Summary

This paper includes a copy of the interactive photodocumentary CD Rom titled the "Poetics of Thresholds". This CD Rom was developed as one aspect of the presentation of my research project. Within the CD Rom is a readable copy of this paper.

The research paper is the basis of my research project. The project deals with the chair as a significant symbol when placed in the space of the porch or verandah at the front of the home.

The threshold stands at the point of convergence, where the public space of the street, meets with the private space of the home. This hybridised space, between inside and outside, private and public, object and subject, is empowered with meaning. In the threshold space sits the chair which is a metaphor, the embodiment of human elements, such as arms, legs, back and seat. This ergonomically designed symbolic form placed on the threshold, projects the occupant out towards the public space. In the public space the seerer can develop a series of narratives which explore various interpretations.

This paper has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

Paul Thomas
PLEASE NOTE

The greatest amount of care has been taken while scanning this thesis,

and the best possible result has been obtained.
"On the ground are two footprints and a sign ‘you are here’. The person puts his feet on the imprints, and no longer sees where he is; when he is beside he is able to see where he could be, but not where he is. There is after all a ‘terra incognita’, that which is beneath our feet’.

This paper investigates the relationship of the chair to the threshold space of the porch/verandah as a theoretical construct. The paper explores the chair when placed on the porch/verandah as a social portrait, through its historical and social context. The chair’s context is developed through a series of scenarios that show the potentiality of its meaning. This is extended by examining the uses of the chair as a metaphor as well as exploring its continual relevant use as a symbol.

The threshold space of the porch/verandah with chair has become an area of interest through which to develop a contextual framework for my theoretical and conceptual ideas. This area of interest has developed through a process of walking around suburban streets.

Whilst studying in Sydney in 1994, I started to walk around the streets of Leichhardt, the suburb in which I was living. During these walks I began taking photographs of the facades of houses; the steps, doors, verandahs and chairs, a process that re-established me in a new location. This process seemed secondary to the work I was producing at that time, which related to autobiographical research of my work produced after arriving in Australia in 1977. The retrospective work I was producing in Sydney, seemed to be losing certain aspects of authenticity in its material translation. Being blinkered to the present, I had looked back to the past. Up to this time my art work had reflected a conscious and unconscious construct of dislocation. The sense of dislocation appeared in my work as a social critique which I now see as a form of colonialism. This awareness of feelings of my own colonialism lead me to find some interesting correlations between myself and some early Australian
explorers. During George Grey’s exploration of Western Australia in 1837, when confronted with some Wandjina cave paintings, he asked his men to file by the works so they could all have an opportunity to examine them.

Paul Carter states:
"... rapidly Grey passes from explorer to tourist and, in doing so, progressively empties the country of its human owners. Blind to the eyes that briefly surrounded him, he refuses to imagine that the country is more than what can be seen, composed from his point of view.

This was the blindness at the heart of his seeing: he mistook what the fixed eye saw for 'reality' and failed to perceive the remainder of space, ritually inscribed with ochre lines, beaten tracks, camping places".

This 'blindness at the heart of seeing' I felt clearly defined my own propositional stance. This passage related to my own failure to examine my spatial concerns which maintained my identity as a tourist.

The authenticity of my present location came about, not by looking back to my home of 17 years, or, to my origins in England but by examining the threshold space of the porch/verandah in the front of houses, especially those with the chair. Walking from one house to another through the streets of Leichhardt and the adjacent suburb of Newtown, I viewed the poetical nature of these thresholds where the porches/verandahs are a domain for the chair. To me the chair in the threshold space became a poetical reflection of social values. This newly identified source of imagery was closely related to my feelings of dislocation as there was no parallel imagery in my place of origin. Indirectly this space confronted my feelings of dislocation linking it with my prior work. In this way the threshold became a metaphor for dealing with the past.

Carter in discussing the painting of Eugene Von Guerard’s entitled From the Verandah of Purrumbete (1859) suggests that Von Guerard painted two views. One view was from the verandah with the other being a view of that verandah from a focal point in the original painting. In this process of visual occupancy the past and present are owned, by their understanding of spatial illusion, by looking out from and back to the verandah.

"As a result the true subject of From the Verandah is not landscape,
whether domestic or pastoral, but a visual coincidence, a time and place where a spatial historical event - the active process of visualising a place - coincided with a place that already had a view of its own.

There was no necessary identity between Von Guerard’s view and the view from the verandah. It was just that here, fortuitously, a picturesque view cunningly mimicked his own spatial history. It was in this sense appropriate that the author of its picturesqueness, the artist who saw and painted it, should not be visible from the verandah, but should be represented, if at all, by a horizon.

This passage reflects my own spatial history which by viewing the threshold space as a metaphor, allows me to not only look at my present but also to look back at my past. The threshold is a place of transition which enables me to feel located in the present without denying the past.

This relationship between Lincolnshire, my county of origin, and my confusion of spatial awareness in migration is made clearer when I read Carter’s examination of the writings of explorer, Matthew Flinders. Flinders, on naming sites in Spencer’s Gulf, South Australia, created a spatial and topographical resemblance to Lincolnshire by naming all the sites accordingly. ‘But the essential point about Flinder’s Lincolnshire names in Spencer Gulf is that they preserve the spatial and topographical relationship of the Lincolnshire villages’. Flinder’s naming of sites was not saying something about his own autobiography but about life as an explorer, which in turn suggests some connection with my own position. As a migrant, caught in a destabilising confusion of redefining a spatial awareness, I allowed myself to settle with a sense of security that was based on not redefining my location. This settling process was based on superimposing where I had come from to where I was now. Perth was like, and therefore was Lincolnshire. Carter also stated something I felt, concerning being in a destabilising confusion as ‘displaced, disturbed by the emptiness of resemblance’.

The need to relocate was negated by spatial resemblance based on my narrow point of view.

"The Berkeleian solipsism of imagining a country springing into existence as one sets foot in it.- Any orientation to the new environment depends initially on finding resemblances between it and the home left behind — its novelty resides not in its absolute
strangeness but in its strange familiarity.

The process of relocation and its relationship with the threshold space therefore became a focal point for my work, as my awareness of its spatial significance became apparent. My past work focused on a spatial denial of Australia, maintaining my position as a permanent tourist. With the development of the notion of threshold space, and the place of the chair inside this threshold my work re-evaluates my resident and cultural status.

