

SCOPE

Contemporary Research Topics

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Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art) is peer-reviewed and published annually in November by Otago Polytechnic/Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Scope (Art) aims to engage discussion on contemporary research in the visual arts. It is concerned with views and critical debates surrounding issues of practice, theory, history and their relationships as manifested through the visual and related arts and activities, such as sound, performance, curation, tactile and immersive environments, digital scapes and methodological considerations. With New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours as a backdrop, but not its only stage, *Scope (Art)* seeks to address the matters which concern contemporary artists and arts enquirers in their environments of practice.

Formats include: editorials, articles, essays, artist's pages, logs and travel reports; responses to exhibitions, and residency notes; onlined exhibitions and moving, interactive works (to be negotiated with the editors for the online version, with contextualising paragraphs and stills to appear in the hardcopy version). Other suggested formats will also be considered; and special topics comprising submissions by various contributors may be tendered to the editors.

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Submissions for *Scope (Art)* are invited from artists, curators, writers, theorists and historians. Submissions should be sent in hardcopy and electronic format by 30 April for review and potential inclusion in the annual issue to Bridie Lonie or Leoni Schmidt (editors) at Otago Polytechnic/Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, Private Bag 1910, Dunedin, New Zealand, bridiel@tekotago.ac.nz and leoni@tekotago.ac.nz. Please consult the information for contributors below and the hardcopy or online versions of this issue for examples. Peer review forms will be sent to all submitters in due course, with details concerning the possible reworking of documents where relevant. All submitters will be allowed up to two subsequent resubmissions of documents for peer approval. All final decisions concerning publication of submissions will reside with the editors. Opinions published are those of the authors and not necessarily subscribed to by the editors, or the institution.

Information for contributors: Submissions should engage with contemporary arts practices in ways which may contribute to critical debate and new understandings. High standards of writing, proofreading and adherence to consistency through the Chicago referencing style are expected. For more information, please refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*; and consult this issue for examples. A short biography of no more than 50 words; as well as title; details concerning institutional position and affiliation (where relevant); and contact information (postal, email and telephone number) should be provided on a cover sheet, with all such information withheld from the body of the submission. Low resolution images with full captions should be inserted into texts to indicate where they would be preferred: while tif, jpeg or eps image files in CMYK mode with a resolution equivalent of at least 300dpi should be provided on a clearly labeled disc accompanying the printed hardcopy submission. Copies of written copyright permissions should be included with all images.

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COLLABORATION

Leoni Schmidt

The success of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art)* is dependent on the contributions of artists and writers as well as on the critical support of a range of reviewers. In this second issue of the journal, the editors thank all contributors and reviewers for their involvement with *Scope (Art)*. We are incrementally building the quality of the journal and cannot do this without you.

This time we also include contributions from a number of artists/writers who are part of our research and teaching networks in New Zealand and abroad. Other contributors to this issue are current or previous staff members or senior students at Otago Polytechnic School of Art.

Scope (Art) is not a themed journal. Nonetheless, this issue includes many instances of collaborative work. The networking implied in the paragraph above is already indicative of collaboration, a practice which is also present in other registers within the issue. Some contributors have jointly responded to the same exhibitions; some writers have worked alongside artists; some authors have worked together on topics; artists' pages often refer to communities of practice; acknowledgements accompanying writing mention various kinds of collaborative support and personal mentoring; curators write about the work of artists on group shows or refer to members of the general public involved in a community project; and images included courtesy of many artists and photographers hint at the extensive networking in the background of the work presented in this issue.

Collaboration in the visual arts and its concomitant exhibition or publication does not always happen in seamless ways. Rather, the tensions inherent in such a practice are often noticeable and sometimes acknowledged. Power relations between co-workers are suggested. We live in an era which admits to the complexities of authorship post Michel Foucault's writing on the "death of the author"¹ and Roland Barthes' insistence on an "intertextuality" through which meaning is never fixed but constantly in the process of production.² Katherine Hayles has also pointed out that our posthuman condition foregrounds systems rather than individual agency.³ Nevertheless, the self as locus for the initiation – at least – of art as a resistant and critical practice, remains insistent and necessarily so. Collaboration is not a simple matter.

John Roberts, in "Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form" published in *Third Text* in 2004, argues that we should not confuse collaboration as a critical ideal with the sharing of ideas or with art's general position within the social division of labour whereby artists have always worked with technicians, assistants, partners or fellow journeymen. Peter Cleverley writes in this issue⁴ of the "kindship" experienced between artists from different cultural contexts in the face of various types of fundamentalisms. In "Tinkering" published in the *London Review of Books* in 2007, Mark Greif identifies four types of collaboration: where the naïve artist works with performers without a script; where the aged or busy superskilled artist leaves much of the work to studio assistants; where "in-betweeners" draw intervening frames in, for example, animation projects; and where artists marry conceptualism with the handicrafts provided by artisans, as in the case of some of the works by Jeff Koons.⁵ But, Roberts also defines collaboration as a critical ideal (although one could argue that this ideal can overlap with the types of collaboration identified by Greif). Roberts writes:

Collaboration is a self-conscious process of production...the socially produced character of art is made explicit in the form of the work. Teamworking, sharing skills and ideas across disciplines, manipulating prefabricated materials (the labour of others), negotiating with various institutions and agencies, become the means whereby art's place within the social division of labour is made transparent as a form of socialised labour...Authorship is defined as multiple and diffuse.⁶

Further on in his article, Roberts makes the crucial point: Collaboration as a critical ideal is not just a matter of artistic interdisciplinarity, it also has a political agenda and a history of political alliance whereby workers claimed the right to organise themselves in the face of whatever systems threatened their survival. He refers to the 1920s when organised artistic collaboration staked out a socialist agenda for many artists; and then arrives at the 1960s and its continued legacy in Western art, a legacy which acts recuperatively to continue resistance of, now, late capitalist manoeuvres which⁷ insist that the labour time expended on a commodity should not exceed the amount of labour time socially needed to produce it. Such an insistence plays into the interests of a capitalist system bent on subsuming labour into a drive for efficiency, not least through the proliferation of technological bureaucracy in the workplace. "The subjective skills of the worker have to be minimalised and controlled if the social forms of labour are to be [institutionally] internalised technocratically [through] separation of the intellect from the expenditure of [manual] labour..."⁸ Still further on, Roberts claims that "...the critical interdisciplinarity of the group, and as such the breakdown of the separation between manual and intellectual labour, is an attempt to challenge the one-sided development of technology, to reforge it in the interest of a collective spontaneous subjectivity."⁹ He continues: "Collaboration through art, then, becomes the cultural form through which the aesthetic critique of [bureaucratic] uses of technology is played out. This is what I mean by the ideal of collective participation in art being a space of social experimentation and speculation."¹⁰

It seems very important, however, to also point out that Roberts refuses the collapse of art into social practice. He argues that the "instability of art as a category and a phenomenological experience is precisely what constitutes its relationship to freedom and human emancipation." He critiques the current ascendancy of post-autonomy in debates about collaboration through which the voice of the self in the production of art is relegated to the past – for example by Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics.¹¹ Despite this ascendancy, he lauds the current debate on collaboration as a site for the overlap between the discussion of art and the discussion of labour: "In a period where the labour of the artist and the labour of the worker are largely hidden as values, this is what underwrites the significance of the turn to collaboration today. The debate on collaboration is the means whereby labour in the artwork is made conspicuous and critical."¹²

Returning to a consideration of the contents of this issue of *Scope (Art)*, I argue that the hidden or naturalised labour of the artist is uncovered where artists and writers coincide in the same author or where more than one author participates in any given project. Difference in role or difference in perspective triangulates contributions between artist-writer-artwork or quadrangulates them between artist-writer-artwork-writer. Thus, difference – and often the concomitant tensions – works in favour of the presencing of labour.

While Roberts critiques the impact of institutions and their late capitalist manoeuvres in his article, this issue of *Scope (Art)* has, however, been made possible by the institution – Otago Polytechnic – in which our School of Art is situated. There are a number of factors which sets this institution apart and outside the frame of such a critique as Roberts': Firstly, it is extraordinarily generous with support – for example through grant assistance – for research in which manual, studio-based work and intellectual endeavour are integrated. Secondly, its recently published "Intellectual Property Policy" must be amongst the most generous to artists on faculty in the world. Through a separation between researchers' full ownership of the outcomes of their work and co-ownership between the institution and researchers' outputs in relation to performance-based research funding for the institution, a mutually beneficial strategy is reached. In this way an 'us-them' binary has been avoided with the excess of self-initiated labour in the School of Art as a continuing and productive result. Thirdly, initiatives such as *Scope (Art)* – and soon



Above: Dadang Christanto, 2000 (and ongoing), *Continuous Drawing* (detail), mixed drawing media, size variable (courtesy of the artist).



Right: Dadang Christanto, 1996-97, *They Give Evidence* (detail), mixed sculptural media, about life-size (courtesy of the artist).

also *Scope (Flexible Learning)* and *Scope (Design)* – are amply supported without censorship of its contents or institutional involvement with editorial decisions or reviewing processes. Collaborative practices included in this issue are, therefore, nowhere strident. However, they are very much in evidence as artists and arts writers remain vigilant in the face of international capitalist and neo-conservative pressures on the freedoms of art *and* labour they champion.

There are, of course, also other dangers facing artists and arts writers and the societies in which they work. This was brought starkly under our attention when Indonesian-born (of Chinese descent) artist Dadang Christanto recently visited the School of Art to contribute to our Public Research Seminar Programme – itself another forum for the collaborative sharing of ideas, practices and experiences. Christanto now resides in Australia, where his work is exhibited and published. His life and that of his family in Indonesia were, however, fraught with the danger and exclusion dealt to those belonging to the Chinese minority during the Suharto regime (1966-1998).

Christanto shared several of his projects with his audience during the seminar. All of these function to critique and to commemorate the atrocities perpetrated on the Chinese minority in Indonesia. The artist's own father was one of many Chinese who suffered genocide in that country in the mid-1960s, when the artist was eight years old. The elder Christanto was one of half a million victims of the purge of PKI (Indonesia Communist Party) members, sympathisers and Chinese persecuted for their political and religious beliefs and ethnicity.

Through his *Continuous Drawing* created from 2000 and still ongoing, Christanto refuses a forgetfulness of that atrocity. Recently in Auckland during a residency at the School of Visual Arts at Manukau Institute of Technology, the artist added to this drawing, making sure that its agency remains current in the memory of events in Indonesia. His additions consist of small graphic marks – one for each of the enormous number of victims as the drawing

grows – amidst ribbons of black and red suggestive of death and bloodletting which also function as celebrations of the lives of the deceased.

They Give Evidence is one of Christanto's sculptural installations. It consists of sixteen male and female figures that represent victims of political oppression. They bear in their arms remnants of clothing testifying to the torture, mutilations and beatings the bodies who wore them had to endure. The figures are about life-size and they silently confront our bodies with their testimonies. Today, one cannot but read this work without thinking of the "Emperor's Silent Army" which consists of eight thousand life-size terracotta figures unearthed in 1974 in China and currently on display in London. These exquisitely detailed figures were buried with the First Emperor, Qin Shi Huangdi, in Shaanxi Province in China during the second century BCE and now mutely testify to the power and resources of the Chinese Empire. Christanto's figures seem pared down and hollow-eyed in comparison; rather than power, they exude tragedy. However, the same fierce pride can be noticed in the stance of both the figures in his installation and in those excavated some decades ago in China.

Here, in New Zealand, we are presently enabled through the Treaty of Waitangi and the opportunities it affords to celebrate the culture of Māori, the tangata whenua or people of the land, and by extension the cultures of minorities in the country. Such opportunities can include collaborative practices between Māori and Pākehā – (New Zealanders of European descent). Master of Fine Arts candidate Roka Hurihia Ngarimu-Cameron is a Māori weaver of long standing. Recently, she joined our postgraduate cohort to research ways in which her culture and that of Pākehā could intersect. One result of this is a traditional koruwai, or particular kind of floor-length cloak, made from harakeke or flax fibre used for the weft and European cotton linen used for the warp. This is the first time a traditional koruwai has been woven on a Western loom. A process leading to this work is narrated by the artist in an essay entitled "Toku Haerenga/My Journey" in this issue of the journal. This text provides an insight into a journey of moving from the security of one culture to voluntarily interact with another in one's homeland. In doing so it stands in stark contrast – being in the same issue of the journal and including images of the koruwai – to the garments imaged in Christanto's sculptural work.

There are also other contrasts and tensions evident within this issue of *Scope (Art)* and the editors invite readers to explore these and to consider contributing to future issues of the journal.

- 1 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 1969/1994), 923-28.
- 2 Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text", in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Blackwell, 1971/1994), 940-46.
- 3 N Katharine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Information* (Chicago: Chicago University Press).
- 4 See Peter Cleverley's artist's pages in this issue.
- 5 Mark Greif, "Tinkering", *London Review of Books*, 7 June 2007: 11.
- 6 John Roberts, "Collaboration as a Problem of Art's Cultural Form", *Third Text*, 18 (6), 2004: 557.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 560.
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Ibid.*, 560-61.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 561.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 563.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 564.

OCCUPYING THE PAVEMENT: PUBLIC ART

Ali Bramwell



Matt Gillies, *Dunedin Beautification Project* (installation detail), Dunedin City, 2006. This was installed across the road from the Municipal Courts (courtesy of the artist).

I was sitting in a suburban bus shelter in Dunedin, some weeks ago now, doing what you do while waiting for a bus, sitting and waiting. The mutual sitting and waiting provided the opportunity for a conversation with a stranger. He (whose name I never learned) was a visitor from Wellington and unsure of his immediate future, would he stay or would he go? He had been roaming while thinking, without specific business to occupy his day, seeking diversion of an inexpensive kind. This state of mind sets up an unusual way to see a city, an attentive semi direction-less wandering possibly not unlike the Situationist *dérive*, the kind of mindset that allows you to notice small plaques attached to things, and to read them. He had happened on and read two plaques the previous day, the first was attached to the side of the Hocken Library, celebrating a significant donation, all well and good, how nice. However, nearby was another cast plaque set into the pavement. This one stated obliquely "Without competition there can be no success". That second message had bothered him enough to begin discussing it with a stranger at a

bus stop. Not unreasonably he assumed that both the plaque and the message it contained were officially generated: designed and paid for by the city. His questions to me included wondering what the undercurrent behind this message was. What governmental values were being expressed in this manner? Was this normal behaviour for the Dunedin City Council?

This seemed to me to be a reasonable set of questions, given that he couldn't have known he had stumbled across a part of an unsanctioned public art work, the *Dunedin Beautification Project* (2006) by Matt Gillies. Without warning or any discussion with council the artist had gradually replaced a number of existing functional aluminium plates (part of the city's water and gas infrastructure, designed to allow maintenance access) with image and message bearing alternatives. The process Gillies followed was to 'liberate' a single plate at a time, melt it down, then recasting it to his own satisfaction and replacing it where he got it from. The workmanlike anonymity of the project was important to its success, nobody questions a man in overalls working in broad daylight.

