

## REFLECTIONS ON PUBLIC WATER

*Student was arrested for filming building<sup>1</sup>*

(she was apprehended harassed roughed-up then arrested)

I was also once requested to stop shooting video by security guards at Canary Wharf

so we cannot photograph this this *alluring environment with an enchanting nautical past attractive and exciting place to live offering a new type of 'urban lifestyle'<sup>2</sup>*

we cannot photograph people  
we cannot photograph place

how can we capture this place?

this loose space  
this pseudo public private capitalist space  
quotidian space  
space of global finance  
real estate  
and the Terrorism Act 2006

water has a refractive index<sup>3</sup>

it creates an image by reflection  
it is a medium

is it forbidden

to film the water?

the gently lapping water once contained by this place that was once a dock  
reflects the architecture

the buildings that it is forbidden to film

urban water

public water

bodies of water as fluid public space  
never twice stepped in  
contained and flows with elusive materiality

a powerful solvent

with a strong surface tension

can it be commodified beyond containment?

by the waterside the reflection becomes part of the image  
a complementary antipode  
a diametrically opposite imaginary place

reflections on water

when photographed

what is the image?

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<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian*, 19 March 2012

<sup>2</sup> *How European cities achieve renaissance*, National Audit Office, UK, 2007

<sup>3</sup> The refractive index describes how light, or any other radiation, propagates through that medium. An index of refraction is a complex number with both a real and imaginary part, where the latter indicates the strength of absorption loss at a particular wavelength. In the visible part of electromagnetic spectrum the imaginary part of the refractive index is very small. The refractive index of water at 20°C is 1.332986.

*A gull could fly for eleven miles up river on the back of a sea wind and never leave Dockland. And a Londoner could live wrapped in the same old land breeze for eleven years and never know about the existence of this strange country on his back doorstep. It is a strange country where the houses are all unlive in but well stored, where there are more waterways than streets, where trains move slowly down the middle of the main road... There is no green, unless it be the dirty green of the water.*<sup>4</sup>

*At sea when it began: three months of water, and then down the west coast of Australia, nowhere else to go. Three months of water and now a land-locked mast, a western setting sun - by the wharf, down at the docks, the pipes, the pipes are calling another aching load...*<sup>5</sup>

more than 61 thousand overseas passengers arrived  
at the Port of Melbourne at the Station Pier between 1949 and 1966

*we left Tilbury Docks one winters day bound for Station Pier  
a month of water sailed away bound for Station Pier  
to a new land and a new life bound for Station Pier  
with my two kids and my dear wife bound for Station Pier*<sup>6</sup>

an Australian flag reflected in water once a dock

(around the boardwalk calm water protected from the wind below  
in Victoria Harbour a medium to light breeze makes the water more choppy  
I buy a chocolate chip and vanilla ice cream single cone  
two scoops  
continuing northeast along the promenade  
medium ripple waters  
reflecting the Docklands buildings)

In the space of global capital  
the contemporary antipode  
is not diametric  
or opposed

it is a continuity of flows  
a wholly produced space  
*a market-driven development*  
*[a] partnership with the private sector*<sup>7</sup>  
with 'urban information architecture'  
and artists' installations

arrivals mirror departures  
night and day  
binaries contained within a whole...

Steven Ball April 2012  
<http://www.publicwater.net>

<sup>4</sup> *Waters of Time*, film, Basil Wright for Port of London Authority, UK, 1951.

<sup>5</sup> *Periscope 180°*, Super 8 film, Steven Ball, Australia, 1992, <http://www.steven-ball.co.uk/archive.html#P180>.

<sup>6</sup> *Bound for Station Pier*, anon, UK/Australia, circa 1960.

<sup>7</sup> 'Vision' *Melbourne Docklands* website, <http://www.docklands.com>, accessed 22/04/2012.