The paper explores the poetics of the chair inside the threshold space in a theoretical, historical context. The intention is to establish the threshold as a culturally significant space with the humanising element of the chair as a key component in this space.

In Chapter One the research paper investigates the spatial context of the threshold by discussing Henri Lefebvre's and Gaston Bachelard's concepts of abstract fetishised space and felicitous space. These disparate positions are used in this chapter to examine the threshold space. At first glance the threshold spaces make clear statements of what they are, their 'denotations'. But as their 'connotations' are formed for the seer, the individual uniqueness of these spaces are revealed.

Chapter Two looks at the historical background of the chair to establish its context as a significant social symbol. The chair is investigated as a piece of furniture that occupies an important role in our society. The positioning of the chair on the porch/verandah creates a link between these two important symbols. This importance will be explored in relationship to an Australian connection as the chair’s individual and cultural implications are explored.

In Chapter Three the theoretical context of the threshold space and the chair as a significant symbol are joined. The chair acts as a metaphor for the occupier in the threshold which humanises the space. Though the humanisation of the threshold space the paper develops alternative readings of the chair as a metaphor when placed in the threshold space. The various interpretations of these chairs are explored to suggest their social significance.

Chapter Four develops the concept of the chair as a social portrait. In this context the chair is seen as projecting some of the occupant’s conscious and unconscious ideology onto the public space of the street. The threshold space allows the seer by a direct cognition to define and re-define these ideologies.

Chapter Five links the theoretical, historical and social context of the threshold space together to reveal that the porch/verandah displays a rich and dense social commentary.
"Thus the history of perspective may be understood with equal justice as a triumph of the distancing and objectifying sense of the real, and as a triumph of the distance-denying human struggle for control; it is as much a consolidation and systematisation of the external world as an extension of the domain of the self".

This chapter investigates the threshold with chair as the basis for an examination of the disparate relationships held within this space. On the one hand the threshold displays a contextual relationship that the occupants have with their space. On the other hand the external seer is given the chance to explore the threshold with their gaze.

The thresholds' spatiality, from the home to the street will initially be explored. This will be achieved by examining the relationship between Lefebvre's fetishised abstract space and Bachelard's felicitous space.

The chair as a significant symbol will also be explored, to explain its power as a signifier in the threshold space. Examining this most theatrical space, with the chair as a contextualising symbol will allow the chair to be seen not only as a sign but to conceive of the threshold space as a signifier.

FETISHISED AND FELICITOUS SPACE

The threshold is positioned where the domestic character of the inside of the home is confronted by the social. The space of the threshold being visible to the public loses a sense of security for the occupant and is transformed into a kind of 'absolute'. The occupants in face of this absolute turn themselves and their lived experience into abstractions within it.

Lefebvre states 'Fetishised abstract space thus gives rise to two practical abstractions; users who cannot recognise themselves within it and a thought which cannot conceive of adopting a critical stance towards it'. The space of the threshold might be seen in relation to the passage of Lefebvre's where the chair exists as an unrecognisable allegory and as a reflection of the uncritical human mind. When the chair is placed in the threshold space it no longer acts just as a chair but more as a significant symbol for recognition. It becomes an icon
of an ongoing conscious and unconscious need for the human to define his or her individual space. The fetishised chair with its signifying potential needs to be conceived of in its own spatial existence as well as in the abstract fetishised space of the threshold.

In the ongoing Lefebvreian theoretical interrogation of the context of abstract fetishised space, the chair as a significier continually acts out the role of the seer and the seen as one entity. The chair’s role is made more apparent when the threshold is missing the chair. The empty space floats like a void in a no-mans land, creating an area of psychological fears to be avoided. The abstract fetishised space is thrown into the dichotomy between the unrecognisable and an inability to conceive the recognisable. The chair supports the abstract fetishisation of space by reinforcing the space as being identifiable. This recognition denies the occupant the ability to conceive of the threshold’s own spatiality. A Lefebvreian threshold space would be one which was not defined by social morphology or a lived experience. The threshold would be viewed as part of a larger set of interconnected social spaces; i.e. the social space of the street, the suburb, the city. The complexity of this concept is what leads to a fetishised abstraction of space and therefore the threshold space.

Lefebvre defines what he sees as the theoretical error in dealing with the perception of space which engages the seer’s role simply as a mediatory process.

"The theoretical error is to be content to see a space without conceiving of it, without concentrating discrete perceptions by means of a mental act, without assembling details into a whole ‘reality’, without apprehending contents in terms of their interrelationships with the containing forms. The rectification of this error would very likely lead to the dissolution of not a few
major ideological illusions. This has been the thrust of the preceding remarks, in which I have sought to show that a space that is apparently ‘neutral’, ‘objective’ fixed, transparent innocent or indifferent implies more than the convenient establishment of an inoperative system of knowledge, more than an error that can be avoided by evoking the ‘environment’, ecology, nature and anti-nature, culture, and so forth. Rather it is a whole set of errors, a complex of illusions, which can even cause us to forget completely that there is a total subject which acts continually to maintain and reproduce its own conditions of existence, namely the state (along with its foundation in specific social classes and fractions of classes). We also forget that there is a total object, namely absolute political space - that strategic space which seeks to impose itself as reality despite the fact that it is an abstraction, albeit one endowed with enormous powers because it is the locus and medium of Power”.

This passage defines Lefebvre’s position in conceiving of space as a state which reproduces its own conditions. This position contrasts with Bachelard whom Lefebvre saw as linking representational spaces that were already contained and defined, suggesting that the spaces he travelled through were like dreams. These dreams which could not be represented by a scientific understanding of space defined more an intimate and absolute space.

Gaston Bachelard describes dream-like space so:

"They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogised space. Attached to its protective value, which can be a positive one, are also imagined values, which soon become dominant. Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within the limits that protect”.

For Bachelard the power of the space was when the space was an imaginary one which puts the emphasis directly on its interpreters.
Bachelard, unable to act on the scientific prudence of examining space, sought a phenomenological understanding by utilising subjective interpretation. The felicitous space of Bachelard and the fetishised abstract space of Lefebvre are in part one and the same. Each construct needs to exist in their own states for some ongoing dialectic to take place. These spaces are not to be defined by the lived experience but by living. The lived experience is one that is recorded and then the experience is built on. This being opposed to living which is the awareness of the present.