The project intentionally leveraged the quiet power dynamics of how Common Good is administered by engaging directly with governmental systems and infrastructures. The systems that the work operated within were several, the most obvious systems being physical; specifically the plates and the streets they were located within. The plates are part of a service infrastructure (water and gas), as are the footpaths where the plates are located. They are also networked arterial systems of mobility and transit, which is both literally the way that people move around the streets and a schematic metaphor for the city as an organism. By extrapolating from the thing to its function allows the body of the city and its social systems to be seen in parallel. By working in an interstitial way with these existing systems Gillies was enacting a form of practical institutional critique, Foucaultian in implication.¹ The imagery and texts used on the new plates were also critical in specifically politicised ways. If the process of the work implies a post-structural critique, the content of the work sets up something different. Each plate was apparently individually issue based but when looked at collectively the set does not attempt to form any kind of coherent manifesto: in one Homer Simpson wallows apparently semi-conscious in a bathtub, in another a businessman is engulfed in soap bubbles, yet another delivers an aphorism in block letters, "WITHOUT COMPETITION THERE CAN BE NO SUCCESS". What each of these things has to do with each other or the site where they are located is unclear. In addition, the borrowed institution of the city altered and shaded the way the political statements were read; complicating otherwise relatively straightforward dystopian iterations.

Much of the tension in this work arose from a transposition of the way that we have become used to reading public works, generic built environments as well as something called 'Public Art'. There is an assumption of shared values coded into urban design in the form of homogenous aesthetics. The homogeneity does not have to be only stylistic (for example bylaws that restrict building design in specific ways), but occurs where dissenting or even merely unusual ideas are not represented. The idea of a narrowed and limited field of representation has implications for democratic principles.² An emphasis on harmonious aesthetics in the built environment creates an illusion of shared goals, an illusion of societal cohesion that is reinforced by permanent infrastructure. If it is made of permanent material it is generally obedient to the dominant schema of civic pride. Because Gillies' work utilised the city infrastructure without adhering to the associated mores of aesthetic appeal, it did appear to cause some perceptual confusion.

Two decades ago Patricia Phillips articulated the dominant expectation explicitly by making an argument that art practice with a critical intention is most effective if it is also ephemeral and mobile.³ Gillies' work subverts this expectation by using permanent structures as a vehicle for targeted critique. In the process he also skirts the most common risk of all critique, to reinforce the thing that you wish to question. In order to engage with a specific dynamic it seems necessary to adopt the same languages, syntax and structural logic of that dynamic; in effect to become the thing you seek to criticise. By co-opting physical languages of the city which are usually regulated governmentally the artist's act was also experienced as governmental. Recall here that the visitor from Wellington literally assumed the texts were communications from the city council.

As a contrast to Gillies' abrasive counter-cultural images I consider a different image that reverses many of the dynamics that the *Dunedin Beautification Project* creates. As part of the 2006 Sarajevo Winter Festival, Miles Sanderson used fat ripe oranges as textural and compositional elements in the frame of an existing architectural structure; an installation using a bridge's decorative ironwork railing. The colour of the fruit, tied simply but with a craftman's care, glowed in counterpoint against a winterdrab and chilly city. At first glance this seemed an aesthetic (even painterly) composition with an harmonious and possibly ameliorative intention.

It's important to note that works in public are ultimately understood primarily through the way they are experienced and perceived in context.⁴ In order to develop my thinking here about Sanderson's work I need to contextualise its occurrence more fully. The context includes time, place, phenomenal experience, social dynamics, ethical considerations and a reactive relationship to a third work by NSK (discussed below).

On a cold February day in Sarajevo 2006, standing in a plaza outside a shopping center (public space in the most generic sense) there is a small group of artists waiting for something to happen. Although it's around 2 o'clock in the afternoon and as warm as it will get for the day, the thin sunlight just makes the day more bleak. While we wait, shifting from one foot to the other to keep our toes warm, our presence attracts a handful of dirtyfaced children asking for money or food. One in particular – a small boy – attaches himself tenaciously to the leg of the artist standing next to me. While Miles Sanderson attempts to disengage, too gently to be convincing or effective, the event we had gathered to see is occurring. Several men in a vaguely familiar uniform are standing at ease, parade ground style, apparently military and arranged under a nationalistic banner: yet another armed group in Sarajevo. However, none of the things in this scene can be accepted at face value. Small details appear out of place, on closer inspection the men are wearing white armbands emblazoned with black crosses, after Malevich. The banner carries the emblem of NSK (Neue Slowenische Kunst). NSK is a multi-organisational art and political project, held together ideologically by an active anti-totalitarian politic that engages with the thing it criticises in complex and parodic ways.⁵

After some minutes the men break their tableau and start posing for photographs with dignitaries and admirers. NSK has a lot of admirers from the arts community in Sarajevo. To understand why necessitates a brief detour into history. Laibach kept a promise to get to Sarajevo before the NATO troops, staging a concert on the day before the Dayton Peace Accord was signed (21 November 1995) bringing a ceasefire after over three years of bitter multi-ethnic fighting. In tandem with the concert another group affiliated with NSK, the Irwin Group, set up an embassy office in Sarajevo, declared "NSK State Sarajevo" and issued more than 350 passport documents to new citizens of the state without territory. Rumour has it that a number of those passports were actually used to travel on in the very difficult months after the ceasefire when, ironically, the borders shut tighter than ever. Because of the timing of this event, its symbolism, fiercely anarchic energy and political intentions this was an important art event and also an immensely important cultural symbol towards re-establishing more normal relations. The event I refer to on this chilly afternoon in February 2006 is a pale shadow of this original event, but with symbolic and historic freight: an official delegation marking the passing of ten years since the establishment of NSK State Sarajevo and the Dayton Accord in the same week.

But what if you didn't know the history? What does the average inhabitant of Sarajevo think when another group of (apparently) military men strike a pose in their city? Armed men both in and out of uniform are part of the urban landscape here, normalised over the last decades, and the varieties of uniform on show are many. NSK is a cipher in more than one sense, since before Yugoslavia dissolved Laibach was synonymous with rebellion, causing consternation with its fascist parodies riding an uncomfortable line between mockery and reinforcement. One of their artistic stunts involved singing approved communist party dogma in Nazi fascist regalia, deliberately showing the similarity between the two forms of totalitarianism. The performances were accepted by hardliners at face value, underlining the interpretive disjunctions when adopting dominant coding for the purpose of critique. If these four men in uniform carry anything of that (art) historical inheritance in Sarajevo today then surely that sense



NSK (Irwin Group) posing with Sarajevo Winter Festival director Ibrahim Spahi , Skenderija Shopping Complex, Sarajevo, 2006 (photograph courtesy of Miles Sanderson).



Miles Sanderson, untitled installation, oranges and bridge over Miljacka River, Sarajevo, 2006 (photograph courtesy of the artist).

of rebellion must be a nostalgic one; nostalgic in a peculiar sense for a clearly identifiable target to rebel against: Yugoslavia was nothing if not a monolithic entity. Sadie Plant talks about political resistance arising in specific relation to the dominant power, that power always shapes and produces the forms of resistance “with which it is irreducibly implicated.”⁶ In this sense NSK, formed in specific relation to central European communist totalitarianism, has lost its original nemesis and natural opposition and must reformulate the nature of its resistance strategies to remain relevant.⁷

Speaking of identifiable oppositions, I left Miles Sanderson hanging two paragraphs back with a Mafia-affiliated street urchin attached to his pants leg. For Sanderson, the presence of the very youthful beggars profoundly altered the way he understood the NSK presence in the shopping centre, because the contrast was so brutal. States without territory collided both metaphorically and literally with the small and stateless, who are vigorously asserting their right to exist in this specific territory. More plainly: the abstractions of ideology, politics and art came into contrast with a lived reality in the form of a very cynical child. Not that either entity acknowledged the other. The opposition existed mainly as an ethical confusion in the mind of an artist in the wrong country.⁸

Within days of this incident, with all its particulars held in mind (including especially the small leg limpet) Sanderson installed his deceptively simple work on a bridge. There is a kind of unconscionable cruelty in aestheticising food when people are hungry, something that Sanderson was acutely aware of. The artist's personal warmth and the quiet beauty of the image acted to alleviate this cruelty but it remained in the form of conspicuous consumption.⁹ However, the same consumption considered in a larger context has an elegant political symmetry, because Sarajevo has literally been using artistic production as a way of sustaining itself. In the years immediately After The War cultural funds and artistic donations poured in from agencies in Europe.¹⁰ As a guest of the festival the city was paying for the artist to eat while he produced art from food. To underline the absurdity bear in mind that sixty percent of adults there have no paid employment and, also, no social security or public welfare system is sustainable in such a broken economy. This situation is ironic in savage ways that many artists will identify with. Perhaps a more direct encounter with an artist who decorates the city with food might also be seen as a more transparent and ethically desirable form of cultural patronage.¹¹ The woman who daily occupied the pavement near that bridge asking strangers for help could literally reach and take the fruit if she wanted, cynically one might say she benefited from the regenerative effects of art.

Usually the political potential of public practices are assessed through embedded polarities of the avant-gardist project around the ideas of criticism and celebration, disruption and harmony, antagonism and placation, elitism and inclusion. The expectation that effective criticality should be anti-hegemonic, actively disruptive and about instigating change is widespread and underpins the ways that public practices are assessed artistically. Public art has an intellectual inheritance from radical democratic theory that insists that good democracy in the form of representational parity is evidenced by the presence of agonism. Chantal Mouffe states that democracy is in peril not only when there is insufficient consensus “...but also when its agonistic dynamic is hindered by an apparent excess of consensus, which usually masks a disquieting apathy ...A healthy democratic process calls for a vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict of interests.”¹²

The logic is that if there is no sign of agonism then something has been repressed, as contestation is the basic condition of democracy. Where this logic has been applied to art practices the democratic function of a work becomes a measure of its artistic criticality; the teleology being that the presence of agonism is equivalent with artistic criticality, making political aims and art-theoretical ones coincide without always making that coincidence explicit. Conversely, in this framework artistic attempts at harmony are interpreted as implicitly hegemonic. Some of the reasons for this have been articulated in my earlier comments regarding harmony and permanence in relation to Gillies' work.¹³ Communitarian politics are supposed to be celebratory rather than critical. Over time this conflation of ideas has resulted in a largely unexamined wholesale dismissal of specific artistic strategies, including the use of permanent materials or beauty, as both critically and politically suspect.

The inheritances from the avant-garde and later from post-structuralism, include the broad idea that stasis is bad and that effective criticality consists of finding ways to instigate change. However, the emerging context of relational practices introduces different implications around what constitutes effective polity. In these more recently discussed forms of organisation the idea of beneficial effectiveness is shifted from change producing critique to connectivity. At their best these forms operate with a pragmatism that goes beyond specific ideology by dealing directly with person to person relationships.

Claire Bishop explicitly views the presence of antagonism as the benchmark of both good democracy and critical purchase, in the process seeming to radicalise Mouffe's position in the subtle difference between agonism and antagonism.¹⁴ There is a practical difference between acknowledging the inevitable continuation of conflict and contestation and insisting that antagonism be actively sustained.¹⁵ Bishop also suggests that criticality will be found in the work's content as distinct from its process. She writes in an excoriatingly scathing way about artists who rely on the dynamics arising from process for critical purchase and praises those who do not "collapse the relationships into the content."¹⁶

Bishop's position can respectively be interpolated in relation to Gillies' and Sanderson's work. Despite the inversions with permanence and temporality that the *Dunedin Beautification Project* employs, Gillies operates within generic parameters of contestatory criticality; the content is specifically politicised; and the work as a whole can be understood according to structural and territorial power relations.

By contrast, analysis of Sanderson's work by content or appearance alone would dismiss it as decorative –that it has no democratic potential and therefore is not critical public art practice. It is here that an analytical habit of separating content from process and context while discussing public work becomes unhelpful, because the implications of the work are quite different when taken in the wider context of its situation. On the next bridge downriver towards Grabvica there is a commemorative plaque attached to the handrails stating the name of the first person killed when the war reached Sarajevo, shot while crossing the bridge. As soon as this plaque was placed it was contested and a separate plaque naming a different person was also erected making the same claim – that it was she who was the first death in the conflict. The two women named were from different sides of the river, involving different ethnic groups, and the dispute seems less about personal commemoration than about establishing an iconography of martyrdom for each group.

The recent history is not seamless or stable, and the bridges in Sarajevo are not neutral sites. A lovely winter river scene with oranges, wrought iron, old stone and icy water would mean something very different in another location. It is the specific relation of its situation that imbues the untitled installation with a murky and sullen undercurrent, a masked violence felt as a sensation not unlike a coppery after taste, occurring in the wake of its aesthetic appeal. Bishop's parameters for successful work are where the "relations produced ...are marked by sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging, because the work acknowledges the impossibility of a 'microtopia' and instead sustains a tension among viewers, participants and context."¹⁷ Sanderson's work fulfills this condition as a specifically sited work with an unresolvable tension created by explicit exclusion and loss. However, Bishop would be unlikely to agree that this work is what she terms "good democracy" as, besides the unforgiveable beauty, the work operates primarily as imminence and process as the relations produced constitute the work. Grant Kester has a different perspective, however, that may have more room in it for work such as Sanderson's. Kester thinks about a form of practice that is less aggressive to audiences in its strategic leveraging but still allows a questioning of fixed identities. He is interested in the possibility that public work can be both open and vulnerable and also enact critical change of a slower and more incremental kind.¹⁸ In order to see this work or to take one of the oranges involved a decision to pause. The work has no narrative content, but becomes part of an ongoing story-of-place by implicating passersby in a process of being momentarily exposed in the middle of a bridge, for modest sensual reward. The work on the bridge was consumed within minutes of being completed, empty red strings left dangling, a series of exposures enacted.

Gillies' and Sanderson's work falls outside of unexamined conventions of how public art practice manifests, and is understood by inverting practical conventions. Both works use strategic temporality and harmony, and complicate assumptions about the role of transgression and the nature of complicity. During each provisional pavement occupation a specific problem is exposed but not alleviated; there is no solution posited or set in motion by the work. Sanderson's work is distinct in its ethical immediacy and its undeniable emotional power. It has an affective power despite an apparent simplicity and a critical relevance that defies emerging conventions around what constitutes criticality. It gains this dimension because of an embodied relationship with place; a short bittersweet burst of sensation, citrus tang an astringent for trauma not yet healed.

