framing devices for individual works may be that the building in which the objects are housed has taken on this role. The institution of the museum or gallery is a key force, whether we know it or not, in how we judge Art.

The gallery and museum are the places where the institution of Art and its power are most concentrated and where this power can be seen to be operating most intensely. In the case of the gallery, this power takes the form of the collection and the importance of a gallery is judged on the number of master works it has in its collection. For example, although the Louvre in Paris has many more works of Art than the National Gallery of London, many believe the National Gallery in London to be a better collection because of its larger concentration of great pictures. Other major galleries such as Museums of Contemporary Art and Kunsthalle (Arthalls', literally large state-subsidised shells for exhibiting Art, but with little or no collection) measure their worth according to the amount of popular and critically praised exhibitions they can host.

So the worth of a museum is measured by the number of good pictures it holds. However, the situation is complicated by the fact that the worth of a picture is also coloured by the status of the gallery, or museum, where it is held. Consider the following, not unusual, sequence of events. A friend with aspirations to become a great artist regularly invites you to his garage to view his work. Years later you view his work in a state gallery and then in a contemporary exhibition amongst esteemed contemporary artists. Whilst you may not like his work, it is very likely that you will start to look at it in a different way as it becomes publicly recognised.

There is no real solution to this dilemma, on which a good deal of 20th century Art hinges. The company of so-called great works, gives lesser works increased credibility. Artists, historians and curators from countries without grand traditions (mostly postcolonial countries) are understandably sceptical of the way grand traditions and high values are bolstered by the institutions of imperial countries they cannot begin to compete with. For contemporary artists, it can be a great boost to their standing for them to have a work in a public collection. This ratifies and sanctions the artist since his, or her, work has been deemed good enough to purchase with public funds. It suggests that the artist can be thought of as representative of that historical moment. Moreover, institutionalisation makes other works of the artist a more secure choice for the private investor.

Placing an object that is not normally seen in the context of a museum can radically alter its meaning. For instance, exhibitions of everyday, utilitarian objects reframe them as 'aesthetic objects', and this then influences the more general set of attitudes that we adopt towards them. Many artists of the 20th century have been aware of the 'museum-effect' and have incorporated it in their work. We have already seen how the artist Marcel Duchamp was fond of subverting objects back and forth across different cultural spaces to see how the meaning of the things changed. Duchamp is often invoked to shed light on the way in which artists have challenged the 'museum-effect' with irreverent gestures. What is less discussed is that Duchamp had already gained notoriety in 1913 for his painting Nude Descending a Staircase (1911) exhibited in the Armory Show in New York. It was only after this show that he launched his readymades. Hence, it was only as an acknowledged and institutionally ratified artist that he acquired the authority to call something he found Art. For example, imagine you are in a room with a famous artist and someone you have never met before. The artist points to an old pair of shoes and proclaims them Art. The unknown person similarly points to a dog sitting in the corner and declares it to be Art. It is likely that the assertion made by the famous artist will carry more weight than that of the layperson. The judgements of the recognised artist are able to set the designated object onto a 'path', whereas the judgement of the unknown does not.

The conundrums that arise out of a merger between institutional power and artistic quality have haunted artists for decades. From the 1960s on, artists attempted to evade the inevitable effects that institutional recognition has upon the economic and aesthetic value of a work of Art. The works of such movements as Land Art were just too big to be contained within the walls of the museum. Others attempted to situate their works within the more robust environments of everyday life. An example is the community Muralist Movements that grew up in the 1970s.
The according of value, quality or importance to a work of Art is never a straightforward, unmediated expression of that object's worth. In the remainder of this chapter we will examine in more detail some of the factors that imbue a work of Art with worth, or quality. They supply the circumstances that position the object or event within a frame, albeit a frame that is not always a physical one.

Into the museum: Discourse

If the nature of the space where the work is shown can mediate its meaning at a general level, then how it is displayed within that space can penetrate into its very core and utterly transform what we see. In order to show how these sorts of mediation work, it is necessary to introduce the idea of discourse.

We have suggested that mediation or secondary coding was not a passive bearer of meaning but was itself active, capable of reordering a text into a new set of meanings or laying onto a text an additional set of meanings.

In Art exhibitions it is usual for a short statement to be placed on the wall near the starting point of the exhibition. This statement, often originating from the curator of the exhibition, introduces the artist and the works displayed and attempts to place them within the history of Art.