PERSPECTIVAL SPACE

Lefebvre's and Bachelard's discursive positions can be explored by looking at the threshold space through its relationship to perspective.

Victor Burgin states:

"Some two thousand years after Euclid, Brunelleschi conceives of this same cone (cone of vision) as intersected by a plane surface the picture plane. By means of this model, something of the pre-modern world view passes into the Copernican universe a universe which is no longer geocentric, but which is nevertheless homocentric and egocentric. A basic principle of Euclidean geometry is that space extends infinitely in three dimensions. The effect of monocular perspective, however, is to maintain the idea that this space does nevertheless have a centre - the observer. By degrees the sovereign gaze is transferred from god to Man".11

Burgin’s view shows how the gaze was transferred from God to man. This position is given to the seer in their relation to the one point perspectival view of the threshold from the street. Hubert Damisch writing on the origins of perspective quotes Lukács as stating that 'Time sheds its qualitative, variable, flowing nature. It freezes into an exactly delineated, quantifiable continuum filled with quantifiable things... in short it becomes space'.12 This concept of time-space fits well into the space of the threshold as an analogy for a stage which appears to be a frozen space, between the temporal based home and street. The relationship between the objects in this Euclidean threshold space are of a quantifiable continuum with the chair as a quantifiable thing.

Space became quantifiable during the pre-Renaissance and Renaissance period by the development of perspective. As Erwin Panofsky points out when dealing with the effects of perspective:
when the material chair is empowered with meanings which then become social and political. The political concerns are suggested not only give the chair power but also the surrounding space, creating an intriguing potentiality of ideas, far more wonderful than the chairs ever were. Once this potentiality is conceived then it shows the ability to define a theoretical context for the spatiality of the chair in a threshold. Seeing the threshold as an abstract fetishised space reflects its significance as a space, which needs to be decoded. Lefebvre states that it is possible, and indeed normal, to decipher or decode spaces, 'Beginning with space-as-matter, paradigmatic contrasts proliferated: abundance versus barrenness, congeniality versus hostility and so on.' The barren threshold space is still space and although it is neither an object, or a subject it is still matter and as Lefebvre has suggested, space as matter, can be investigated. For Lefebvre the absence of investigation can be linked to the possible lack of a critical language, which in itself constitutes enough reason to question: Why the lack of understanding of space? And therefore the lack of understanding of the threshold space.

The significance of Lefebvre and Bachelard in the context of this paper is in the concept of the fetish. This term was first muted in Lefebvre's abstract fetishised space. Tracy Brown states on fetish, 'Freudian fetish then can be imagined as consisting of three parts: the subject whose gaze is redirected, the screen-memory or fetish object, and, importantly, what is behind the screen-memory: the origins of the entire fetishisation project.' Through Brown's use of the fetish, Lefebvre and Bachelard can be seen in an interesting context. With Lefebvre we see that when space becomes unrecognisable we fetishise it. To understand the space we must interrogate the fetishisation of it. With Bachelard we find space defined through the imagination. These two disparate concepts can be united, by initially using Bachelard's form of imagining of space to become a basis from which Lefebvre's interrogation can be conceived. Abstract fetishised space is one which, without Bachelard's imagination, becomes too intimidating to confront. Having confronted the space in Bachelard's context we can then interrogate its theoretical errors. The relationship between Lefebvre and Bachelard is then shown to be further developed by the concept of 'screen-memory' which allows the critical interrogation to happen from behind a perspectival view point of the threshold space. Once we have established through Bachelard a screen-memory what is seen can then be investigated.

The threshold space with chair is an area that encapsulates both Lefebvre's and Bachelard's concepts of space. The perspectival view gives the seer the position of perceiving the threshold as though a theatrical stage or the illusion of a movie screen. Examining the stage from the stalls allows the seer to engage in a God-like form of
perception, making critical judgements of the content and concepts presented.
"If, to the academic chair and the episcopal cathedra, we add the regal throne, the judicial bench, the congressional seat, it is clear that the chair itself occupies the place of pre-eminence in the community of pieces of basic furniture, each of which corresponds to the animal needs they transfigure and ritualise. This is because, so far as I know, none of the others - tables or beds, to take the obvious examples - are said to rule, or judge, or decide, or determine, as the chair, the throne, the bench are said and expected to do".18

This chapter will examine various social aspects of the chair, exploring its relevance as a significant social symbol. A distinction must be made at this point in terms of reference to the use of the word 'chair'. The dictionary definition states the chair as being for a single occupant. In the context of this chapter the term is used in a generic form to imply a seat which varies in size, style and number of occupants.

The threshold stands at the point of convergence where the public space of the street meets with the private space of the home. This hybridised space, between inside and outside, private and public, object and subject, is convoluted and empowered with meaning. In this threshold space sits the chair which is a metaphor for the embodiment of human elements, such as arms, legs, back and seat. This ergonomically designed symbolic form placed by the occupant in the threshold, projects out towards the public space. Positioned with its back to the private space, the chair looks away from the nest towards horizons of memories.

Historically the chair has a number of spiritual and social symbolic forms. The spiritual form of the chair is based on allowing the body to rest,19 so the mind can fully concentrate, without being disturbed by other bodily needs. The sitting position implies a unique state unlike standing with its relation to motion, or lying with its relation to sleep. In this context the chair signifies not only the resting of the body but also the focusing of the mind. The focusing of the mind is reflected in the spiritual context of the chair. Thus the chair as a throne, the bishop’s cathedra, a seat of authority, is one of contemplative judgement: the seat of the soul. Therefore, in the threshold space, the chair is bestowed with the role of reflecting the religious or spiritual attitudes of the occupants of the house. The chair through its religious connection imparts a sense of serenity to the social space of the street. With an all knowing awareness, the
chair can act as an immortal symbol of self-actualisation, anointing
the social space with its presence. The spiritual nature of the chair is
embedded in the way that, when kneeling to pray, we form the
shape of a chair.