- 1 Gillies' project can be understood as Foucaultian in method in the way it observes an existing institution and inserts itself into its structural logic. Foucault has talked about the role of criticism as being primarily one that makes existing conflicts more visible in order to shift the thinking that supports them. "Out of these conflicts...a new power relation must emerge" so that modes of action may be altered. A critical/theoretical process...understands institutions from personal experience and recognises "cracks, silent shocks, malfunctionings..." Michel Foucault, "Practicing Criticism (an interview with Didier Eribon)", 1988: 156.
- 2 The extensively documented and discussed removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* in New York illustrates the point I am making here very well. Some of the stated reasons for its removal were that it was found to be ugly and alienating and that it was likely to encourage terrorism (!). Its defendants made the link between aesthetic freedom of expression and democratic principles of inclusion. Kwon referred to it, but there are dozens of other references. See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity*, 2004.
- 3 Patricia C Phillips, *Temporality and Public Art*, 1992.
- 4 Similarly, it is necessary to address how this text presents each of the works discussed: entering via descriptions of encounter as a way of thinking through the potentials of unexpected occurrences in the city. In the interests of gaining an understanding of what affective and effective implications a particular work has outside the art bracketing of the gallery situation one approach used here is focused on phenomenological reporting: literally describing an experience.
- 5 This text is assuming a certain amount of prior knowledge about the history of NSK and Laibach in Europe. The iconic band Laibach is the core and genesis of NSK. The men posing are four members of the Irwin Group who are in Sarajevo representing NSK. The Irwin Group is a separate entity and an affiliated subset of NSK, there are several other key groups involved also. For a more detailed overview visit <http://www.nskstate.com> as last accessed on 30 September 2007.
- 6 Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture*, 1992: 119.
- 7 Bosnians insist they are not part of Eastern Europe, but of Central Europe.
- 8 Miles Sanderson and I were participating in the Sarajevo Winter Festival as guest artists, Sanderson is a Norfolk Islander, I had travelled from New Zealand. Neither of us are used to such visible extremes of poverty, such naiveté in the face of suffering become casual is also a luxury.
- 9 Sanderson was so discomfited by this dynamic that he has decided that the personal cost of working this way is too great, and he will not use food in this way again.
- 10 This phrase is always spoken as if capitalised, 'The War' brackets social memory in an absolute manner, things are referred to always in relation to it: Before The War, During the War and After.
- 11 Some muttering was heard after several years when a number of high profile cultural projects largely failed to materialise and when, as a result, the flow of cultural funding dwindled sharply. This is hardly surprising really, the canton literally needed to rebuild itself and can it seriously be argued that art is more important than roads and electricity? This might be considered enough of a problem without the complications caused by trying to distribute cultural funds bureaucratically. The complex political organism that is called the 'Bosnian Government' is made up of various aggressively separatist affiliations that struggle with the colossal diplomatic task of settling even the simplest administrative decisions. How much more so when deciding how to spend European beneficence under the vague aegis of cultural development? Where should the money go? Good question. But a handful of people on the street at least ate oranges on that one day.
- 12 Chantal Mouffe, "Introduction: For an Agonistic Pluralism", in *The Return of the Political*, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (eds), 1993/2005: 6.
- 13 Public works in America in the early nineties framed as politically engaged fell foul of this critical view as political engagement was often synonymous with community empowerment. In this context the Phillips text, written at around the same time, could be seen as an attempt to reframe strategies of mobility and temporality as implicitly critical and by implication to redeem a whole range of artistic practices that had been dismissed as celebratory.

- 14 While stating clearly that antagonism is ineradicable from a pluralist society, Mouffe also discusses open antagonism as a potential barrier to democratic process that needs to be managed carefully to prevent the complete alienation of entire groups. The danger of this kind of alienation is an increase in fundamentalisms that are actively anti-democracy. The difference between agonism and antagonism is the difference between relations with opponents and those against "enemies to be destroyed". Ibid.
- 15 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", 2004:60. "...in other words, a democratic society is one in which conflict is *sustained*..." (emphasis in original).
- 16 Op.cit.,70. Bishop makes this argument specifically in conversation with Nicolas Bourriaud. In helping define the field of dialogical practices Bourriaud's states that in "relational aesthetics" the art is judged according to the relations that it produces. The definition was theoretically significant because it separated the idea of relation and social engagement as a strategy that is politically imminent as a process. This is distinct from the polemical and didactic practices called "new genre public art". Claire Bishop has extensively criticised Bourriaud's work for political disconnection.
- 17 Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics", 2004:70.
- 18 Grant Kester, *The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*, 2004: 80.

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*(are we
there yet...?)*

Editors' Note: The following five texts respond to the same exhibition, Neil Emmerson's *(are we there yet...?)* installed in The Blue Oyster Art Project Space during 2007 in Dunedin. The exhibition was specifically configured for The Blue Oyster as a response to the space while using the subterranean nature of its location, the history of previous installation strategies and its particular audience and their habits to support its own agenda. Apart from the image introducing Ben Smith's text, all the images included across the five texts are from this exhibition, courtesy of the artist.



Exhibition Response #1

(are we there...?)

Judith Collard & Neil Emmerson

The question posed in the title of this installation of works by Neil Emmerson spanning the past twelve years provokes more than it answers. Not only is it unclear where we are going, but also where we have been or even who the 'we' is that he refers to.

Much of the work, and what is made clear from an overview of the artist's practice, focuses on the machinations of a semiotic encounter with the construction of the modern homosexual. Some of these signs are more obvious than others. Some are tuned to slip beneath the radar. An abandoned, civil service, brogue shoe emits the sounds from a dark corner of a public park, the leather mouth conjuring the absent masculine body through this tentative aural residue of place. In another room the same shoe is cast to mimic the red shoes that Dorothy inherits from the Wicked Witch of the East and then shrouded in the multicoloured, flickering glow of an obscured imagery played out on the hidden television screen. Dorothy is there creating the technicolour glow but like the

fugitive figure signalled by the original lone shoe, her singing and dancing is neither seen nor heard. There is a dissolution of certainty here. All these references to Oz, the rainbow, the yellow brick road, Dorothy and her friends, are implied but not overt.

Locations are important here. There are allusions to the closet, to the beat, and to the spaces where certain male sexualities and relations of power are enacted. The gallery itself has become transformed into an uninhabitable dream of domesticity; bedrooms, dining and living areas are indicated. Yet for all that it may signify – the prissy, controlled, even anally retentive environment of the closeted queen – the exhibition occurs in a basement, off the street and hidden down a dingy alley, the smelly arse-end of restaurants and bars its only neighbours. Dichotomies are set up here to be dissolved and challenged.

In the bedrooms desire is as much about anonymous encounters as it is about domestic bliss. Here there are references to the hunt, to heroic military victories,



to love and to death. The boudoir is transformed into the public garden, a midnight rendezvous where self-identities can be suspended and men can meet beyond the scrutiny of sanctioned public behaviour... to fuck. These innocuous scenes of garden settings and war memorials, typical of towns and cities across New Zealand and Australia, are also, ironically, hunting grounds where men cruise at night for contact. As if in ghillie-suits they seek to blend into the background, to merge with the scenery (flowerbeds, shrubby borders and fabricated woodlands) to avoid attention even as they seek it. Yet the image of the small adobe building, now famous for a notorious celebrity outing, reminds us of the thrilling possibility of discovery. It is all done in the best possible taste.

Emmerson brings together a carefully orchestrated array of transhistorical signs that illustrate the terms of polarised modern masculinities. By analogy Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley are juxtaposed with scenes from the Chinese Cultural Revolution, where Red Army soldiers hold high Huysmans's bible of decadence, *Against Nature*. Just as *fin de siècle* artists used Eastern art forms in an attempt to transform Western culture, so the Chinese drew on Western ideologies to fuel their own revolutions. Cultural boundaries are dissolved as much as sexual ones in these works. The mirror literally reflects the metaphors played out here. This is an exhibition anchored in anxiety and uncertainty, where the coherence created by the balance of form and colour is disrupted by the images presented and the relationships between them. It highlights shifting identities and challenges a misleading homogeneity. Perhaps what he might be asking by (*are we there yet...?*) is what happened to the transgressive and liberatory function of identity politics and if we are 'there' yet how can we tell and what were 'we' expecting to find? After all, Dorothy just ended up back in the comfortable, chromophobic world that she had come from.

If to be queer is to be other; uncertain, in between, self-constructed, free within the confines of power; aware of your body and afraid of its limits, conscious of your own construction and amused by its pretensions,

can there be a queer space still?...Can there be an opening that is queer toward what cannot be known?...To refuse to accept one's conditions, to build in the full knowledge that one will never finish and never live in peace, is human. It is also...a tantalising (queer) speculation.¹

...are we there yet...?

- 1 Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow, 1997), 16.

Exhibition Response #2

Are we there yet?

Bridie Lonie

To use the title (*are we there yet...?*) for the transformation of a gallery space into a gay man's single apartment with a generous living area is to signal very clearly that the division of public and private is dodgy at the best of times and won't work here. Neil Emmerson has furnished three rooms with works from the last twelve years. All exploit the doubling, reversals and repetition intrinsic to print media. And all equally remind us that print is the most public and political of forms, introducing into the domestic space the public realm first by its presence and then by its content. From the entry chamber, with its round looking glass (isn't a reflection the original print?) to the bedroom with its single bed surrounded by pendant letters whose rotational flow cruelly differentiates the space between articulation and experience, the print form acts as an integrating force. This enables a constantly doubling meditation on the consciousness engendered

by living in the queer lane. And Emerson's way with colour is to bleach strong colours through light printing, translucent overlays or their use on reflective surfaces, always suggesting something lost, not quite there, or coming to light.

The mirror in the atrium area immediately suggests the gaze and narcissism, and a reversal that is entirely naturalised in the everyday organisation of our self-image. Public space is signalled by the formality of a very phallic obelisk centred on a large table, referencing prints of a war memorial in a park celebrated for its public toilets. Large blankets with intaglio and printed text and images curtain what one imagines are plate-glass windows, an implied vista beyond. Images of parks and their accompanying public toilets reside in this space, and a shoe plays the sounds of foot traffic.

The obelisk introduces the motif of the soldier and the war-zone. This is played on both an individual and collective level. Sexuality can be a war-zone, but it's not as simple as that. Emerson's work reminds us that fantasy is also a constructed, public zone that operates using tropes and metaphors that can be astonishingly over-determined. The three greyed-black images of the Abu Graibh atrocity; the abstraction produced by repetition and tonal reduction; and the metaphoric resonance of the use of three, bring home, literally, that particular atrocity's dependence upon imagery of the crucifixion and the lynchings of the Ku Klux Klan. Racism and fundamentalist intolerance have their end in the projection of a fetishised image onto an individual.

A curved wall covered with Emerson's prints of the late 90s plays with another dialogue, another mirroring: an adroit conversation between the revolution in decadence of *fin de siècle* Europe and Chinese appropriation of European revolutionary tactics during Mao's Cultural Revolution. Oscar Wilde

and Aubrey Beardsley meet the Chinese Courtyard Sculptures, those ceramic life-size figures which image the revenge taken on the landlord class by the peasant. Beardsley's angular face is seen through images of lacquered screens; Mao's soldiers hold a copy of Joris-Karl Huysmans's *À Rebours*. There seems to be no 'nature': all is culturally determined, but also all male, even when images of hermaphrodites emerge, reinforcing the constructed nature of gender and the persistence of sexuality and desire. These images move lightly between different cultural registers, suggesting links between sequestration and domesticity. Screens obscure and reveal as characters play hide and seek between their own and others' politics of liberation.

Relations between domesticity and childhood are there too: behind a soft focus screen *The Wizard of Oz* plays, duplicating itself only in its registers of colour and sound. The curtains in this section reference Oscar Wilde and Jean Genet; Wilde in Beardsley's image of him in the nursery chair, his book loose between his fingers, his head fallen in sleep. Here intimacy and domesticity come closest together.

But, in the bedroom things are more stringent. Hanging letters spell out *the heart is a lonely hunter*, and the text runs like an acrostic across and between other words: art, alone, he, one. The narrow bed with its incised blanket faces three images – the most recent of Emerson's works – of young soldiers in camouflage suits, visually teasing through the text, like a Lacanian meditation on the beauty of the image and the bleak horror of the Symbolic Order. The room also opens onto a bleak subterranean alley.

Indeed, the cohesion of (*are we there yet...?*) lies comfortably within its understanding of the ways that post-structural theories both articulate and produce queer experience.



Prints Charming and the Gobbet of Spit...Hushed Tales and Deadly Precision...

Neil Emmerson at the Blue Oyster

Carl A Mears

Emmerson has had a distinguished career as an artist in Australia. His singular practice extends far beyond the parameters expected to be met by even such a consummate printmaker, or one with a more cautious reach. In tailoring a politically complex exhibition, (*are we there yet...?*) for Dunedin, New Zealand, he employed a distinct synthesis. This allowed a glimpse of his sensibility toward materials, his experience with regard to spatial organisation, and an historical knowledge of extended sculpture practice which led to an experience far beyond the feckless arranging which often passes for "installation art", an unfortunate term whereby a volume of space is frequently transformed into a refuge for scoundrels.

The cultish Blue Oyster Art Project Space in a dank basement of central Dunedin is a mixed gruel of avant-tradition and assertive innovation, which often offers no challenge to the low ratskeller spaces, the crumbling décor, or the audience. Twilight Zone openings here are often furtive grabs for free beer and a hopeful chance to make a new friend...in the more conservative galleries near-by, comparable and other expectations are filled by similar knowing-codes and coding of knowledge. Culture there sloshes by in clean Chinese crystal.