Some years ago there was an exhibition of the English artist William Hogarth (1697–1764) during which he was spoken of as 'a great satirist and a man of radical political views'. Some years later there was yet another exhibition of the artist, but here he was talked about as being 'a great example of English Art'. His paintings were described as being 'the most intense expression of Englishness'. In both cases, the works were being placed within a wider set of meanings. This wider set of frameworks is called a discourse because it is a way of speaking about the pictures and transforming them into texts. By entering into a discourse, the 'pictures-as-texts' were made to connect with other discourses. In the case of Hogarth, they were inserted into a discourse of radical politics or became components of a discourse about painting and Englishness. Discourses, then, resemble complex stories or narratives, but they differ from 'story stories' in that they are made up not just of words, but can include words, pictures and buildings as well as human actions. It is possible—and likely for a building such as an Art gallery or a museum—to be part of a discourse. One only needs to compare the architectural styles of museums in the late 19th century with those of the present day to see that they embody very different ideas about what it is that the buildings are supposed to be doing. We might say that the works of Art are continually being incorporated into 'the big pictures' which are the discourses, and these discourses operate at every level of the display and presentation of works of Art.

Museum Architecture – Museum as sculpture

The origin of the museum is the private collection, oddities collected as conversation pieces for guests and visiting scholars – the Wunderkammern, or ‘cabinet of curiosities’. In the age of Modernism, the aspiration was to the neutral space. This is now referred to as the white cube, the context-free space where Art works themselves could bespeak their own truths free from the inhibitions of time and space. Now we know this to comprise one of the ‘purifying’ myths of Modernism towards which Postmodernism is justifiably hostile.

Although numbered among the great Modernist architects, Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) is credited with designing the first ‘sculptural’ museum, the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York (1956). 'Building as Sculpture' is a postmodern term that refers to buildings which initially announce themselves as being large, inhabitable sculptures – except that these buildings have their problems. While beautiful to look at and pleasant to walk through, Wright's museum is not always the most sympathetic for the hanging and viewing of works of Art. The spiral nature of the building means that works of Art are seen, as it were, in transit.

Despite the architectural misgivings of Wright's building, it spawned a whole new culture where museum design became the highest aspiration for many ambitious, talented architects. Indeed the two buildings that are considered among the greatest architectural masterpieces of the close of the 20th century are museums, The Jewish History Museum (1999) by Daniel Libeskind (1946 – ) and the Guggenheim Bilbao (1997) by Frank Gehry (1929 – ). Attesting to the concept of 'Building as Sculpture', both buildings are known better for themselves than for what they hold. Gehry's building has turned the once obscure Basque city into a tourist spot. Libeskind's museum, to everyone's astonishment at the time, received paying visitors from 1999–2001 while it was still empty. It is now filled with museological objects,
Exhibitions
Under contemporary viewing conditions, we rarely encounter Art works as isolated and autonomous entities. Regular visitors to commercial galleries or publicly-funded museums mostly see works as part of a wider grouping, the exhibition. This may appear to be a natural way of looking at Art objects, but it is in fact a highly conventionalised practice. As always, History shows that things have not always been like this. For instance, in the 19th century salon exhibitions, huge numbers of works were displayed simultaneously and the walls of the exhibiting galleries would be covered from floor to ceiling. It was only towards the end of the century, with the onset of the idea of an Art work as an independent aesthetic entity, that works were hung in relative isolation from one another. Unlike 19th century Art exhibitions, the Modern and Contemporary Art show is rarely an arbitrary grouping together of works. The hanging of works is usually premised on their being a set of internal connections between them. An examination of such presumed connections will reveal the ideas and assumptions that have determined how and why that particular set of works has been hung together.

If there are decisions being made about what is to be included in an exhibition, there are also decisions being made about what order the works should be placed in. One of the most elementary features of an exhibition is the fact that we experience a single work in relation to all the others in the show. Exhibitions are really a ‘package’ of Art objects involving a set of decisions made by the curator as to what is the optimum conjunction of the works to best illustrate the interpretation being mounted. Of course, it is always open to the visitor to violate this curatorial ordering and thread one’s own particular pathway through the exhibition space. If this strategy is adopted, then it is possible to discern a different set of relations between the works than those preferred by the organisers, although this form of alternative viewing is often severely limited by the floor plans of the show.