The chair in medieval times was immediately associated with
authority and status. The earliest chairs were far from being easily
movable and were made from an oak chest and then given high
backs. This chair from which the occupant could make judgements
requires certain distinctions that separates it from other chairs. The
elaborateness and scale of the chair ensured that the occupant was
imbued with a sense of authority. With this authority the occupant
would be able to make and contemplate judgements. The scale of the
chair had to be high enough for the occupant to have a clear view of
left to right, so as to see all the issues. This position could also show
the seer that the decisions were made impartially from that chair
and not behind closed doors or in a fractional corner.

Arthur Danto suggests that the chair as a contemporary symbol
has a position in the language of authority, as a mark of perquisite
power.

"The chair has been available for human use and hence for
philosophical metaphor for some five millennia, and I am struck
that it is the sitting position that is spontaneously invoked in the
philosophy of mind when one speaks of the seat of the soul, or of
intelligence, or of a wisdom or reason. Descartes spoke of the pineal
gland, a mysterious organ suspended like the seat of Breuer’s
Wassily chair midway between the cerebral hemisphere, as the seat
of the thinking essence of man". 20

In this passage Danto relates the importance of sitting to the
realm of intelligence and wisdom that the chair has come to symbolise.
The modern chair of the chairman/chairwoman, (in which the
occupant is the person chosen to preside over a meeting, a company
or a corporate body) is placed in a position that designates the
importance of the occupant. 'He who sat in the chair was the
'chairman' and the subordinates over whom he presided sat together
on benches before him, constituting the board'. 21 This importance is
not only present when the occupant is seated but also by the
relationship of the chair’s position to the board room table. The
metaphoric and metonymic use of the chair also reflects the chair’s
social role. The metonymic use of the throne as a signifier for royalty
also reflects the use of language in the social role of the chair. The
metaphoric use of the chair in universities, where its relationship
with authority and knowledge are inextricably linked, the chair is
seen not as an irrelevant object but part of our social institutional construct.

The threshold space is not occupied by chairs innocent of meaning nor is it occupied with chairs without style. A household ideation and personality can be reflected by the occupant’s individual choice of a chair. This divergent mix can range from, the wooden chair, designed with its hard base as though sitting was associated with a form of penance, to the more comfortable bourgeois cushioned chairs. The social role of the chair as a signifier also has a relationship with comfort. The chair with the soft cushion of the courtiers might be seen in comparison with harder more base chairs of commoners. These chairs act as a status symbol, as shown by the painting of Vincent Van Gogh, *Van Gogh’s Chair*, (1888), which reflects a form of social hierarchy in its design.\(^2\) Painting oneself as a peasant’s chair to be sat on implies a sense of personal self-abasement. Van Gogh’s process of morphing with a chair was not based on the metamorphosis of recognisable features but by the recognisable brush marks made to recreate the chair.

This concept of representing oneself as a chair creates the problem of how this projects the occupants into the social space. The projection of the occupant is also conveyed by the placement of a chair in the threshold. In these terms Van Gogh’s self-abasement was shown through the status of the peasant’s chair. Alternatively, by constructing a chair that would be fit for a judge, for example, the chair could be seen as a symbol that would pass down the occupants judgements onto the social space of the street. On a recent CD disc cover a contemporary rock band the Cranberries\(^2\) were photographed sitting on a battered sofa. After the huge success of this album, a second album was later released. The second album’s cover re-used the original battered symbolic sofa, to say that money and stardom had not changed them since their original humble beginnings. This demonstrates how the chair has transitional meanings which change contextually.

The chair’s transitional meanings can also be examined in an
Australian context. Placed on the verandah these chairs are not as articulate as the human body but still powerful enough to carry significant meanings. The transference of the chair's social, political and spiritual meanings can be made when seen on the thresholds of Australian homes. The chair can be seen as a symbol of prime importance within the space of the Australian threshold. The Australian porch/verandah creates a transitional area for the occupier to move through before engaging with the land. The occupier on the verandah is symbolised in Russell Drysdale's painting Maria (1950). In this painting the woman stands under the verandah as though waiting. The barren landscape is all around her but she waits refusing to step forth onto the land. The Australian verandah can be seen as the metaphorical transition of an immigrant denoting a migration of meaning to the outside.

The chair placed in the threshold is positioned in part of the architecture of a house that might best reflect the environmental relationship with the climate and light of Australia. The architectural needs in Australia have been well documented by Robin Boyd.

"The universal visual art: the art of shaping the human environment, is an intellectual, ethical, and emotional exercise as well as a means of expression. It involves the strange sort of possessive love with which people have always regarded their shelters. The Australian ugliness begins with fear of reality, denial of the need for the everyday environment to reflect the heart of the human problem, satisfaction with veneer and cosmetic effects. It ends in betrayal of the element of love and a chill near the root of self-respect". 24

When looking at Boyd's passage in relation to what the chair can socially signify the chair can be seen as an expression of the occupant's cultural responses to Australia. This originally English colony is confronted by the chair when positioned on the porch/verandah. The chair's position is characteristically un-British and sets up a dichotomy of references. The threshold space of the porch/verandah seems to inadvertently confront a sense of denial which both Drysdale and Boyd imply. The threshold space not only architecturally links Australia to itself, but also uses the metaphor of the threshold as the symbolic area of transition. The chair's position on the threshold is made more poignant by the threshold's metaphorical relationship to engaging the occupant with the land.

Philip Drew states that:
It is only when we find novel forms that properly express our own experiences and discoveries that we can fully register the totality of meanings in our own lives. Meanings which truly reflect where we live and what life is like in the very deepest sense—meanings which affirm place instead of denying it. The verandah is an invitation and challenge (if somewhat belated) to explore the cultural significance of place, and the spatial catalyst which puts Australians in touch with their country.\(^{25}\)

The threshold space of the porch/verandah embraces the fabric of the social environment unlike the inside of the home with its closed doors. The openness of the threshold allows for a continual surveillance, an ongoing dialogue.\(^{26}\) The same dialogue cannot be entered into by examining the lounge or kitchen which have their own private domestic symbolic significance. The threshold with its exposure to the elements, forms a self-evident state of identification.