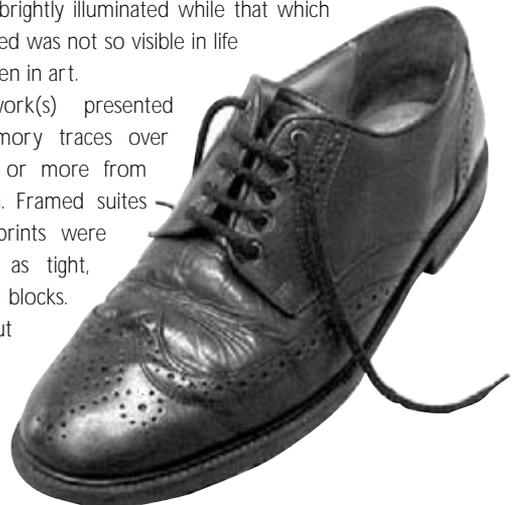
are we there yet..? Emmerson's opening with people included was a beautifully modulated and cunningly installed object, improvisation, image and

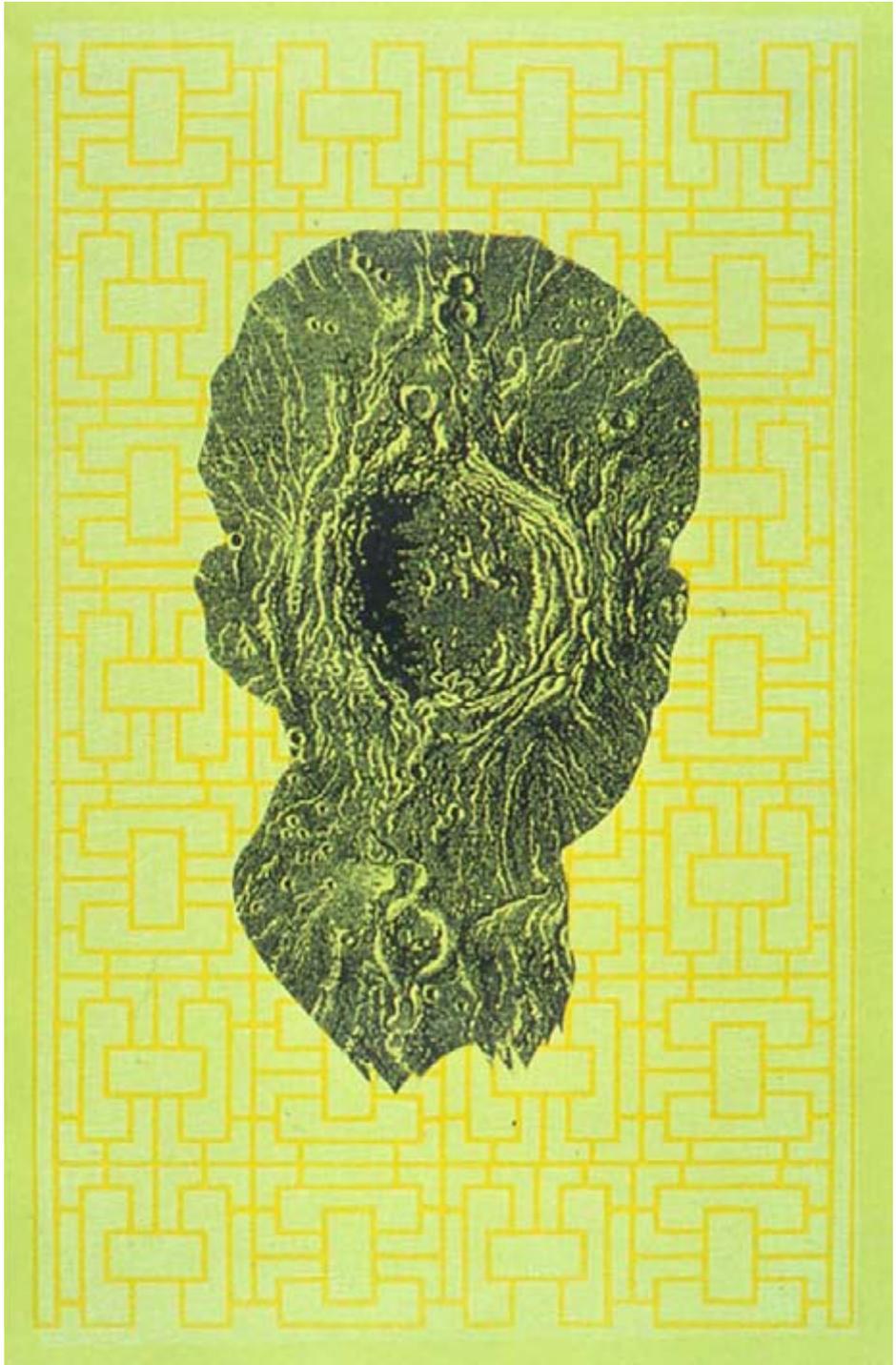
cryptography presentation. It offered no beer for the grabbing. It was very clearly an installed work of many parts whose needs made simple redecorating urgent in terms of work-content, and the alcoholic need of the punters was far less urgent than the extremes and needs of the matters at hand. The local and esteemed Emerson's brewery lucked out big time, but the poise and hushed poignancy of the work deserved this necessary discipline.

The most particular lighting allowed unusual glimpses of the shoe leather of cultural cruisers alongside those nifty, talking brogues of the artist. Part of the work – those leather singletons being loose acute accents from Emmerson's secret alphabet of signs, sat like anxious monitors awaiting the other to form a pair. Those shoes accommodated male feet only, nugget brown and spleen green. They conjured sounds of crunching gravel, and authoritative echoes of many yesterdays down many a garden path or up a gum-tree. Mumbled conversations, missed assignments, new propositions hovered about. Mix and match, maybe indicative of mutual failure, they drew the eyes down to the new greyed floor. Even the lamentable cracks there were drawn into things, annexed by dumb eloquence and a strong aesthetic of material and method.

For a gentle man he cracks a mean whip, and that space had jumped out of its skin and into another. But the light within the several gallery spaces was acute to the point of hurt, because it was the antithesis of the expectation of gloom and lazy hot-spotted small pools of glory in the blue histories of the Oyster. All the scars were now in relief. In Emmerson's show every thing was brightly illuminated while that which was revealed was not so visible in life – rarely even in art.

The work(s) presented were memory traces over a decade or more from Emmerson. Framed suites of small prints were presented as tight, large-scale blocks. Muted but bright felt drapes





held experience in stasis with laser-burn lines. Intaglio burns to set the short hairs standing, depicted other historic and cultural images alluding to the politics of innuendo or to unspoken knowledge; shaven-back green bas-relief made its felt presence as curtain, privacy, secrecy. Excess was evident – nothing was skimped but nothing was superfluous. It was all just right. The particularity of the laser drawings, the recognised buzz of shaven fabric, the urgency of the work ethic and the unique personality and generosity of the artist, revealed us to each other and maybe even to ourselves.

What was behind those grubby old windows? Or was it in front? What lay beyond them now while we were secret together here in public? Heavy felted folds hinted at Robert Morris or not. Joseph Beuys fitted the old space but not this new meticulous empire. Aesthetics of domestic life gave comfort to the wounded, insulated temperature, shielded sound; and gave instant intimacy to strangers. A spare procession of tiny, editioned images metred out a pointed pæn of praise to Goya and a strident anger at the torturers of Abu Graibh. Was that already three years ago? Three hundred? All our Demons were there. Or here? The up-front honesty of the man is heroic. The boiling politics of experience is served with elegant insight, decisive thought and such particularity that on this rare occasion the warts, bags, bumps and spots on each one of the audience were revealed in counterpoint

to our attempts at costumed elegance. We became simply simpering odd souls at odds with the ceiling, and as self-conscious in a way, as the art of Emmerson is in self-knowledge. Were we really posing? And for whom? *are we there yet...?* said Emmerson.

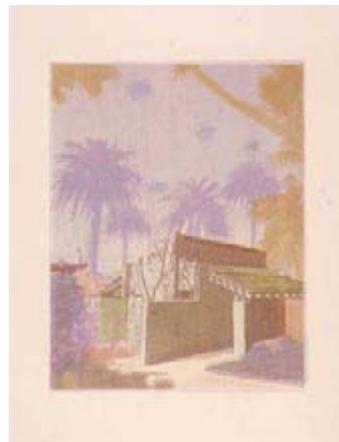
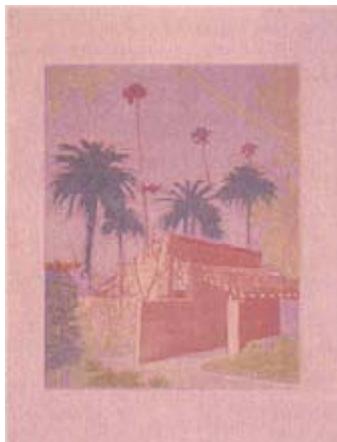
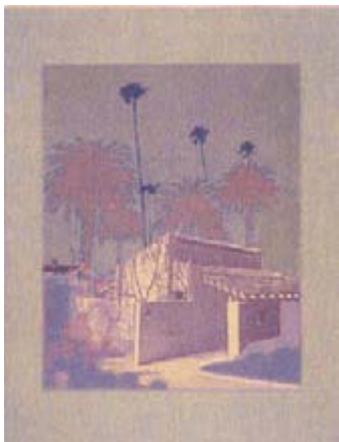
Exhibition Response #4

WHAM! BAM!

Ben Smith

In the Blue Oyster Art Project Space show entitled (*are we there yet...?*) Neil Emmerson transformed the gallery into a domestic space: the private interior world, the safe family haven, the chores that are executed for one's own bodily needs, the private lives of the people of the world played out behind closed doors with the curtains drawn shut.

Emmerson's domestic space is created through a tableau of domestic objects – pictures on the wall, a table, and a bed. The most striking are the curtains, large and weighty in both form and concept. These curtains, made from blankets, are drawn closed and have engravings pressed, and text shaved into them. They act as the delineation of the interior/private and



the exterior/public, the subject and the socio-political. Here the curtain is liminal and epidermal.

So to whose world have we, the viewers, gained access? Yes, another's personal realm, but why and in relation to what? And here we find the crux: this is not the nuclear family's domestic environment but the heterogeneous private world of an other. However, I do not feel like an invader of privacy on entering this other's world (it is an art gallery after all), I feel more a twinge of guilt, the guilt of rifling through someone else's closet. The sexualised closet is created by the dream of the middle-class family and is constructed from the outside by a moral code that prescribes any subject that deviates from the norm as an other. Indeed, in Western metaphysics one thing is always dialectically defined by its other.

A group of four prints entitled (*IWYS*) hangs in the 'living area' and features a small adobe building nestled amongst palm trees. The prints (lithography and woodblock, 1999) are re-worked in different colour separations. (*IWYS*) is a buried reference to a song by George Michael entitled *I Want Your Sex*. The original image was sourced from tabloid newspapers. Through subsequent publication of this image on the Internet, the building became widely known as the site of a major celebrity 'outing', when an undercover policeman coerced George Michael into a 'lewd act' and then arrested him¹.

"WHAM! BAM! I AM! A MAN! [...]

I choose, to cruise.

Gonna live my life, sharp as a knife,

I've found my groove and I just can't lose."²

Despite the bravado of his lyrics, on this occasion he did lose. Michael was recently reported to have said that he initiated the arrest intentionally, as it finally

settled the media's and the public's speculation about his sexuality, so he could finally "make my life about me"³. Emmerson's appropriation and its referents highlight the nature of the social queering inscribed on innocent bodies and the political (abusive) power mediated images can exert over society, groups, and subjects. The subtle use of this image can be seen in terms of a subcultural appropriation, where Emmerson quietly recodes a cultural sign rather than insisting on a more confrontational program.

Different but not quite other, the subcultural nevertheless attracts the sociological gaze. Indeed, it is often dismissed as a spectacle of subjection, but this is precisely its tactic: to provoke the major culture to name it and in so doing *to name itself*.⁴

Through this appropriation all viewers are in essence 'put in their place'. Through our decoding, we – the subject – are contextualised.

However, on another level, it is a queer re-appropriation, a taking back, where the image itself has been claimed by Emmerson as 'ours'. Using the visual art traditions of printmaking and this iconic image, Emmerson constructs a queer *community of memory*. The work acts as a monument – 'Lest We Forget'. In this way the image becomes highly politicised, as it not only represents the space where a cruel trick was played against a now publicly gay celebrity, but also highlights the methods that the socio-political gaze operates through continuous phases of marginalisation and alienation. And this is what the entire installation, this private/public space, implicitly asks of us - where do we subjects position ourselves, and will we ever get there?

1 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1879596.stm> as last visited on 30 May 2007.

2 George Michael's lyrics for the Wham song *Wham Rap! (Enjoy What You Do?)* [Unsocial Mix] (6:36) 7": Innervation / IVL A 2442 (UK) 1982.

3 See <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1879596.stm> as last visited on 30 May 2007.

4 Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1985), 170.

Exhibition Response #5

Act Natural Neil Emmerson

One of the more difficult things to do, whether you are challenged or feel involuntarily obliged, is to *act natural*. More often than not it will be in front of a camera that the suggestion is made and somehow you have to strike a pose that might best indicate the comfortable relationship that you have...with yourself. As if the camera wasn't there and you weren't being observed you struggle to develop the demeanour associated with the word *natural*. Like an inversion of the chameleon changing its surface to suit its exterior environment you conjure a pose that is considered your very own, a reflection of your true nature, the private architecture of your interior.

In 1830, Balzac attempted one of the first scientific approaches to the study of self-representation. He claimed that through the study of a person's habits, lifestyle, profession, carriage, gesture, speech, and dress one could be decoded and classified. He believed that there was a direct correlation between an interior essence and an exterior signification. He also hypothesised that these codes of signification, if subjected to a self-reflexive and individual practice, could render one a living work of art.¹ Now, if these codes were read in terms of a specific interiority producing a corresponding exteriority then one could imagine the reverse to also be true...that a singular, contrived exteriority could produce a corresponding interiority. In our regular, everyday lives, we are continually in the process of the construction, the maintenance, consolidation or the rearrangement of that construction of ourselves.

To *act natural* then is oxymoronic. If it is an act, then surely it's not natural...unless of course acting itself can be considered natural. "In matters of grave importance, style, not sincerity, is the vital thing."²

If you are an artist (whatever your individual means of cultural production or expression might be) this struggle is often carried out in the same terms through

your work. Are we obliged to consider what we make an expression of what we are? Can we, do we, construct ourselves through our practices or can/do we construct our practices through ourselves? Is it possible to construct, through a conscious manipulation of signs, a kind of practice to equally erase our natures as well as we might expose them? "To reveal art and conceal the artist is art's aim."³

This double movement is a fundamental signifier in the production of a space that might secret a queer presence. But that presence is invariably an absence in the scheme of this theory. A queer space is like the space in a mirror, uninhabitable, and the audience is more likely to see themselves reflected in that space than see the artist. The mirror is crucial and refers away from itself to the spectator in its two-dimensional spatial appropriation. The distinction between private and public (interior/exterior, same/different) is fundamental to a spatialised concept of modern subjectivity and playing with those codes can create slippages, doublings like in a mirror. If the terms are inverted then outside becomes inside and so the artist and the viewer have the same (different) interior, populated by incalculable others, ghosts of the cultural machine, the media, all the things that we share but that we don't imagine that we have to take responsibility for.

"If it is anywhere, the public is 'in' me, but it is all that is not me in me, not reducible to or containable within 'me', all that tears me from myself, opens me to the ways I differ from myself and expose me to that alterity in others."⁴

- 1 See Moe Meyer, "Under the Sign of Wilde" in *The Politics and Poetics of Camp*, Moe Meyer, ed. (London: Routledge, 1994), 76.
- 2 Oscar Wilde, from *The Importance of Being Ernest* as quoted in *The Wit and Humour of Oscar Wilde*, Alvin Redman, ed. (New York: Dover, 1959), 138.
- 3 Oscar Wilde, from *The Picture of Dorian Grey* as quoted in *The Wit and Humour of Oscar Wilde*, Alvin Redman ed. (New York: Dover, 1959), 62.
- 4 Tom Keenan, quoted by Fraser Ward in *Jeff Gibson's Taste in Men*, exhibition catalogue essay accompanying *Legends: Jeff Gibson*, shown at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1997, s.p.

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Bridie Lonie is the Head of Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin. She is a writer and has completed a master's project on theoretical frameworks for the art therapy encounter at the University of Otago in New Zealand.

Carl A Mears hailed from New Haven, Connecticut, USA sometime in the mid-sixties. He gleaned a lot in the ambience of a great university, and from its superior art collections and libraries gained a love of culture, learning and librarians. He is a Veteran of a Foreign War, and served in a junior officers' mess somewhere, or elsewhere. Until recently peripatetic he lives now at Walden Pond. He enjoys his own micro-radio commentary on life and on the arts where he hypothesises and hyperventilates fortnightly on a local radio station. Sometimes he writes things on paper, sometimes on walls.