The element of discourse intersects with an exhibition because the various ways of imparting unified meanings to a body of works are drawn from discourse. Discourse, then, resembles a fund of such narratives around which Art objects can be organised. Put simply, discourses are the organisational principles that are employed to impart meanings to works. We can observe the operations of such discourses by examining the most common forms taken by Art exhibitions.

Thematic exhibitions
Such exhibitions may attempt to show how a particular theme or object has been depicted over a given historical period. For instance, ‘Paris 1400–2000’ or ‘The Apple in Art’. In such instances, the unity of the exhibition may derive from something external to the history of Art itself, so that concerns about the ‘quality’ of the works may be marginalised in favour of appropriate content.

Group shows
These are related to theme shows in that they can involve a variety of artists, sometimes from different eras. In another incarnation, group exhibitions are also used to give young artists their first chance to show their work and, with luck, make a sale. They may be used by the curator/organiser as an opportunity to argue that there is some unity within the works – the claim may be that the works were selected because it was felt that there was a set of common stylistic concerns. Such claims may then prompt the visitor to confirm or disagree with...
the arguments being made, thus establishing a 'frame' for their inspection.

Group shows are the most common form of Art exhibition. Their heterogeneity means that there is more to please more people. If it is the initiative of several artists, it also means that the costs can be shared.

Historical exhibitions

These works from the past will be brought together to perform an Art historical function. There may be an attempt to argue that a particular set of influences were impinging upon the artists of a particular place and time – 'Paris–Sydney: 1900–1925' – or that past interpretations about certain works were wrong – 'Sydney Nolan: a case for Reconsideration'. In such exhibitions, there is usually an overt recognition on the part of the curator that they are engaged in historical revision or disputation. We want to use the example of an exhibition mounted in the Tate Gallery in London to show that the historical exhibition is always more than just displaying the works of a dead artist and can lead to bitter public argument.

In 2002 an exhibition of the work of the 18th century English artist Thomas Gainsborough (1727–1788) was held at the Tate Gallery, Britain. Gainsborough is a much loved and highly respected artist and so an exhibition of his work is inevitably going to collide and engage with a dense mass of popular feeling, historical research and aesthetic judgement. (For instance, one of Gainsborough's most well known works, Mr and Mrs Andrews (1748–9), gained notoriety when it featured in John Berger's best selling Art primer, Ways of Seeing, see pp. 106–8.) The works chosen for the exhibition by Professor Michael Rosenthal, one of the chief curators of the show, aimed to show the full range of Gainsborough's oeuvre. Indeed the exhibition was laid out in such a way that the visitor was able to make connections between the major works that the artist himself intended for exhibition and his other, less public pictures – such as landscapes and genre scenes of the rural poor (see illustration 27, p. 174). One of the most sensitive issues raised by the exhibition was the relationship between Gainsborough's landscape works and the profound changes happening in the English countryside at the time with the arrival of agrarian capitalism. The political framework within which certain pictures were presented in the exhibition sparked controversy in the English national newspapers with the curators accused of being Marxists bent on politicising the work of a national treasure.

Solo exhibitions

Solo exhibitions can range from non-commercial installations, which might be a highly intricate single work, or a body of work put up for sale. Even if it is for sale, for the work to be taken seriously it is expected that there is continuity amongst the works. In Contemporary Art it is not unusual for the artist to give the solo show a title, thereby setting the tone.

Experimental and ephemeral exhibitions

In the case of more experimental exhibitions, artists more often create installed environments. The sites for such exhibitions are often state or foundation subsidised 'artspaces' whose purpose it is to purvey work that is not necessarily restricted to the commodity market, including ephemeral
work, from Performance Art to large-scale Installation Art to Art that makes use of digital interfaces. The way an artist, curator or group of artists gets into such spaces is like applying for a grant. It is now expected that in the exhibition proposal the artist, to a greater or lesser extent, 'responds to the space' — that is, he or she gives diagrams and descriptions of how the work will be physically configured. To help fulfil this expectation, such artspaces now routinely place copies of their floor plans on their website (see illustration 28a and 28b on pp. 176–77).

Retrospectives

These exhibitions are normally staged as a way of acknowledging that the artist has reached their maturity and that the time has arrived to review their oeuvre, or work, as a whole. By gathering a large body of the artist's work representative of key turning points and achievements, it is hoped that a fuller picture of the artist's contribution will emerge. The discursive unity operating here is usually the lives of the artists themselves; that is, the work is viewed in light of the life. Or there may be an attempt to detect the existence of an overarching developmental sequence or thematic consistency. The assumption in both instances is that such unities in the life or the work are locatable, and it would be hard to imagine how such exhibitions might be organised if instead of biographical unity only fragmentation and disunity were to be found.