To conclude, there are a number of readings of the chair as a symbol with historical significance. The chair has been given various roles to play in social ceremonies. The chair with its wide range of metaphorical meanings is linked to history from its function as a throne to its function as an electric chair. The chair on the threshold also works as a metaphor for the occupant which form the basis for alternative readings of the chair's meaning.
"Chrysler Building Chair, AT&T Building Chair, One Family House Chair, Side Chair, Door Chair, Acorn Chair, Easy Chair, De Witt Chair. Womb Chair, The Blind Man’s House Chair, Lorry Chair. Rib Chair, Different Management Chair, Rose Chair, Chair with a Past, Manet Chair, Courthouse Chair, Kitchen Chair, Ceremonial Chair, Fan Chair, Looking Chair".27

This chapter will explore a number of scenarios for viewing the chair as a metaphor by examining different types of threshold spaces. The critical reading of the chair on the threshold is elucidated through historical and cultural references. These scenarios suggest that the angle and position of the chair within the threshold space can designate the occupant’s point of address to the world. From the porch/verandah certain chairs can look straight ahead to the bridging device of the path and surrounding delineating fence which separates the home from the street. Other chairs placed within the threshold can hide behind various objects but still maintain their position under the roof line of the home.

INTERACTIVE THRESHOLD

A narrative for the chair can be developed through its implied status derived from social history. Relationships are also implied through the interaction with other chairs, couches, lounges, chaise longues. The chairs placed on the threshold in turn display an internal dialectic with the seer.

The chairs develop their own narrative, brought about by their own spatial relationship with each other in the threshold. Two disparate chairs of different origins, creeds and cultures could sit together in various displays of marital union. In certain dialectics the style of the chair will determine its role. One chair through its style can appropriate a patriarchal role as opposed to its matriarchal partner. Other partnerships are equal in status, the chairs being of identical styles, where only their placement can provide an insight into the signified roles undertaken. Two chairs in a confrontational position can stand out like a beacon in the charged area of an otherwise deserted threshold. In this threshold, an Oprah/Donahue style expose of the symbolised occupants is staged,
with the private space of the threshold revealing all to the public space. Sparing no shame, the candid upfront revelations are aired in this very public forum, leaving only subtle re-positioning of the chairs to retell another story whilst the threshold stays the same.

Not wishing to be seen, the concealed chair reveals a timidity. Hidden behind a shrub it engages the seer in the psychoanalysis of the occupant as the positioner and the positioned. The chair's position implies an introversion that the seer can identify, which transforms the seer's role into one of a psychoanalyst. The psychoanalysis can continue over a period of time where the subtle changes in positioning of the chairs indicates the ongoing therapy.

A row of four red vinyl covered chairs placed in the threshold, act out through associations and memory, an externalised waiting room of a doctor's surgery.

Other groupings of chairs on the threshold, rearranged spatially, mimic the social gathering of a tea party. All chairs are open, willing to engage in social intercourse and lack any form of confrontation.

A conglomeration of various types of disparate chairs which herald from a variety of cultural backgrounds, come together upon the threshold. These vagrant chairs, each with their own history, all congregate within the threshold at one point in time. They meet in a multi-cultural congregation of acceptance, as well as reflecting a tolerance to the public space. The acceptance of difference is displayed to the street, as the seer witnesses the scene with caution, questioning the ease with which these disparate chairs can all coexist.

TECHNOLOGY THRESHOLD

A single chair on the threshold is seen sidled up to a gas and electricity meter. The chair constantly keeps a vigilance over the flows of energy or any other forces entering into the house. By conceiving the house as an energy field, the chair understands the relationship between the various forms of power that it patiently watches.

Andy Warhol's Electric Chair of 1965 stands as an icon, an image obsessed with these flows of energy to the seat. The electric chair designed in 1888 was one of the first electric products, pre-dating the electric iron and the electric stove. The use of the chair in this context instead of a bed or a standing device is endemic of the view placed on the chair. The electric chair with its terminal relationship to power enables us to envisage chairs in their acrimonistic guise.

As the chair senses these flows of energy through their pipelines and airwaves, it is linked to all other chairs on an information super
highway of potentiality. This information which is transported down the super highway becomes part of the chair's understanding. The chair in physics is linked to the energy of data by its very nature. Energy is what holds the material substance of the chair together and it is the same energy as that of data. The chair positioned at the threshold of the home is therefore also metaphorically sitting at the threshold of new technology. The chair conceives of its new relationship to the public space, seeing the potential for industrial spaces to become more redundant and the private space of the home to become more pertinent. The chair at the threshold of the home is to have a renaissance. It has waited patiently knowing that as all things flow to the family home, so too would Internet, the super highway of optic fibre cable, microwave and satellite. The work place, the industrialised public space, will become more redundant, home would become the new factory. At the gateway, ready to receive this on the threshold, stands the connected chair, the chair's signal is transmitted and received to and from the world.

**DESIGNED THRESHOLD**

Chairs when positioned on the threshold facing towards a potted plant appear to be acting out a meditative state of contemplation. The contemplative position situates the chair as connecting with an ornamental Japanese gardens. The porch/verandah often contains a variety of bizarre, sculptured, dried and twisted plants placed in pots like arthritic stunted growths. These growths appear as though the occupant by neglect or desire has been manipulating nature in the bonsai tradition. These chairs are strategically placed to reveal a private spatial contemplative attitude which can be witnessed by the public space.

Threshold spaces display both symmetrical and asymmetrical design principles. Two potted plants placed at either end of the porch/verandah are punctuated by a chair, which in turn is placed directly below the window. This is opposed by the chaos of the asymmetrical space where chairs are positioned in a non-functional abstract array. The colour co-ordinated threshold becomes an illusion with its matching chair/bench-seat appearing as camouflage. This illusion is crafted throughout the space, forming a designed space, projected to the world. These spaces have been totally contrived, with all the
elements of the threshold co-ordinated. The chair is painted with the
decor colour range of the house concealing its presence like a
cameleon on a rock. Thus the chair is disguised in the threshold.

SEXUAL THRESHOLD

The sexuality of the chair is displayed in its design and placement.

The chaise longue on the threshold might imply a figure in a
pose as exemplified in Eduard Manet’s *Olympus*. This allegorical
reclining figure has a suggestive power which in turn is transferred
to the viewer. The nude in Manet’s painting looks straight at the
seer, which can intensify the seer’s excitement by the recognition of
being seen. The suggested sexuality inherent in a pose can be
intimated in the design of the chair e.g. the French lovers’ chair
implies its function from its form.