Benjamin Smith is an artist and arts writer who completed a BFA majoring in Sculpture in 2006 at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic. Having directed the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Dunedin, he recently relocated to Glasgow, Scotland, where he is developing a research-based practise that explores processes of othering by dominant cultures. He also likes to climb mountains.

IMAGE DETAILS: PAGES 18 - 27

Page 18: Entrance to the Blue Oyster Art Project Space off Moray Place in central Dunedin, 2007.
Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

Page 18 below left: Installation view: Curtains: (*I was his...*) 2005, dyed and shaved woollen blankets (x2); (*falling boy*) 2000, printed laser engraving on woollen blanket (x1) each 230 x 160cm; (*black obelisk*) 2007, marquette, grey board, 75 x 18 x 18cm; (*table*) 2007, covered by (*red book cover*) 2000, dyed and shaved woollen blanket, 230 x 160cm; *The Rape of the Lock*, 1996; (*red shoe*), 2005. Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

Page 18 below right: Installation view: (*black obelisk*), 2007; (*table*) 2007; (*red book cover*), 2000; *Mirror*, 1986; (*IWYS*) 2000.
Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

Page 19 left: Installation view: *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, 2006, laser cut acrylic, brass swivels, lead weights, dimensions variable; *Wood Nymph Triptych*, 2006, screen prints, 112 x 76cm each. Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

Page 19 right: Installation view: (*are we there yet?...*), TV monitor, acrylic sheet, video loop; (*penance*), 2000, laser cut acrylic, plastic beads, lead weights, dimensions variable; *The Rape of the Lock*, 1996, 45 unique state colour lithographs from a suite of 123, 47 x 30cm each; (*red shoe*), plaster, laces, red acrylic paint, 2005. Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

Page 21. *Mirror*, 1986, (containing installation view), glass mirror, 150cm diameter. Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

Page 22. (*shoe*), 2002, containing sound piece - minimitter, cd player and fm transistor radio. Photo: Neil Emmerson.

Page 23. *The Rape of the Lock*, 1996, unique state colour lithograph, from a suite of 123, 47 x 30cm each.
Photo: Christopher Snee.

Page 24: (*IWYS*), 2000, 3 unique state colour wood block and lithography prints, from a suite of 13, 40 x 30cm each.
Photo: Neil Emmerson.

Page 27: (*penance*), 2000, laser cut acrylic, plastic beads, lead weights. dimensions variable.
Photo: Yvonne Caulfield.

EMBEDDED ECOLOGIES: TEACHING DIGITAL THEORY IN ART AND DESIGN

Susan Ballard & Caroline McCaw

This article was first written and co-presented as a paper at the MEDIANZ conference, Victoria University, Wellington, 8-10 February 2007. It is the initial proposition of a larger research project in which the two authors begin with reflexive considerations and conversations about the teaching of digital media theory to art and design students. The first part of the article outlines and positions our definitions of theory, media and ecologies. The second part of the article uses examples from our classroom learning practices to clarify how our notion of embedded ecology might be practiced.

THINKING ABOUT METHODOLOGY

Our paper was originally entitled "Embedded Ecologies – teaching digital theory in Aotearoa New Zealand". However, we realised early on that we were not talking about a physical or necessarily cultural location but rather about our disciplinary location. The project began with recognition. We are both researchers in a traditional sense and also design and art practitioners. We work in an environment where our students make things as well as study theory. Our hypotheses surround our experiences, both as academic 'makers' and through our observations in the classroom. Our position is, that if practice and theory are integrated and embedded within art and design educational experience, meaning is brought to theory and thoughtful positioning to practice. There is a wide range of literature on the theory/practice relationship within art school environments.¹ We draw on this material but in many ways diverge from it as we consider the impacts of students' experiences and knowledges from outside the institutional environment as equal to those they experience within it. This paper suggests that an examination of the wider contexts and cultures within which students operate can lead us towards a consideration of relationships of theory and practice within the classroom environment as a media ecology.²

DEFINING MEDIA ECOLOGY³

The interrelationship of three key terms: *ecology*, *theory* and *media* form a starting point for the position adopted in this article. Each of these terms has a varied political and social history and in recent times each has gone in and out of fashion.

ecologies

In a recent discussion of "media ecologies" Matthew Fuller broadly defines ecology as "the modes or dynamics that properly form or make sensible an object or process."⁴ Fuller's emphasis is on the formation and dynamics of media systems. His use of the term *ecology* draws upon Félix Guattari's formulation of ecosophy that examines dynamic systems "in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of those connections, and always variable, such that it can be regarded as a pattern rather than simply as an object."⁵

Guattari extends the definition of ecology to include human subjectivity and social concerns. This does not mean that everyone operates together to shared ends but that a social ecology is one born from dissonance, including the



Figure 1

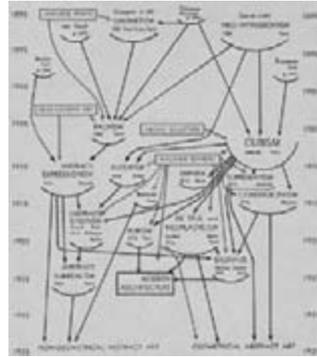


Figure 2

wider tensions of different material forces, be these human, spatial, cultural or linguistic as they operate alongside each other.⁶ So while we might isolate something (for example, a television advertisement) in order to study it, it is first necessary to examine the various contexts or systems within which it is embedded. These connections are necessarily part of the system in which the television advertisement is produced, and must be read. These ideas of dynamic ecological systems are not unique to media, but are found in a surprisingly diverse range of subjects and disciplines. For Guattari, ecologies are dynamic immanent systems.

Figure 1 illustrates one such a dynamic system. Across a park we can see 'desire lines', paths that have been walked and traced by the users of the park. Desire lines are found in urban planning ecologies (in many ways they serve as an urban test of usability) where people are first encouraged to construct their own routes across a given space and develop their own relationships to these urban areas before paths are laid. Desire lines traverse the formal concrete paths of a space. These common tracks leave material traces.⁷ Conversely, 'desire lines' may be identified as a result of poor urban planning, where users form their own tracks outside of formal paths. Both types of desire lines may be identified by the direction, shape and size of people's movement. The direction of a desire line is usually the shortest across a given space; the width of the line reflects the usage or demand for that particular route. Even given this understanding, a desire line can be prepared for but not necessarily predicted. As people trace paths through a park they are adding material layers that are manifestations of movements and flow. The paths are visible maps of transversal actions.⁸ To invoke the desire lines as a transversal within the media ecologies operating in our academic institutions and in the teaching of media theory to art and design students opens possibilities for movements *across* the multiple domains or disciplines we engage with rather than *between* them.

theory

In this discussion about desire lines we are slipping away from a definition of ecology and into the use of theory. What do we mean by theory? In art and design 'theory' is the field of ideas and their relationships, not things, objects or outcomes. Theory is a tool to think, make and play with. Figure 2 shows a well-known image (a book cover design) by Alfred Barr. It depicts the relationships of early modernism in art in 1936 and despite its problematic and historically specific categories maps theoretical and material movements. This time, however, they are not paths crossing a preexistent place like a park. Rather they generate and create material connections between immaterial representations, in this case between and across Modern art movements. Although Barr appears to be concretising flows and relationships within broad categorical imperatives, what he does is demonstrate the relational yet provisional formation of material clusters. His map does not and cannot perfectly map the paths taken by abstract and cubist art. Instead he argues for an immanent and located perspective, albeit one located within the

mainstreams of Western European art history. The 'park' in this sense is not a material or pre-existing field but is a set of art practices recognised by their relational networks. The 'park' becomes a "visual machine for the generation of connections" in formation.⁹ It is here that Barr's approach to art's histories shares something with our approach to working with digital media theory. As we will discuss, by mapping possible theoretical connections, art and design students are able to form material connections in their work.

media

Sean Cubitt has argued that "media mediate – they are physical and dimensional and informational structures of real materiality that communication embodies in."¹⁰ 'Media' is the third term addressed in this article. Media do not operate in isolation and because of this have proven extremely difficult to define. In digital contexts media are often recognised as technologies – television, film, a photograph, MP3 recording etc. However, the conflation of technology and media means that attention is frequently paid to the properties of things, resulting in a closed definition of media. We prefer Cubitt's active model of media as processes. For example, Raymond Williams' groundbreaking study of television demonstrated that television was much more than the technology of broadcast and transmission but the whole changing economic, cultural and social sphere within which television emerged.¹¹ As processes, media are dynamic operations within social and cultural frameworks. Using media and media theory to consider the ecological relationships offers us two perspectives. Firstly, this relationship allows us to examine the way in which technologies are embedded in different material forms. Secondly, media theory demands that both teachers and students pay attention to the movements of materials across and through media. Within current contexts such as the cell phone or PDA one medium may mimic, copy, or perform the properties of another. The mobile phone is a medium through which other media perform and operate. Media play out in multiple layers. And media are pervasive, always operating within our social lives. Media are both object and process, not simply a layer within which other things are contained. The relationship of theory and practice in art and design contexts are most evident when we engage multiple layers of mediation.

all together now, how ecologies, theory and media relate

We are convinced that theory should not be disassociated from experience but embedded within experience. Within this balance, theory and media are patterns of activity and not objects of study. They are tracings like the desire lines crossing the park, dynamic ecologies. The problem we perceive with theory taught in Design and Art schools – and particularly in digital programmes – arises when theory is mistaken as an object and becomes objectified and separated from practice. As we have begun to demonstrate, theory is a dynamic system operating within other systems. Theory needs to be understood as both the model of the context and the context itself – and this is what we call an embedded theoretical approach. In art and design learning, embedded theory helps to develop conceptual and contextual understandings of both making and made.

LEARNING ECOLOGICALLY

We understand both theory and media to operate ecologically within open, networked and dynamic systems. However, as a tool for making things theory is contradictory. Many of us expect theory to be something that confirms existing hunches... 'there must be a theory about that'. But the way theory is often experienced by students in tertiary education is as something that either disrupts and challenges their established beliefs or fills in gaps. As educators we do not need to work inbetween but *across* these twin expectations. What tools do we have to understand and communicate these ideas and relationships? How might we identify movements across the multiple domains or disciplines we engage in. How might we traverse various experiences in a manner that would

be useful for students? And how might we encourage students to consider this an ecological model or relationship between theory and practice? The remainder of this article will use an ecological approach that includes media contexts and concepts to examine two teaching examples where theory has been embedded in material practice.

THE OTAHEITE DOG: MATERIALS AS A TOOL FOR THEORY

Many examples of theory and its relationship to media are found in art's history. The very construction of art history as a subject of study is based on the identification of different fixed media.¹² Twentieth-century approaches to media in art history formed around notions of media-specificity. Media-specificity is a particular deterministic approach based on the idea that media should present and engage the content most appropriate to them. Rosalind Krauss argues that medium-specificity is not about materiality but suggests "a structuring appropriate to the formal characteristics of a generic medium."¹³ Media-specific approaches assume that a specific medium should produce media-appropriate sensory affects for a viewer. That is, a painting should investigate the effects of surface and flatness rather than theatrical or representational movements and sound. Krauss argues that even though modernism's fracturing of representational space allowed the appearance of new media, media do not exist in isolation from each other nor do they sit apart from some kind of external theoretical apparatus.¹⁴ Being able to separately identify medium (the work's processes and formation) and materiality (what it might form from) of a studied art work becomes necessary.



Figure 3

Media-specificity can seem removed and irrelevant for students engaging directly with the study of media objects. However, it is the very need to be able to distinguish media from material that generated our first example. In an art history course we were discussing *The Otaheite Dog* (by Charles Catton, 1788) as a useful example of the role of art in colonisation and the construction of naturalist discourse in the eighteenth century. As with many other images at the time, strange hybrid pictures had resulted from the notes and drawings of an explorer as they were transformed by the later hand of the engraver across time and distance. The colonialist definition of the exotic, in this case in the Pacific, is more about the needs and desire of European culture than it was about the transliteration of a Tahitian animal. In discussion though, it became apparent that these art history students (who were not art makers) were unaware of any difference between a drawing and an aquatint. Their reading of art history prioritised image content and not the material art object. An aquatint could not have been made in the South Pacific at this time. Because they did not understand the materiality of a print, they were unable to see the shifting media contexts – cultural, economic and social – that surround the production of image representations of the South Pacific.

Although it may seem obsessive on my part, for the purposes of the discussion I felt it was essential that they understood how an image (as object) might have travelled around the world pre-telegraphy, and how in that very slow process of materialisation and due to the very materials and processes being used, some 'information' may have been lost or mis-understood. It was important that the students understood both the physical material and the media processes of the artwork. An aquatint is an early form of mass media imaging able to be reproduced and circulated, unlike the original sketch. In order to be able to read the artwork, they needed to be able to separate the apparent media of the work from an assumption of fixed materiality.

This example raised the question of generating and introducing materiality as a necessary aspect of media ecologies. The cultural, economic and social relations to the material reproduction of the image we looked at are also a part of our learning ecology. I introduced issues of media and materiality within the classroom, so that such details became explicit, rather than exceptional. These details were able to be read and understood both historically, as well as within a contemporary digital context.

Most students have grown up on a diet of digital media and understand all images by way of digital content. This presupposed digital image obscures the material image. This was the case with *The Otaheite Dog*, a 300-year old print, but also evident in its online or printed version. The image connects its media. Additionally, if students cannot see that a work might have material form how can we expect them to recognise materiality through theoretical paradigms? While in the teaching of art history, media and materiality have their own charms and loaded histories, the question is raised: is there a difference between the art history student, savvy with their personal digital technologies, utilising cross media platforms within their personal and academic lives, and the student who incorporates these mediated understandings into their very subject of study? How can we compare the art history student above with the digital youth below and use both methods in the classroom? The interfaces that our students experience are multi and cross media.

The democratisation of media tools means that any student (given full access to these tools) can, for example, quickly achieve a short video project. This places us all in a position not unlike that which Nam June Paik found himself in when first handed a Sony Portapak – where to point the camera? His seminal video of the Pope visiting New York – which has attained mythical status as the first handheld video made by an artist and has recently been discredited as factually impossible because of a lack of battery power in that particular model – was filmed either out a window or out of a moving taxi cab and remediates a pre-existent media event, transforming it into something totally other. In Paik's video we can locate the intersection of media and practice.