International exhibitions

With the increasing internationalisation of the Art market has followed an increasing internationalisation of Art images, Art personnel and Art debates. Originally part of the World Trade Exhibitions that emerged towards the end of the 19th century, international Art shows are now firmly fixed as part of the Art calendar. By far the most conspicuous form of the group show to have emerged since the 1980s is the Biennale. Before Biennales began cropping up all over the place, the two major biannual festivals for Contemporary Art were the Biennale in Venice and the Dokumenta in Kassel, Germany. Now there are biennial Art events from São Paulo to Sydney to Liverpool to Havana. Their purpose is to bring a broad range of what are deemed the foremost Art practitioners of the day and to create a survey of major artistic trends and preoccupations of the present time. Usually the quality of these...
shows rests on the skill of the curator(s) and a budget that will attract well-known artists to do ambitious works that can only be achieved with considerable ancillary support.

Virtual exhibitions
These have yet to come into their own, but exhibitions over the web now draw sizeable audiences. Beginning with exhibitions consisting of scanned photographs of an actual show, the virtual exhibition has now progressed, via digital animation, into a form where one is able to navigate one's way through a virtual space as well as interact with the works on show. Sometimes there is an 'actual' or grounded component to the exhibition and sometimes it will only exist virtually. Currently, the most lasting examples of the virtual exhibitions are those formulated through the many incarnations of the fluid Art movement, Fluxus. Born in the 1960s and still active with succeeding generations of artists, the ethos of Fluxus is radical experimentation, open-endedness, and distrust of fixed objects that could be sucked up by the commodity market. The internet is a fertile tool for the Fluxus zeal for artistic change and flow of ideas; messages and simple Art works can be delivered via sites or email lists to anyone, anywhere on the planet.

All exhibitions, either consciously or unconsciously, by drawing on the unities and narratives contained within discourses, mediate the works to their viewers. All exhibitions, of necessity, submit the works to secondary codings.

The catalogue
In its modern form the catalogue is perhaps the place where the viewer most commonly encounters the mediating operations of discourse. It can range from a single sheet listing the titles and prices of the works on show through to the large, book-like volumes that accompany prestigious historical shows or retrospectives. We want to concentrate on the more substantial type of publication because it is there that one can most clearly see the many types of mediation performed by the catalogue.

In 1999 the National Gallery of Australia mounted an exhibition entitled, 'The Antipodeans: challenge and response in Australian art 1955–1965'. To accompany the exhibition the gallery published a forty-eight-page catalogue consisting of the following sections:
A short introduction by the head of Australian Art at the National Gallery at that time

An essay by Steve Tonkin, a research assistant for the exhibition, entitled 'In Defence of the Image'

An essay by Deborah Clark, the curator of the exhibition, entitled 'Tachistes, Action Painters, Geometric Abstractionists, Abstract Expressionists, and their Innumerable Band of Camp Followers'

A reprint of 'The Antipodean Manifesto' written by the Art historian, Bernard Smith, in 1959

A bibliography

A list of the works in the exhibition

Of the various sections that made up the catalogue only the last one conforms to the dictionary definition of a catalogue, namely 'a complete list'. It is clear from the presence of the other sections that the catalogue is doing much more than providing the viewer with a simple inventory of the works on display.

The exhibition consisted of sixty-six Art works and it would have been perfectly possible (and legitimate) for a visitor to the show to have looked at the works without any reference to the contents of the catalogue. One might suppose that the curator had simply chosen a fairly arbitrary selection of works to illustrate the state of Australian Art between the years 1955 and 1965, but this is not what was happening in this instance.

In 1959 a number of mainly Melbourne-based artists exhibited their works along with a manifesto written by the Art historian, Bernard Smith. (The Antipodean Manifesto is reprinted in the catalogue). The Antipodeans exhibition, as it was called, has become, in the words of Steve Tonkin, an 'event that has attained almost legendary status within the story of Australian art'. The manifesto interpreted (mediated) the works on show as being representatives of a modern figurative Art that was opposed to the inferior productions of abstract Art that were, overwhelmingly, based in Sydney. As the curator Deborah Clark observes in her essay:

The Antipodean affair has resonated so loudly down the years since the Antipodeans exhibition of 1959 and its accompanying Manifesto that the oppositions it invoked are embedded in our understanding of the art of the 1950s and 60s.