In times of war a conquering army might use the vanquished as
chairs, demonstrating a complete domination of them. On the
threshold, a chained chair, captured, debased, reflects its lack of
freedom. The chair being pinned down by its chains or clamps has
the visual sign of containment which implies various inferences
such as bondage and sadomasochism, security and anxiety. Seeing
one of these chairs with its inability to repel by its restrictions,
empowers the seer with a sense of their own freedom to debase the
chair. Whilst the occupant is seated they can experience domination
of the chair. The occupant can also be dominated by their own
feelings of vulnerability through the chair’s inability to move.

In certain instances two disparate chairs placed on top of each other,
interconnected, display a form of mixed social or inter-race
relationships. They engage in simulated pornographic depictions as
in an x-rated film. The notion of interconnected chairs an be seen in
Denis Oppenheim’s *Two Objects* (1989) in which he uses chairs as
expressions of human interaction.

"Two chairs, one pink, puffy and upholstered, the other plain and
stiff and wooden are motorised so that the hard wood chair slips its
seat in and out from under the soft padded chair in a regular
rhythm.... The incongruous contrasting partners in *Two Objects*
reflect human equation more accurately and sympathetically than
the figures in the later series and although the piece lacks their
cynical bite its a more successful work".29

The correlation made by Oppenheim to the gender and social
nature of the chairs is reflected in their materiality, with their engagement in an act of intercourse as a deliberate form of cultural mixing. The pink fluffy chair being penetrated by the more common wooden chair recreates not only a class distinction but a stereotyping of the male and female manifestations in chair forms.

The red light threshold spaces is probably another far-reaching analogy of what can be interpreted when viewing the chairs from the street. The idea of a red light threshold with scantily attired chairs is a bizarre concept. However, the chairs have a strong relationship with foreplay and love making due to their connection with ‘making out’ in such places as the back seat of a car or a park bench. So the memory of sexuality of the chair is implied and subconsciously transferred when the seer passes by these various configurations and designs.

The chair in the threshold space has sexual connotations, which can be further explored through the threshold’s proximity to the house. Whilst still remaining under the roof line of the house the threshold space also maintains a detachment. This allows the occupants a freedom from domesticity and from being sexual inside their own home. This freedom can be transferred to the space of the porch/verandah where being aware of the possibility of almost being seen, creates a tension in a voyeuristic construct.

IMMIGRANT THRESHOLD

The single chair can act as a personal signature of the occupant. The signature as an identifiable monogram is at the root of recognition. A migrant status can be linked if we examine the chair as a means of identifying a cultural heritage. This relationship can be associated with a multi-cultural society, constructing the chair as an ethnic symbol. The ethnic groups present their cultural status to the seer in the threshold space, as the chair signifies a tradition that denotes a cultural authenticity.

The hybridised space of the migrant threshold is formed by the restructuring of colonial architecture. The restructuring takes the form of an egalitarian sense of space with a specific cultural bias, creating a uniquely modelled threshold. This threshold is one that is socially heterogeneous, contrasting with the back of the house which is culturally homogeneous.

The various categories examined in this chapter explore a number of readings of chairs in the threshold space. These readings are implied by the metaphorical nature of the chair, when placed in the threshold as a reflection of cultural values. The values were interpreted by the examination of various thresholds spaces which
when their symbolic and metaphorical meanings are explored make these spaces a rich source for investigation. The interpretations made examine the threshold space and reveal the theatrical nature of the space.
"If one takes architecture as the expression of an individual’s life, one starts at the centre rather than at the face, asking what space is created rather than what plot is filled. Places thoroughly lived in become internalised in a series of adjustments till they represent a person to himself, a process the critic can try to follow in reverse, deducing life from the quarters."³⁰

This chapter will define the relationship of the chair to the public space. The threshold space of the porch/verandah is significant in the context of the house. This space belongs to an architectural sequence of private spaces, yet does not engage with them. The threshold space is where the ownership of one’s spatial interaction with the world is first made visible to the public. The threshold becomes a transition zone and the signifying symbol of the chair as the disembodied occupant, plays a role in this dialectic. In Robert Harbison’s passage the house is taken from the centre as a reflection of life but with the threshold space it is reversed. The process of working from the threshold as the centre allows the chair as the disembodied occupant to act in a diplomatic role, between the private space of the home to the public space of the street.

MAPPED CHAIRS

Occupants engage in some form of social interaction through the placement of the chair. Identifying with the chair the occupant consciously or unconsciously defines certain intentions. These visible intentions significantly outweigh some of the other domestically related internal household decisions. The occupant is revealed through the exposed threshold and not through the home’s internal structure and design. These internal structures are entombed and never seen unless by a momentary glimpse through a half open door. The chair on the threshold looks away, around, to the side, rather than inwards, never peering down the hall to the modelled rooms which reflect a person’s sense of place.

Whilst the chair on the threshold seemingly looks away it is nevertheless a symbol of the occupant. The spatiality of the threshold as a delineated area also has its own metaphoric state, which is charged with a number of possibilities. Lefebvre states ‘Ought we to look upon architectural or urbanistic works as a type of mass medium, albeit an unusual one’.³¹ The placement of the chair in the threshold space acts as a type
of mass medium, a marker, an identifiable object that can be mapped. The ability to map a space becomes discernible only by the identification of objects and being superimposed onto a girded area. The map expands by quantifying and qualifying the position of objects in relationship to one another. This process creates interesting contextual relationships in regard to what is identified and defined on a map as well as what is not. Could we conceive of a street directory map which identified the symbolized chair on the threshold? The chair could become an icon on the map that designates the social relationship the occupant has with the world. The scale of the map could be used to define the spatial relationship of the chair to both the threshold and the house. The map, by reducing its magnification, can embrace the threshold's relation to the street. By making further reduction of the street to the city and so on we can attain a universal connection. In this case the mapping of the threshold can take on a whole new meaning. This meaning would allow the seemingly insignificant symbol of the chair to be given significance in a socially mapped interactive structure.

THEATRICAL CHAIRS

The narrative of the lone chair standing on the threshold, can suggest a single person's house. A chair by the front door stands as a sentry, not to stop people from entry but to say, 'here is a threshold of solitariness'. The chair acknowledges the visitor upon the threshold with a sense of aloofness. The allegorical projection of the occupant through the on-guard chair exemplifies its confrontational value. The chair placed on the threshold acts as both aggressor and 'aggressed'. It watches as you walk by suggesting that at any minute the occupant could come out and confront your over eager gaze.