To make this argument, we find ourselves stuck with another problem. The problem we have here is that the word 'media' means two things. Firstly, media refers to the solidification of materials into fixed boxes, and secondly, to the circulation of information. So for example, digital media includes computers, cameras and phones, but also

what those things do – they circulate, they inform, they store. This circulation of media in social life relates to Guattari's ecological definition of media: media are both the object and the process, not simply a layer upon which other things are placed.¹⁵ Students need to be able to identify other social and historical media contexts in order to recognise their own.

theory as a tool for making

As the previous example demonstrated, we approach digital media theory from the perspective of not only what it does, and what it is, or appears to be, but how it behaves. Furthermore, our classroom strategies seek to analyse the social and cultural terrain in which digital media operate.¹⁶ Overall, we are concerned with the integration of theory and practice. Because it is in the integration of theory, or what we are calling embedded theory, that we locate the materiality of media in art and design digital practices. To restate, materiality happens not in between but *across* media, time and space. For example, audio media were once associated with the material object of the 'wireless' – a large solid material receiving object centred in a living room – and are now distributed across many different modalities, producing a very different understanding of 'wireless'.

Our next example of embedding theory in practice comes from teaching a new media theory course. Students began by studying the principles and practices of interface design. Their two projects involved reading and making, theory and practice. The first part of the course involved reading theory, discussion and blogging. Once I was confident that students could both recognise theoretical paradigms and articulate their experiences of the media, we started on field trips.

I encouraged the students to explicitly make connections between theory and practice in order to enrich their practice and for them to recognise theory embodied in practice. Initially this was through analysis of news media stories, blogs and personal experience of the latest invasion of Iraq by the US. Students learnt to identify their own specific cultural, historical and social positions both within the class and in relation to current news media stories both official and unofficial.¹⁷ That is, they learnt to use cultural and media theory and this analysis not simply as vocabularies for studying things but as tools for making things. Their analysis of media stories reflected their own positions and locations.

These students then worked collaboratively on the design of an online environment, a virtual hotel. The virtual hotel was used as a simulated training environment for the teaching of hotel management to tourism students. Fundamental to the project was the understanding that both the design and tourism students already had lived experiences of hotels. They all understood, without tertiary education, the role and material experience of visiting a hotel. This enabled and informed their scripting of the hotel as an interactive environment, beginning with classroom role-play and paper-based story boarding. The students developed an online graphic chat environment that involved numerous role-played scenarios, each involving customers, staff and managers in a hotel. Their ability to trade places, to imagine the place of each character and their various scripts and relationships to each other, was compared to the circulating media of war we had spent time in and with during our blogging project.

In order to assist students to develop the connections between theory and practice and the two projects, three aspects were introduced to the class in a connected way. First, we all played an online game, one similar to this. You know the type, *America's Army* is an example of an online first person shooter game where people who don't know each other run around a fixed 3D space and shoot each other. Ironically, this game is used to lure game players into recruitment for the US Army. A branching class discussion evolved from this example and their previous analysis of Gulf War media, official and unofficial. This discussion connected topics ranging from historic and current US military involvements with the internet, through to the relationship between digital simulation, warfare and the material world.

Directly after shooting out the enemies online, we walked down to the nearby "Laser Force" centre, where running around a wooden maze we played out essentially the same game, shooting classmates in a game



Figure 5



Figure 6

of warfare. In this example, the mediated stories of war were first traced onto digital media through online game genres, and then experienced in a more material and embodied way. The students inevitably found that though a shift in media affected their experiences, their roles and gameplay essentially remained the same.

Through shifting the modes of experience surrounding representations of war, the students were able to understand the difference between mediated, embodied and received experiences. The material, contextual, social and historical relationships of digital media were embedded in one class. Students experienced models of theory they had read about in a lived way. And they really did engage with theory, and with new realisations. This example, while different in content and context (and student membership) from the art history class described earlier, managed to cover many of the same sorts of topics. Historical specificity aside, issues of the materiality of different media and its ability to communicate in different ways (and their own materiality as participants) became experienced and communicated in an immediately relevant fashion.

We then had to abstract and translate this understanding back to the project of the virtual hotel. How did their knowledge of the difference between mediated, embodied and received experiences contribute to the way in which they would construct the interactions in the virtual hotel?

Aware of the problems we encountered within culturally and gendered situated experiences and perceptions of war and its retelling through official and unofficial media, students began by telling and drafting stories of their experiences in the hospitality industry.

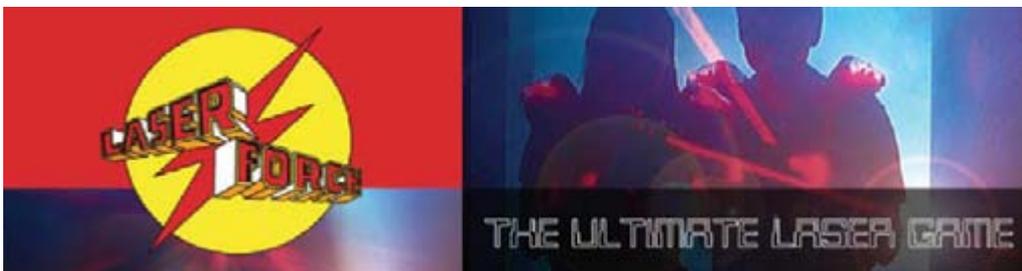


Figure 7

It emerged that a variety of stories were also evident in the class, with students of different class, race and gender having had wildly different experiences within the hotel environment. All had experienced hotel service, either as employees or guests, and through the retelling of stories could better understand the problems of defining predictable roles. Their personal experiences brought a breadth and depth to a project that could be analysed and critiqued in terms of mediated, embodied and received experience. They began to see how even the highly crafted relationships experienced within the hotel environment and hospitality industries could be 'read' as mediated. This in turn affected their 'writing' of the virtual hotel and its many scenarios in terms of media. The key success of this project, however, lay in the collaborative, offline and embodied classroom discussions. It is here that students as individuals had to share and face social realities that each other had to offer, and realise their own roles and experiences as necessary sources of knowledge in an ecological relationship with the media they were producing. This circulation of media in social life relates again to Guattari's ecological definition of media: media are both the object and the process, not a layer upon which other things are placed that may be seen as separate or discrete from other relationships we have to each other in our social world.¹⁸

While the first example highlights the necessary understanding of material processes in order to read images, this second example reminded students of their material participation in media processes in the design and experience of images, spaces and interactions which are rich and informed by material and lived experiences. Students actively reflected upon their sense of living in a material world, and in turn designed in relevant and thoughtful ways for the online interaction experiences of others.

IN CONCLUSION: EMBEDDED MEDIA ECOLOGIES

This paper maps a personal exercise, and represents the opportunity we have had to reflect on our respective teaching and learning practices. Currently, we find ourselves situated within a Polytechnic sector that is being broadly directed towards 'professional and vocational training' and within shifting contexts and definitions of 'research'. These directives return us to the question that formed the beginning point for this research project: how does our use of theory in the classroom both shift and employ the existing knowledge of media savvy youth, who are learning to make and use digital media? For those planning to enter the digital creative industries this approach seems to offer students a set of tools that will both advantage them and fulfil our own agendas based on the importance of critical thought. What does it mean for theory to be embedded? In 1928, French writer and thinker Paul Valéry wrote:

Just as water gas and electricity are brought into our houses from far off to satisfy our needs in response to a minimal effort, so we shall be supplied with visual and auditory images, which will appear and disappear at the simple movement of the hand, hardly more than a sign...I don't know if a philosopher has ever dreamed of a company engaged in the home delivery of Sensory Reality.¹⁹

It is no longer the philosophers who dream of such a home, but the marketing and development departments of major digital companies who push towards this "sensory reality" of digital visual and aural experience. It is necessary to engage a historically informed analysis that does not begin with the advent of digitality, but, as our first example above demonstrates, engages in the examination of the impacts of mediated thought on all image making and media production. An embedded digital theory that examines the histories and materials of digital media, and the role of ourselves within this, needs to become part of the toolbox that students use for making things. It begins with an awareness of their own place in the reading of images and media texts and shifts to a sense of personal relationship to the produced image or media text. This does not mean that practice is unified by theory, but that examination of media images and texts must be accompanied by contextual and critical thought. Our students are already familiar with digital media, but we hope that by employing an embedded approach we can also encourage students to be materially, contextually, socially and historically aware of the media they work with and live with - as a part

of an ecological system. By employing an approach that is embedded and uses transversal connections, we aim to produce students who use theory in a way that does not lie between disciplines but cuts across them.

The next step in this project is to do work on further methods and contexts within which we can do this. Rather than simply analysing existent media objects, our students must be able to discuss and critique the objects that they are creating themselves. They must be able to cross registers, whether vernacular or corporate, material or media, social or cultural; and engage in these processes mutually – aware of the changes that occur when they do cross. In doing so, they will understand themselves as embedded actants within a participatory media culture.

Figure 1: People defining desire lines in the paths they take to cross a space, Otago University, Dunedin, 2007 (photograph courtesy of Caroline McCaw).

Figure 2: Alfred H Barr Jnr, chart for dust jacket of book published to accompany the exhibition *Cubism and Abstract Art* (The Museum of Modern Art, New York: 1936, image courtesy of MoMA from <http://www.moma.org>).

Figure 3: Charles Catton, *The Otaheite Dog*, aquatint, from *Animals Drawn from Nature and Engraved in Aqua-tint*, 1788 (courtesy of New Zealand Birds, www.newzealandbirds.co.nz).

Figure 4: *Virtual Hotel*, visualisation prototype. Vector works model, Michael Findlay and students at Otago University Design Studies, 2005. The *Virtual Hotel* was a collaborative research project between researchers at the University of Otago Design Studies (Caroline McCaw, Michael Findlay), the Tourism Department (Richard Mitchell) and Otago Polytechnic (Martin Kean, Design and David Scott, Tourism).

Figure 5: <http://www.americasarmy.com>, screenshot published on site as last accessed on 12 March 2007.

Figure 6: www.laserforce.com.au/ screenshot as last accessed on 12 March 2007.

* The research for this project has been supported by an Otago Polytechnic Research Grant.

- 1 See in particular Susan McKenna, "Theory and Practice: Revisiting critical pedagogy in studio art education", *Art Journal*, Spring 1999.
- 2 "Digital theory is responding to the process of change, describing and analyzing a medium (or cluster of media) still being born." Henry Jenkins, "The Work of Theory in the Age of Digital Transformation", *The Brain Trust DV*, 2006. Available from <http://www.braintrustdv.com/essays/work-of-theory.html> (as last accessed on 14 December 2006).
- 3 Neil Postman writes that "Media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving." Neil Postman, "The Reformed English Curriculum" in *High School 1980: The Shape of the Future in American Secondary Education*, ed. Alvin Eurich (New York: Pitman, 1970), 160-8.
- 4 Matthew Fuller, *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT, 2005), 2.
- 5 Fuller, *Media Ecologies*, 4.
- 6 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London and New York: Continuum, 2000).
- 7 James A Throgmorton & Barbara Eckstein, "Desire Lines: The Chicago Area Transportation Study and the Paradox of Self in Post-War America," *The Three Cities Project*. Available from: <http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/3cities/throgeck.htm> (as last accessed on 10 June 2007). See also Brian Holmes, "Drifting Through the Grid: Psychogeography and Imperial Infrastructure" *Springerlin*, (Issue 03/04: World Provinces). Available from: <http://www.springerlin.at> (as last accessed on 10 June 2007).
- 8 In his analysis of Guattari's multiple uses of ecology Andrew Murphie highlights transversal movements and process as the main operations of a media ecology. The focus for Murphie is on the process and activation of the transversal as it cuts across existing lines, processes, operations or systems. Andrew Murphie, "Putting the Virtual Back into VR," in *A Shock to Thought: Expression after Deleuze and Guattari*, ed. Brian Massumi (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 188-214.
- 9 See WJT Mitchell "Ut Pictura Theoria: Abstract Painting and the Repression of Language", *Critical Inquiry*, 15 (Winter 1989), 348-371. In his discussion of Barr's diagram Mitchell comments that the diagram is inherently paradoxical. He writes: "Barr's abstract grid... opens onto a history and a social reality that complicates itself - representation as a quest for purity" (367)

- 10 Sean Cubitt, "re:[Ada_List] Digits and Names," *Aotearoa Digital Arts*, Sun July 18, 2004, discussion list archived at http://list.waikato.ac.nz/pipermail/ada_list/2004-July/date.html#start (as last accessed on 18 July, 2004).
- 11 Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (London: Fontana, 1974). McLuhanist visions dominate media theory. See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, Mass. & London, England: MIT, 2002).
- 12 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay Upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (London: Noonday, 1963). See also, Rosalind Krauss, "A Voyage on the North Sea": *Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).
- 13 Alex Potts, "The Interrogation of Medium in Art of the 1960s" *Art History*, 27, no. 2, April (2004): 296. Potts extends this discussion saying that "Greenberg envisaged the art work as being structured by very basic visual qualities that...governed how we saw the material world, namely form, colour and optical effect. As a result the qualities of substance and materiality that fascinated artists such as Beuys were considered by him to be formally irrelevant." (298)
- 14 Victor Burgin explains that "it is essential to realise that a theory does not find its object sitting waiting for it in the world: theories constitute their own objects in the process of their evolution." Quoted in Martin Lister et al., eds, *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London & New York: Routledge, 2003), 62.
- 15 See John Hanhardt "Dé-Collage/Collage: Notes Towards a Re-Examination of the Origins of Video Art" in *Illuminating Video*, eds Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1990), 71-79. See also Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- 16 Formulated as an aesthetics of media practice that is, at the same time, an ethics and a politics: within this class there was an Iraqi student from Baghdad, Iraq and an American student as well as the usual mix of New Zealand and international students. The major media event covered by mainstream media at this time was the invasion of Iraq by US Troops. Various stories and perspectives emerged around this media event from the constituency of the class.
- 17 We found examples from mainstream media and blogs from within Iraq to compare the telling of stories across media. We also identified the inherent problems of cultural generalisation and that power cannot be inverted through our cultural relationship with the internet. We saw that power and privilege were not easily exchanged or relinquished.
- 18 See John Hanhardt "Dé-Collage/Collage: Notes Towards a Re-Examination of the Origins of Video Art" in *Illuminating Video*, eds Doug Hall and Sally Jo Fifer (New York: Aperture, 1990), 71-79. See also Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm*, trans. Paul Bains and Julian Pefanis (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- 19 Paul Valéry "the conquest of ubiquity" 1928, quoted in Anne Friedberg, "The Virtual Window," in *Rethinking Media Change*, ed. David Thornburn and Henry Jenkins (Cambridge, Mass. & London: MIT, 2003), 337.

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SHIFTY

Blue Black

*Formless: A User's Guide*¹ by Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois turned into a god-damn slippery experience: shifting and twisting. To try and contain and define the many facets of *formless* became a hindrance to gaining access to its meaning. The nature of *formless* cannot be defined. I see *Formless* as a living document that continues to develop within oneself as it is not confined to the pages of the book. The manifestation of it in my work gave me a taste for its flavour.

Georges Bataille talks of *formless* in terms of the 'operation', 'task', 'job' and 'description'. The focus is not the meaning of the work but the description of an operation, stating the influences, connections and mechanics of the process and related interests. In fact, I am consumed by the action of doing a job. It is as important, if not more important, than the finished product. The meaning lies in the doing as directed by the materials. In particular, the movement of doing gives me a heightened sense of being in 'the flow' of things. Taking a risk when making something allows for the element of chance. My work evolves from a position that embraces this element.