The claim being made here is that the Antipodean affair set the terms through which Australian Art of the period has subsequently been interpreted. What was created by the 1959 exhibition was a story that organised the Art works of the period into a meaningful pattern. But not only this: the story, or narrative, persists to the present. But is it an accurate story? If it isn't, then how must it be changed?

The exhibition can now be seen as a complex entity in which Art works and Art History, new evidence and debate (the catalogue) are brought together in order to both test the validity of the earlier interpretations, as well as suggesting new ones. In the case of the 1999 exhibition the aim was to place the art of the Antipodean group within its proper context, alongside the broad sweep of non-figurative Australian art, leading up to and beyond the Antipodean challenge.

By placing a selection of the figurative and non-figurative works of the period alongside of one another the viewer is better able to judge whether the separations established by the Antipodean Manifesto, such as 'figuration/abstraction, Melbourne/Sydney, local/international, and conservative/progressive', are valid. In other words, the catalogue is an avidly interpretive exercise and is, in the words of the curator of the exhibition, 'the latest chapter in a continuing conversation about art'.

The curator

The role of the curator is pivotal in the modern Art Museum. Either as a full-time employee of the museum, or as a freelance operator, it is the curator who mediates between the Art Works and the viewing public. Curators will specialise in the Art of particular historical epochs, or in the Art of a specific place. If they are attached to a large Art museum then they will tend to organise exhibitions that draw upon the collection owned by the Museum, or at least organise exhibitions where the home collection can form a prominent part.

It is the task of the curator to construct a legible, coherent set of images by deciding what works will be in an exhibition and how and where they will be hung and arranged. In all probability they will also be responsible for the catalogue that accompanies the show as well as the more general interpretative material that is such a key part of the modern Art exhibition. As we have already seen, the decisions made by the curator can be crucial to how the
The increasing dependence of Art works on the institution of the Art museum is indicative of a complex shift in the social placement of Art that has been gathering momentum since World War II. For instance, there has been a steady rise in educational standards and with it a raising of the intellectual expectations both artists and the public have in relation to Art. The ‘blow out’ in the investment market for Art has meant an increasing demand for knowledge of the works that such economic interest generates. Finally, the increasing professionalism of careers in Art has led to much greater involvement of artists – as teachers, writers, critics and administrators – in those public Art discourses. In a way, what has happened is that Art has returned to a modern variation of an older form. The long, romantic interlude is coming to a close along with the myths about artists and Art making that accompanied it – it is, in fact, once more becoming a highly integrated cultural activity, an object of interest and anxiety and, therefore, something appearing to need professional administration.

We have suggested that mediation or secondary encoding was not only something generated by the immediate environment of a work (the title, the frame and the medium) or by the museum, but could also be located across numerous other institutions within the Art world. It is to these ancillary institutions that we now want to turn and consider some of the ways in which the aesthetic circuit can come full circle by looking at the relation between Box I and Box III.

The changes in the organisation of Art already mentioned have led to a great increase in the traffic between viewer and artist, and vice versa. It has always existed in a variety of forms – patronage, money, shared assumptions about Art, and the common regimes of taste. However, since World War II, many more artists are participating in the processes of mediation. They are invited to be the curators of exhibitions; they participate in the activity of writing and criticism; they get seconded onto the boards of museums; they are Arts administrators; they are teachers. Artists now participate in (and bring to the processes of production) a plethora of secondary encodings that are integral to the contemporary Art world. An example from a 1980s catalogue illustrates this:

This exhibition evolved from an observation by a United Kingdom artist Chris Iunwell, and his colleague Michael Wootton, that:
Art has en a trual out owly eas of 'Art dern close it is, et of onal only, the cross nst the box I great ways Art, no t the nism, tors; es of terr- artist

a new and potent spirit of Critical Realism was currently emerging in the work of diverse artists across Britain and their suggestion that the time was ripe for a collective showing of this work. (Our emphasis)

Here we can see the producers of Art actively engaging in the work of secondary encoding, almost as sub-curators, as they suggest both the theme and the title of the exhibition. This then provides the works with a mediatory unity within which the various works are exhibited. In this instance the traffic was from Box I to Box III, but the reverse can also occur. The Art critic is pivotal here, not simply as a post-hoc interpreter of the work, but as a figure who can, both literally and metaphorically, stand at the artist’s elbow and make ‘helpful interpretations’. It is important to bear such exchanges in mind because it would be wrong to understand mediation in terms of the numerous conspiracy theories that circulate in the Art world. Oppositions such as critics versus artists, words versus pictures, and teachers versus doers, may be satisfying in the short term, but will not stand up for long when the complexity of the actual situation is examined.