The single chair placed in a strategic position has a commanding presence in the threshold that is otherwise vacant. The chair's monologue with the street is continual and relentless. It has the power to demand attention, assuming importance by its very position. A position which has been so carefully chosen. The chair projects the occupant as an orator in the public space. The authority of the chair on the threshold in reality is only that of the understudy.

The dual chair threshold which suggests more than
one occupant, allows the chair to engage in mirroring the interpersonal relationships within the house. The chairs can have two completely different personae and engage in acts ranging from intercourse to negation, acting out their roles with degrees of conviction. The threshold stage allows other characters to arrive and take up their positions, some with associations and placement that emulate a farce. The scenario develops further with the arrival of items of furniture to the point of inverting the entire household. The threshold becomes the stage for a possible subconscious puppet theatre, with the chairs as central characters and the occupants the puppeteers. The scripts are written and revised sometimes daily like a soap opera that becomes addictive. The chairs act out their roles, these are the days of our’ lives.

ANARCHIC CHAIRS

The threshold as an area can reflect a playful anarchy, in which the Kitsch or luxurious chairs are appropriated in an avantgardist approach to life.

This approach demonstrates a complete disregard for historical reverence, where the variously styled chairs act as a confusion for terms of reference. As suggested earlier, the position of the threshold chair often seems to be looking towards memories on the horizon. Nowadays the chair positioned on the threshold claims to have a glimpse of the future. Through its style, the chair acts as a symbolic reaction to that glimpse.

The avant garde chair in the threshold acts out a political role where it reigns over its furniture state. The chair suggests its confrontation to authority by its ability to mix metaphors with abandon. So the threshold becomes the platform for the chair to be a political activist. The luxurious-ostentatious chairs are left to ruin and decay. On the threshold the elaborate and decorative chair contrasts with the plain wooden chair through style and use of materials. The styles and materials give an indication of the social status of the occupant. The chair as a cultural statement shouts out at the streets. The threshold becomes the platform for the futurist’s chairs to pronounce their manifestos to the world, inciting rebellion and revolution.

"1.Destory the cult of the past, the obsession with the ancients, pedantry and academic formalism.
2. Totally invalidate all kinds of imitation.
3. Elevate all attempts at originality, however daring, however violent.
4. Bear bravely and proudly the smear of ‘madness’ with which
they try to gag all innovators.
5. Regard art critics as useless and dangerous.
6. Rebel against the tyranny of words: Harmony and good taste and
other loose expressions which can be used to destroy works of
Rembrandt, Goya, Rodin...
7. Sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects
which have been used in the past.
8. Support and glory in out day to day world a world which is going
to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious science.
9. The dead shall be buried in the earth’s deepest bowels! The
threshold of the future will be swept free of mummies! Make room
for youth, for violence, for daring”.32

This section from a Futurist manifesto, correlates with the
previous suggestion, that the chair is empowered with political
meaning and therefore creates a political statement. These chairs
that appear on the threshold in various states of disrepair can be
recognised as expressing a political point of view. These points of
view confront and also support the chair as a symbol of authority
which is exemplified in the throne, the cathedra and the magistrate’s
bench. The chairs when placed on the threshold read as acts of total
rebellion, object manifests for a different rationale. Using these
symbolic seats of power one could be subversive through their
placement and appropriation. This appropriation could also be
done by understanding the chair’s materiality and stripping it of its
class association. These debased chairs are then used as seats on the
threshold allowing the occupant to absorb their historical context.
The occupant seated on the threshold is then imbued with a new
sense of history. This new perspective allows for a confrontation of
historical issues. The history is not one of fictional winners, or of a
religiously biased history but an anarchistic view of history, which
denies the past and negates the future.

EXHIBITED CHAIRS

Chairs as metaphors can be manipulated by the hand of the
occupant. This takes the form of a social conditioning where the seer
accepts what is displayed in these shop window-like thresholds.
Seduced by the subtleties of the display we are driven by some
unknown force to interact with what is seen.

The process of autosuggestion is exhibited by the chair’s
positioning upon the threshold. From this position the exhibitors
can transmit anything from a political message to lifestyle enrichment.
These subliminal messages are projected out to the unsuspecting
seer. If one person in a street has aluminium windows or new roller blinds installed in the threshold for example, then the proliferation of these improvements become obvious throughout the street. Social life styles are reaffirmed through a support program of interdependence.

Merleau-Ponty suggests in the following passage what the role of the seer is:

"Since the seer is caught up in what he sees, it is still himself he sees: there is a fundamental narcissism of all vision. And thus, for the same reason, the vision he exercises, he also undergoes from the things, such that as many painters have said, I feel myself looked at by the things, my activity is equally passivity - which is the second and more profound sense of the narcissism: not to see in the outside, as the others see it, the contour of a body one inhabits, but especially to be seen by the outside, to exist within it, to emigrate into it, to be seduced, captivated, alienated by the phantom, so that the seer and the visible reciprocate one another and we no longer know which sees and which is seen".33

Applying this passage to the threshold space the seers see themselves as though the threshold returns their gaze. What is suggested here is a process where the seer and the seen become indivisible. The subliminal images exhibited on the threshold re-enforce the seer's own narcissism.

The narratives described in this chapter re-define the chair in the threshold space as one that creates a social portrait of the occupant. The construction of a mapped environment categorises the chair as an icon. The constructions that include mapped, theatrical, anarchic and exhibited chairs, detail the attributes of the chair as a social portrait. The character of individual chairs develop personalities that allow the seer to explore their own identities represented through the threshold.
"The verandah is an interval implying potential meanings just out of reach... Life on the verandah is not fixed or stable, but always a process, a progression. This raises the question of how much longer Australian culture will hesitate before stepping off the verandah into the landscape." 

This paper has explored the social and cultural potential of the chair within the threshold space of the verandah to act as a portrait. The paper suggests that the portrait is informed by the chair's diverse and varied historical connections. This history of the chair was developed from an oak box, by giving it a high back and transforming its status. The chair when placed on the threshold of the verandah expresses varied connections to the social space of the street. The chair's positioning and style also creates a continual dialogue that engages with the social. By investigating the chair's positions and styles, this paper has developed various interpretations of the meaning of the chair's position.