Bois discusses "base materiality" as posited by Bataille where he concerns himself with "matter" and being involved with "the thing-in-itself" of daily life and with the body's functioning in that life "...it was a question of disconcerting the human spirit and idealism before something base, to the extent that one recognized the helplessness of superior principles."² Material itself with its raw and basic presence brings a

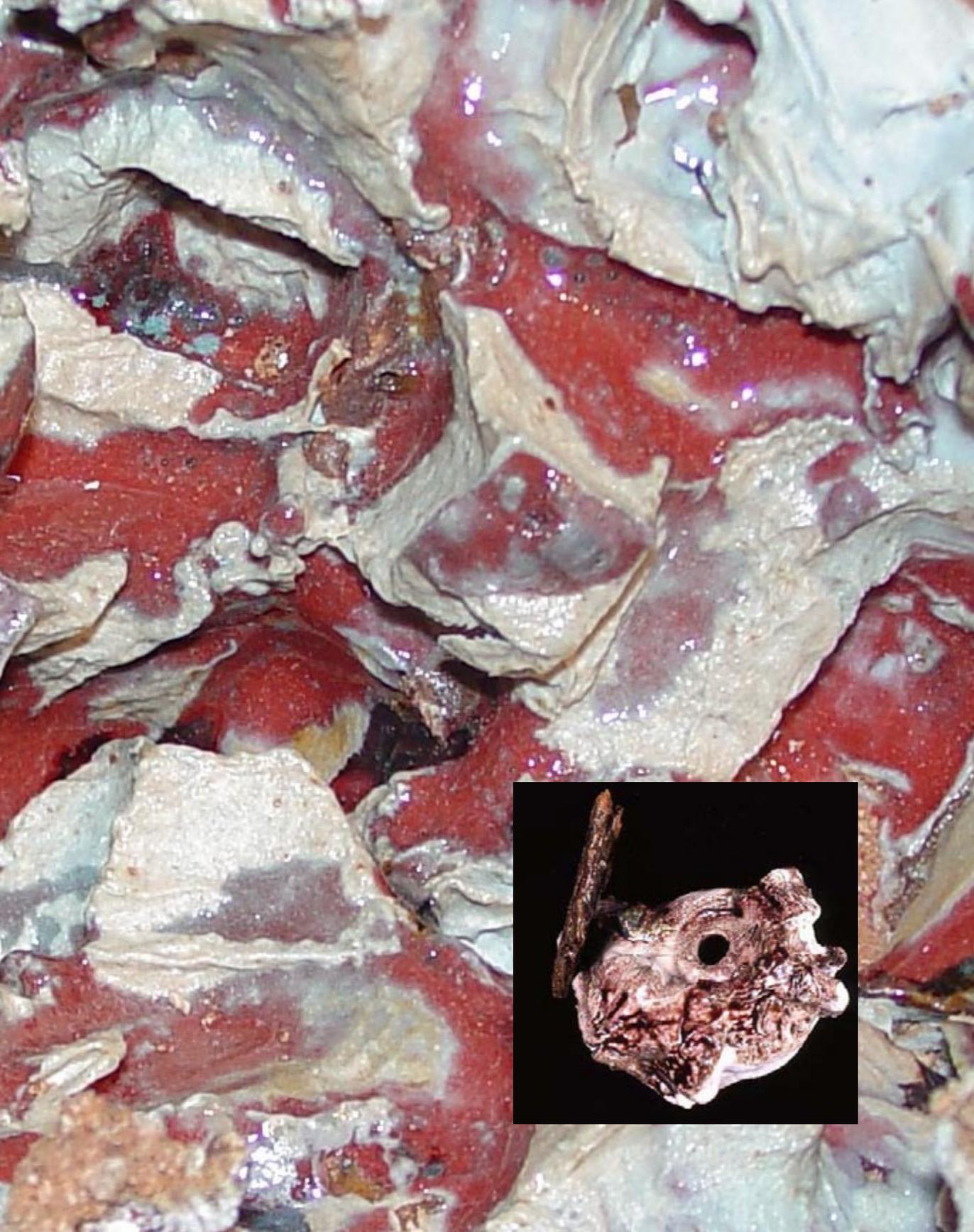
shock factor to an artwork. Bataille's perspective brings everything down to a position lower than culture and form, where everything has its own excrement and is sacred as such, as sacred as god. His notion of the "heterogeneous" relates to "base materiality" in its consideration of all things being equal and consisting of many different parts, a spicy concoction which he calls the "other". The opposite of the heterogeneous is the homogeneous: the monotonous, the regular, the routine, what "should be".

While experimenting with discarded materials and objects, dirt and clay slip, I intuitively slap various components together. I wrap it all together and once-fire it at 1280°C without being too concerned about the final outcome. In the process of making I involuntarily go to places related to the horrors of darker days and of my 'shadow self' (the dark side of being human). Something vaguely familiar in the suggestion of such places appears when I view my work but before I can grasp it, it appears to become *formless* and thus most elusive.

In conclusion I can say that my making goes beyond a comfort zone and breaks the mould of social order, fronting up to daily life and death with all their anxieties and fear. The spirit of *formless*, as I see it, keeps me honest and has certainly rattled my cage of formality. Through the process of making, a connection is made to the self through an experience of *formless*. A sense of liberation, individual freedom and wonderment contribute to this. With ceramics as the medium there

Opposite image: Blue Black, detail of *Untitled* (glazed and combined with a slipped egg carton bound with string and then fired), ceramics, 2006.

Inset image: Blue Black, *Untitled* (cardboard moulding with a bit of tree attached), ceramics, 2006.



is always also an element of surprise when opening a kiln. The process of making and seeing what one has made acts as a tremendous seduction that entices me to further exploration. Thus, when I look at a body of my completed work I see many different parts of a larger group – heterogeneity – with each piece being a step or increment within the exploratory research process of my practice.

The seven works shown here are from my 2006 exhibition at Segue Gallery, Dunedin, entitled *Other*. They originated from discarded materials and objects that were dipped in clay slip and then once-fired at 1280°C. They can be held in one's hand and this provides an indication of size. They should be seen together as they are heterogeneous parts of a whole that is never complete but always in process.

- 1 Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).
- 2 Georges Bataille, "Base Materialism and Gnosticism" in *Documents* 1, 1930, no.1: 8 as quoted in Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 54.

Blue Black has been involved with clay for many years. She has exhibited in New Zealand and has worked on four large commissioned projects in Southland. She completed a BFA in 2005 and is currently working with ceramics and drawing towards an MFA with a research topic entitled "Against the Grain". Her recent works, *The Inside Story*, was exhibited at Objectspace in Auckland during October - November 2007.

* All photographs by Motoko Kikkawa and the artist.

Images opposite:

Top left: Blue Black, *Untitled* (originated as willow branches), ceramics, 2006.

Top right: Blue Black, *Foreign Body* (slip mixed with kapok, cabbage tree leaves and bow tie inserted in polystyrene mould), ceramics, 2006.

Middle left: Blue Black, *Untitled* (originated as cabbage tree leaves and seed heads), ceramics, 2006.

Middle right: Blue Black, *Stomach* (scrap of polystyrene inserted into slip mixed with kiln rubbish, kapok and a stick), ceramics, 2006.

Bottom: Blue Black, detail of *Organ* (originated as coconut husks laid together in the kiln during firing), ceramics, 2006.



THE SNAKE PROJECT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY FRAMEWORK OF DISCUSSION

Sophia Lycouris, Jamie Billing,
Tracy Cordingley & Philip Breedon

Figure 1: *Snake* project video demo
(screenshot) with animation of the
sculpture designed by Chris Forbes and
movement by dancer Joanna Geldard.



INTRODUCTION

by Sophia Lycouris

In early 2006, Philip Breedon, myself (Sophia Lycouris) and Jamie Billing, three academic researchers based at the Nottingham Trent University (Nottingham, UK) with backgrounds in the respective areas of control technology, choreography and product design, started a conversation about movement, artificial intelligence and simulation in relation to product design. Tracy Cordingley, a specialist in both product and interior design, joined the original team at the end of 2006, when the conversation had become more specific and funding had been secured to complete the development of a specific project under the title *Snake* by the end of 2007.¹

The aim of the initial conversation in early 2006 was to develop a common language (and an appropriate methodology) in order to explore the potential of applications/products which have an emphasis on the artistic yet clear potential for subsequent expansion into the commercial sector. During this period, the research process was generative and not driven by any concrete practical problems or issues. Instead, problems or issues arose as part of the research process through discussions about each others' interests and previous work. This process led to the realisation that the team shared interests in issues of space and perception, audience engagement and interactivity. A 'product' emerged through this dialogue, as an example of how the issues identified and explored could be

practically addressed in the context of a given artefact. This idea involved the development of an interactive kinetic sculpture (under the working title *Snake Robot?*) which could engage viewers in 'dance duets' through reacting to their movements (Figure 1).

After this point, the character of the dialogue between the four members of the collaborative team gradually shifted towards a different direction, since the character of the research process also changed as a result of the decision to focus on the development of an object with tangible form and specified purpose. Clearly the research process was no longer generative but strictly determined by the need to resolve a series of practical problems so that it was possible to build a concrete object. The initial inclination to identify common positions about the themes of space and perception, audience engagement and interactivity on the basis of the three different disciplinary perspectives of control technology, choreography and product design was replaced by the need to establish boundaries and identify differences. The project became a typical case study on interdisciplinary collaboration, through addressing the creation of a common language (or at least a common framework within which all members of the collaborative team could fully understand the principles of the development process) and the under taking of an on-going negotiation process in relation to how far each one of the participating disciplines could extend their established boundaries, before unacceptable disciplinary compromises were unavoidable.

All four members of the collaborative team have contributed to this article in order to unravel the challenges of the interdisciplinary collaborative working process and introduce thoughts and ideas which emerged as observations about the character of this process. It is important to clarify that, since this article was written when the project was still in development, the observations made and communicated in this text should not be perceived as conclusions. Conclusions will come at a later stage through engagement with appropriate methods of reflection, once the project is completed and tested in the public domain. However, in projects (such as *Snake*) which bring to dialogue academic research and artistic/professional practice, the outcomes of reflection which emerge directly from within the day-to-day developmental processes have a unique value and, therefore, deserve to be shared with an appropriate wider audience for their own sake. Such observations primarily relate to perceptions about the creative process and the experiences of the researchers involved, at a point in time during which these perceptions remain unaffected by the successes and/or failures of the completed project, after this appears in the public domain. There is a clarity and immediacy in these thoughts as they transpire in the on-going debate of the collaborative team or through practical work taking place in studios and workshops, which disappears as time passes. Observations and conclusions which crystallise after the completion of projects tend to become affected by how projects are received by their audiences or users, even if these ideas only relate to the developmental process of this work.

If it was possible to capture the immediacy of a live working process in a written text, this would be the main purpose of this article. Yet I do not think that this can ever fully happen and, as a choreographer who engages with wider issues about the documentation of the live process,³ I suggest that, instead, this article functions as a written account of crucial decisions which determined the character of the working process, which are specifically presented under the light of the disciplinary contexts informing these decisions. The article includes three parts: on choreography, on product design and on control technology, written respectively by myself (Sophia Lycouris), Jamie Billing with Tracy Cordingley, and Philip Breedon. The structure of each one of these sections reflects the specific structures of thought and decision making protocols which are resonant within the disciplinary boundaries in which the four researchers operated. The sections on choreography and product design both interrogate the character, status and purpose of the interactive sculpture through posing the same set of four questions (what is it? who is it for? what is this experience? what is the rationale of the project?) in order to provide responses from within their different disciplinary perspectives. However, the final section, which focuses on control technology, unfolds as a series of propositions about relevant technical information which indicate some unexpectedly close links between critical approaches to choreography and design and technology-based research.

PART ONE: CHOREOGRAPHIC POSITION

by Sophia Lycouris

The relationship between choreographic practice and interactive technologies is highly complex and multi-faceted and, on one level, depends on the perspectives and politics of choreographers involved, how they use existing techniques, which precise techniques they use, whether they develop anything new and the various implications that all these decisions have for the meaning and purpose of the work and the (power) relationships between artists and audience. In the field of interactivity, technical solutions and how these are implemented and towards which ends, also have repercussions for the relationship between technology and the user. Furthermore, through participating in this dialogue as an equal partner, the practice of design brings its own techniques, practices and political implications of all choices in these fields, to add one more layer to this complex as well as complicated debate. Within this edifice, notions of control cut across the various relationships between people and techniques, artists and audiences, designers and customers, engineers and users. The very idea that a kinetic artefact could be designed and produced to react to the movement of people around it comes with a multiplicity of meanings and effects which emerge from the 'how' and 'why' technological solutions are adopted to support the development of a 'product' in order to fulfil needs identified on the basis of various sets of assumptions about relationships between makers, objects and users/audiences of these objects.

1.1 WHAT IS IT?

There have been various attempts by members of the *Snake* team to describe and name the (artistic) role of the artefact, to say that the outcome of the project would be 'thing a' or 'thing b'. Somehow it seems that the question 'what is it?' can be only replied to by the choreographer, or if any of the other collaborators attempt to provide an answer, this will be an articulation of what they think the choreographer is doing. There is an assumption that the choreographer is leading the project through providing a brief which will determine the contributions of specialists in other areas who will use their expert knowledge to support the materialisation of this brief. So, according to this approach, a choreographer is making a decision to create a 'thing', a technologist is developing an appropriate technology which will support this 'thing' and a product designer is providing a suitable design for the most effective materialisation of this 'thing'. The 'thing' in this project has been described as a *performance robot* by the technologist, as an *interactive piece* by the designers and as an *interactive kinetic sculpture* by the choreographer (myself).

Through providing an alternative concept about what is the 'thing' which is being created and insisting on taking into account this concept, I automatically fulfilled traditional expectations about my role, which is to be *in control* of the 'thing' which is being created. Therefore, as a choreographer, I did not manage to challenge the assumption that I am leading this project and this means that I have a substantial degree of control over certain aspects of the project such as its concept. In actual fact, I more or less accepted the idea that, as a member of the collaborative team, I am responsible to provide a framework of guidance which will allow my collaborators to operate comfortably and use their specialist knowledge in the most beneficial for the project way. This is in line with two main principles of the traditional definition of choreography included in the following excerpt:

The choreographer is the author of the choreography and arranges material using an individual process to present an end product for performance. Choreographers are responsible for the total visual imagery and expect to negotiate with musicians, costume, set and lighting designers.⁴

So what would a choreographer normally do?