Debating Art
Beyond the walls of the museums and Art galleries, we begin to encounter the domains of academic Art History and the more general debates about Art that are conducted within the institutions, journals and magazines that constitute the Art world. Such debates – or disputes about and over meaning – rest upon the work that is being produced by those doing advanced research in the study of the Visual Arts. When exhibitions are mounted, they are often reviewed and talked about in the columns of newspapers or the pages of Art journals, and it is here that other viewpoints, criticisms or praise will surface.

Art journals of the 20th, and now the 21st, century have been particularly powerful mediatory agents for debating Art. Often they will have been established upon a founding manifesto, where the overall project of the magazine or journal will be spelled out by the editor(s). Journals and magazines often set themselves a task to perform, usually in the form of arguing for and giving voice to a set of curatorial positions. To further this end, it may incorporate writers who are in broad agreement with such aims as well as promoting the work of artists who are thought best to embody the aims and values upon which the project of the magazine rests. Here is an excerpt from the editorial of the first edition of the Australian magazine, Art and Text:

Art and Text cannot expect, nor does it aspire, to publish work that shares all the above concerns. The Australian critical field is simply not large enough. Neither is this the purpose for which the magazine was initiated. As the content of this first issue demonstrates, a wide variety of critical approaches are worthy of inclusion. Essays by and about Australia and, sometimes, overseas artists, theoretical and cultural analyses, inquiries into the relationships between several arts and an avoidance of extensive interviewing, reviewing and lavish illustrations all aim to establish Art and Text as a forum for critical and artistic re-examination and experimentation. By means of such a forum, Australian artists and critics may gain a progressive understanding of their role and practical potential.

We have reached the final stage of mediation, and the book you are reading at the moment enters the picture. As the introduction made clear, the content, the ideas and many of the values that have been dealt with so far derive from both our experiences as teachers in Art schools and universities. Teaching is itself a process of mediation. However desirable the utopia of absolute objectivity might appear it is, and always will be, a false hope in a subject such as Art History. Teachers, like everyone else, espouse values that exist within discourses. If teachers operate in the field of the Arts, it is also likely that they participate in every one of the mediatory processes we have been examining. In addition to being teachers they may be Art administrators, museum and gallery advisers, writers of catalogues, authors of articles in Art journals and magazines, and writers in their specialised areas of study. The single most important ethical injunction they operate under is not to mediate, but rather to know, as far as it is possible, from what position they are undertaking their teaching and be able to spell it out in a clear and lucid manner for their students.

The major points that can be drawn from the above analysis are:

- Mediation, or secondary coding of some kind, is always present. It should not be thought of as a conspiracy against the ‘true’ meaning of the work, or as a war in which words are plotting to overthrow images. Mediation is an integral part of the circulation of Art works
Mediation is an activity that is inseparable from the life of Art objects as texts. Meaning gets layered on meaning, interpretation upon interpretation. Mediation is often combative and may overtly set out to contest an Art object's existing meanings and aim to install itself as the new meaning.

The original act of coding by the producer may become lost through time, leaving us with nothing but the history of a work's mediations.

Mediation is always a 'motivated' process, although the particular motivation need not be present at a conscious level. The reason for this is that the agencies of mediation are part of and exist in a social and cultural world. They must, of necessity, be carriers of particular values, or bring values to bear upon the works they are mediating. For instance, a shift in cultural values may usher in new regimes of taste. Victorian Art was re-assessed as being worthy of attention and carrying aesthetic merit by certain cultural tendencies operating in the latter part of the 1960s.

Political values may be mobilised to justify the inclusion/exclusion of a particular work in the canon of Art espoused by official institutions. An example of this would be the ideology of Socialist Realism in the former USSR, and its subsequent reformulation under 'glasnost'.

Economic values may be affected by Art works undergoing reformulation. Their value as commodities may then rise or fall.

Notes and references

2 Ibid., p. 19