Chapter One explores how Lefebvre and Bachelard construct through science and imagination, an investigative interrogation of space. This interrogation can be applied to the porch/verandah and therefore the threshold space. A theoretical error is made in viewing the threshold space as passive, denying its spatiality in favour of a perspectival view. The perspectival view limits the conception of the threshold space, turning it into a mathematical space, therefore limiting its potential for interrogation. The fetishised threshold space becomes transformed by the occupant as well as by the seer. These two positions, one the occupant's, the other the seer's, both construct interpretations of the space. The seer's and the occupant's interpretations have vital significance when the threshold space is considered in the context of an ongoing social commentary. What can be experienced here is that the threshold space is not insignificant and that the perception of this space is not an insignificant act. The threshold space is an area to develop theoretical constructions, due to its visibility and vulnerability. Through Bachelard's concept of felicitous space, the threshold can be seen as an area for the occupant's unconscious and imaginative ideas to be interpreted by the seer.

Chapter Two researches the historical significance of the chair when defined through its ongoing metaphorical role in society. The academic chair, the cathedra, the judicial bench and the throne, show how society places an importance on the chair's role. When
placed on the porch/verandah the chair's character is given a renewed context which extends its references and articulates its function. The significance is contextually developed through the various narratives that are interpreted from the style of chair and its positioning. These chairs with their historical context are then placed on the porch/verandah of Australian homes. The construction of various principles and personal beliefs are displayed to the social via the threshold space. The threshold space with the chair as its principal character, displays a cultural relationship to Australia.

Through Chapter Three the perception of the chair on the threshold as a metaphor is explained. The various narratives developed in this paper concerning the threshold space defines it as an area of continual change and renewal which can be viewed as a cultural and social barometer. The space allows for and demands critical analysis of an ongoing cultural dialogue between the occupant and the seer. This space can then be transformed into a world of imagination and intrigue which can change the seer's perception of this space. The chair's interaction with the social, is explained through its relationship with technology as well as its sexual connotations. The chairs on the threshold are visible signifiers which display a multitude of cultural values.

In chapter four the chairs positioning on the threshold at the front of a home are examined as a social portrait. The chair as a social portrait becomes a transmitter, part of a re-defining and re-evaluating process that is projected to the seer on the street. The seer from the street becomes the interpreter, reading the various signs and symbols that are presented to them from the threshold. Various narratives are developed to demonstrate the possible interpretation that can be related to the chair. The chair is discussed from its position as a social icon or symbol that could be classified and placed onto a map. Its theatrical implications are explained when a number of chairs placed on the threshold appear to be characters in a play. These narratives are extended upon in the anarchic and exhibited chairs sections. Here the seer's interpretation of the threshold space is one where by the seer also sees him or herself as though the space was a mirror, reflecting back their own identity.

By examining the theories of Lefebvre and Bachelard, as well as a historical perspective of the chair, the threshold space and the chair are shown not to be innocent of meaning. By stating the various meanings and interpretations of the chair's historical and social connections, the threshold space becomes a significant area of investigation revealing its poetical possibilities.

The threshold space defines a significant area that develops a cultural identity when perceived as a linking device between
Australian's and their country. The chair's placement within the threshold space is an identifiable human element. This identifiable element defined by the dialectic in this paper interacts between the spatiality of the porch/verandah and its own innate history. The spatial construct of the porch/verandah is contextualised by the chair in the same way that a stage is contextualised by the actors. These threshold spaces are political arenas that have the power to define a social and cultural context.
NOTES

1 Thomas, P. (1983), p. 3
3 Ibid, p. 64
5 Carter, P. (1992), p. 3
6 Carter, P. (1992), p. 3
9 Ibid, p. 94
13 Panofsky, E. (1991), p.31
14 Damisch, H. (1994), p. xv states that “some maintained that photography and film disseminate spontaneously, and so to speak mechanically, bourgeois ideology (because perspective, having appeared at the dawn of the capitalist era must of necessity be essentially ‘bourgeois’), while others, sometimes the same individuals, celebrated the pallid attempts of would be experimental cinema to free itself from the ‘tyranny’ of the single point of view and from the general constraints of perspective”.
15 Marx, K. (1976), p..71
16 Lefebvre, H. (1991), P. 165
19 Danto, A. (1988), p. 11 An early representation of a chair, in a relief sculpture The Assualt of Mara Amaravati 2nd Century AD from the ruined Buddhist stupa of Amaravati. This piece of Buddhist iconography displays the scene of Budha and the Bo tree chair. This image shows a chair carved out of the tree (Prince Gautama has transcended into Budha) with a cousin at the base of the seat and two legs that represent human legs. The cousin on the chair states he was of importance and that the act of sitting is used for attaining enlightenment.
22 Danto, A. (1988), p. 14 So there is a double self abasement in Van Gogh’s portrayling himself as a chair. To begin with, to be a chair in the first place is to offer oneself as something to be sat on, which is the first abasement; and then to choose as the chair one is the lower order of chair in the cosmic scheme everyone in Europe would at that time have accepted, is to execute the other debasement.
23 The Cranberries. (1993)
25 Drew, P. (1992), PViIII
26 De Fusco, R. (1976), p28 “Sergio Bettini first spoke of furniture in this sense, and it was of Le Corbusier he was thinking; ‘It seems to me’ he wrote, ‘that the greatest quality of these armchairs by Le Corbusier is that they are signs, where two symbolic links of space and time are brought together, through the word of Le Corbusier to form an impeccable equilibriun”.
28 Lefebvre, H. (1991), P. 93 This concept is dealt with by Lefebvre. In the light of this imaginary analysis, our house would emerge as permeated from every direction by streams of energy which run inand out of it by every imaginable
route: water, gas, electricity, telephone lines, radio and television signal, and so on. Its image of immobility would then be replaced by an image of complex of mobilities, a nexus of in and out conduits.

29 Crockett, T. (1991), p. 73
30 Harbison, R. (1977), p. 22
31 Lefebvre, H. (1991), p 131
32 Apollonio, U. (1973), p. 27
33 Burgin, V. (1991), p. 18
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