To choreograph is originally to trace or to note down dance. This is the meaning that Feuillet, the inventor of the word assigns it in 1700... Since Feuillet's time, the acceptance of the term has undergone a singular evolution, and today 'choreography' refers, not to the activity of notation, but rather to the creation of dance, or to 'composition'.⁵

It is interesting that famous choreographers of various periods have not provided definitions of choreography but, instead, have spoken around the term. Here is an example:

...choreographic movement, used to produce visual sensations, is quite different from the practical movement of everyday life used to execute a task: to walk, to lift an object, to sit down. Choreographic movement is an end in itself, and its only purpose is to create the impression of intensity and beauty. No one intends to produce beautiful movements when rolling barrels or handling trains or elevators. In all these movements, however, there are important visual dynamics if one will look for them.⁶

Situating my work in the choreographic lineage of movement-as-an-end-in-itself (not because I value formalism but because I am fascinated by the physicality of movement and how this is communicated to the viewer as sensation rather than information), I am interested in an approach to choreography which focuses on how elements of time, space and dynamics constitute movement compositions. This is a principle assumed by a number of modern dance choreographers who created abstract (rather than narrative) work and has been succinctly indicated by Lois Ellfeldt as the “use of energy in space and time”.⁷

In traditional choreography, whether narrative or abstract, the final result is always the product of the authority of the choreographer and a manifestation of their signature. However, the carefully crafted movement material which is created through processes of traditional choreography cannot exist outside the specificities of the physicality of the bodies of the dancers and their technical abilities, since these dancers provide the vehicles through which the choreographed movement occurs in space and time. This particularity defines the production of movement material as doubly *controlled* by a) the choreographer and b) the performers. It is interesting to notice that these two types of control are closely inter-connected, since the more specific and demanding the choreographer is, the more *controlled* the environment is for the dancers, whereas the more experienced the dancers are, the more they are in *control* of the production of movement material during the performance moment.

But how would this be outside the context of traditional choreography? And, furthermore, how does the element of interactivity impact on these definitions and techniques? If it is possible to argue that the interactive artefact operates as an artificial dancer, the outcome depends on the sophistication and accuracy of the interactive system and the accompanying computer programming. There is a distinct element of control here: the more accurate the system is, the more *controlled* the outcome (product or behaviour of the product) is. But who controls this outcome? A second manifestation of a double control system becomes apparent. There is one type of control which relates to the production of the artefact and this lies with the control of the makers and most importantly, the programmers of the interactive mechanism. At the same time, there is another kind of control which relates to the function of the artefact: the audience or users are the ones who exert this type of control.

To compensate for the fact that I accepted to play a leading role in the development of the concept of the *Snake* project, I attempted to challenge assumptions about what it means to be a choreographer and what kind of elements are acceptable within the practice of choreography, through introducing expanded notions of choreography. This is in line with the development of my practice in recent years and, most importantly, the last six years during which I explored the potential of *interdisciplinary choreography* in the double sense of: a) borrowing lenses and techniques from other art forms (as well as disciplines more widely) in order to develop movement-based artistic work with dancers and b) applying choreographic principles on materials other than the dancing body.

Approaching the *Snake* project from the perspective of interdisciplinary choreography, I came to the decision that the most useful framework of guidance was to think of the artefact as a *sculpture* and, more specifically, an *interactive kinetic sculpture*. Through bringing the term *kinetic* into the project I also wanted to share my fascination for the long tradition of kinetic sculpture which celebrates the phenomenon of movement beyond the human body, for patterns and qualities of pure movement without purpose other than the celebration of movement for its own sake, as this emerges from carefully designed *kinetic* systems. Guy Brett suggests that, in kinetic art, “the

visual is immersed in the phenomenon of energy".⁸ Similarly, in the *Snake* project I focus on the dynamic aspects of the situation which are communicated kinaesthetically to the viewer rather than information about meanings which is communicated through (dance) movement.

1.2 WHO IS IT FOR?

To address this point, I am going to ask a different question first: 'but why is it a *sculpture*?' The main element behind my suggestion to conceptualise this artefact as a *sculpture* is my interest in the understanding of choreography as a dynamic process which affects the viewers'/users' perceptual access to space, and colours how they experience the presence of objects in this space. Through adopting this perspective, a shift of priority and focus takes place and the element of 'performance', which was traditionally associated with the physical manifestation of the choreographic outcome, loses its primary significance. This approach challenges the traditional assumption that choreography is only an artistic technique through which intricate movement material is created to be 'performed' by human bodies (or any elements that can replace them, such as robots). I suggest a shift towards the conceptualisation of choreography as dynamic process in order to redirect the research focus towards the exploration of relationships in choreographic processes instead of the study of elements through which choreographic manifestations take material form.

This approach becomes increasingly relevant as choreographers become increasingly interested in creating work outside traditional theatre spaces. In non-theatre environments, the space of the performance event can expand and physically include its audience so that 'performance' can manifest itself everywhere in the physical (and sometimes virtual) space shared by performers and audience. In non-theatre environments, performance does not only happen on the 'other side'. Traditionally this 'other side' of the space is the theatre stage, an area inaccessible to the audience, in which dynamic changes take place, manifested as movement events which are 'performed' by performance agents, such as human bodies. Through challenging the traditional spatial divide between audience and performance event, *control* becomes diffused between the makers of the artefact (as a past activity and precondition of the situation) and the performance of the technology in dialogue with the physical involvement of the viewers who trigger the interactive mechanism (in the 'present' moment of the performance event as this unfolds in space and time).

Through undertaking previous research, I introduced the notion of *choreographic environments* to emphasise that it is possible to use a shared space within which the choreographic action and its audience can co-exist. This work presented the idea that choreography can focus on the function of dynamic changes within spaces (rather than movement sources, such as the human body) through contributing to the construction of dynamic environments. However, in the *Snake* project, the role of the dynamic environment is secondary, as there is a clear emphasis on the very source of the movement event (rather than how this contributes to the creation of a dynamic environment and how this is perceived or experienced by viewers/users), yet this element is an artefact instead of a human body. The idea of *sculpture* accommodates better the challenges of this paradox in which there is a focus on a single physical element in the space, which is however not placed in a dedicated area of the space inaccessible to the viewers. It can be argued that the spatial role of a sculpture, at least in its traditional sense, is to be part of an environment, and that a sculpture of this type is not usually created for spaces inaccessible to the viewers. It is the idea of sculpture as a physical element which has been created to be part of the public space, which is implied here. The combination of the terms *interactive* and *sculpture* provide appropriate means so that the diffusion of control between makers, artefact and viewers/users is located within an appropriate conceptual framework.

The *Snake* sculpture will be situated in a room, not necessarily in the centre of this room, but in such a way that viewers can have physical access to it from all directions. Sensors built in the body of the sculpture will be recording the movements of the viewers in order to pass information which will trigger 'appropriate' movement responses in

the sculpture. It is anticipated that the viewers/users will be motivated to respond through movement. This form of exchange between viewer and artefact will constitute a 'duet' relationship between the two. The core of the future research will concentrate on the study of the conditions of movement exchange between artefact and user. Experiments will be conducted on how specific movements of the sculpture can motivate the viewer to respond with one quality of movement instead of another. There will be a focus on how the movement of the sculpture affects the user 'corporeally', and therefore what kind of movements are being generated by the users as a result of them experiencing a specific movement quality generated by the sculpture; furthermore, how the movement of the users 'affects' the movement of the sculpture, how this movement is being recorded by the sensors of the sculpture, and finally how the information recorded feeds into the interactive mechanism so that the exchange can continue through new movement produced by the sculpture which will affect the viewer accordingly and so on and so forth. During this stage, there will be opportunity to explore relationships between the viewer and the artefact and how these two elements share control over the emergence of the 'dance duet' as an event unfolding in space and time. At a later stage of the project, it will be explored if the sculpture can be developed as a commercial project, which will be used as a training tool for children with disabilities who will benefit from developing their movement skills. This phase of the project will introduce further controversies in relation to where control is located within the project and how it is distributed between those who designed the artefact and those who use it.

1.3 WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE?

In the discussions with the research team about the character of the movement of the sculpture, I emphasised the importance of avoiding an anthropomorphic approach: the sculpture should not look like a human being, or remind one in any way. My assumption was that, the less unidentifiable this artefact is, the more its movement is expected to contribute to the development of an 'atmosphere' or 'mood' which should affect the viewers' perception at a corporeal, perhaps visceral, level instead of only engaging their intellect. The purpose of this work is to stimulate the viewers to express themselves in movement through responding to the movement of the sculpture. The specific aim of this 'dance duet' is to provide an appropriate physical and emotional setting so that a dialogue about feelings can emerge through the medium of bodily movement.

A necessary step in the development of the project was to provide information about possible movement qualities that would characterise the sculpture so that the designing process could start and technical solutions could be explored which would support effectively the purposes set for this artefact. In order to avoid that audience members attribute anthropomorphic or other roles to the sculpture (since this would prevent them from engaging with it at the basic experiential level required), I tried to approach this task in the most abstract way. With the awareness that this is a practically impossible instruction (which would however work if it was used as a direction towards which the project should develop rather than as a strict rule), I suggested that the movement of the sculpture should be subtle and curvilinear, "as if a line was moving in the space, leaving a delicate 'trace' behind." This instruction still remains a considerable challenge for the other members of the team and has stimulated a number of interesting responses which have provided starting points for the development of appropriate technology and product design solutions.

The control technology specialist translated the visual brief of a "line which moves in a subtle and curvilinear way, leaving a trace behind" into the idea of undulating movement, and concluded that, if the artefact was structured as a series of vertebrae connected together into a kind of 'spine', this was a good basis for the development of efficient design solutions. It was then useful for him to introduce the metaphor of a 'snake' which was accepted by the team, and became part of the title of the project, which, as mentioned earlier, was initially called *Snake Robot*. It is interesting to observe that the word 'snake' does not offer an accurate description of the visual impression that

the sculpture is expected to provide. The artefact will not look like a snake but will be developed on the basis of a principle of movement which underlines the movement of snakes. However, the concept of 'snake' was particularly helpful at the early stage of development because it offered a common ground for the communication of ideas between the members of the research team.

An animation has been created of the final artefact which is currently used in exhibitions and presentations about the project (Figure 1). In a recent presentation,⁹ audience members suggested that the artefact and the way it moves in the animation reminds them of a plant which is moved by the wind. This idea prompted another member of the audience¹⁰ to think of the potential of this artefact as a source of alternative energy. The basic idea was that people could have such sculptures in their gardens and 'dance' with them on a regular basis to generate energy for their houses! This suggestion was welcomed by the collaborative team, as worthwhile to pursue during later phases of the project. Thus elements of control were also introduced into the process of the long-term development of the project through the team's engagement with feedback provided by audiences/users and peers.

1. 4 WHAT IS THE RATIONALE OF THE PROJECT?

One of the main aims of my interdisciplinary agenda in this project has been to encourage the collaborative team to find appropriate ways to foreground ideas about what they think this project is (or can be) from within their own perspectives of technology and design rather than on the basis of what they assume choreographers do traditionally. This is a delicate area, as a number of heterogeneous factors co-exist within a web of highly complex relationships between practicalities, concepts, techniques and approaches defined by widely existing disciplinary boundaries and professional fields, as well as separate elements beyond these fields. For example, there has been extensive discussion about whether the artefact should be standing on the floor or hanging from the ceiling. The latter was particularly convenient for technical purposes. However, this suggestion was not matched with an appropriate concept and, therefore, did not appear suitable for the project.

It is possible to notice that the very notion of 'concept' (which seems to be the validating factor for any 'good' decision in this situation) originates in very specific disciplinary contexts, perhaps the contexts of artistic practice (choreographic practice in this case) and design. It is clear that a certain type of disciplinary practice has determined crucial developments in the project situation which affects/controls the outcome distinctively. It becomes challenging to examine the conditions under which the idea that 'all disciplines involved in this project should be encouraged to foreground their perspectives on equal terms' is operational in this project. And indeed is it possible for such an idea to operate unconditionally? How can disciplinary control be eliminated in these complex negotiations between conceptual and practical aspects of a project, and is this ultimately possible? The following section explores the complexity of this issue from the perspective of product design.

PART TWO: PRODUCT DESIGN PERSPECTIVES

by Jamie Billings and Tracy Cordingley

Traditionally, within the context of product design, the final 'outcome' of a project is *generally* referred to as an 'object' or 'product'. The object itself is developed against a pre-determined set of 'design criteria' (or brief), and is designed for a particular purpose - whether that be practical, aesthetic, symbolic or the more recent hypothetical and critical designs¹¹. Regardless of the intended role of the object, the product itself would have a clearly defined purpose and its nature, meaning and identity would all be intrinsic to this function.

It became apparent, however, when attempting to provide a 'label' or definition for the final outcome of the *Snake* project, that there were a number of issues raised relating to the interdisciplinary nature of the project and the three different contextual frameworks from which it was being conceived.

It was always taken for granted and celebrated that the three disciplines involved with the conception of the final outcome would have their own perspective of what the final outcome should exist as – governed by the knowledge framework of their own discipline. However, when it becomes necessary to establish a common ground, and in this case, make decisions about the actual role and purpose of the outcome, definitions and meanings can quite easily be seen as conflicting.

Regardless of whether a firm definition is established, and a common language/label agreed (hence, there would be nothing to prevent the final outcome, due to its multidisciplinary development, having a multitude of different meanings and values), it is imperative that each discipline engage in their own debate and discussion regarding the object's meaning.

Therefore, from a product design perspective, how do we define the 'object' within the contextual framework of the *Snake* project? What is its nature, spirit, meaning and identity? What are we trying to communicate through this product? These are all important questions which, from a design perspective, need both discussion and clarification. Only when these ideas are sufficiently formulated and externalised can the design of the object be successfully conceived.

2.1 WHAT IS IT?

the technological object

In contemporary society, recent technological developments are rapidly redefining existing models and definitions of 'the object' or 'product'. As these new technologies continue to emerge, traditional conceptions of the product as a solely 'physical' entity can no longer be sustained. Today we live our lives through an increasing array of technological products that have become mediators of a variety of new virtual spaces and experiences. These products often extend into complex information systems, as well as our own physical architectural environments. But how do we define such complex multifaceted technological objects?

It is now taken for granted within the design profession, (and in some ways has become somewhat outdated), that products no longer exist as definitive, static 'three-dimensional objects'. As early as the 1990s the new design concept 'four-dimensional design' entered the foreground of academic debate, opening up the doors for product design to now exist as a much more multi-disciplinary practice. According to John Thackara¹², just as the 2D was concerned with graphic communication, the 3D with craft and industrial artefacts, 4D design was all about electronic interactivity¹³. In Thackara's opinion 4D design was "the biggest challenge to face the design profession since the Industrial Revolution"¹⁴. So what is it, beyond the electronic interactive nature of these products that determines them 'four-dimensional', and more importantly within the context of this particular discussion – can the *Snake* be defined as a four-dimensional object?

Although there have been a variety of definitions provided for four-dimensional objects, the one provided by Alec Robertson, one of the original conceivers of this new design paradigm, appears most relevant to this discussion. According to Robertson, 4D design is a "dynamic form resulting from the design of the behaviour of artefacts and people in relation to each other and their environment"¹⁵. Hence, the complex and non-material form of these new consumer products opens up more multifaceted functional and kinaesthetic relationships and movements between objects, people and their environment. It is such possibilities that extend 4D design beyond the traditional boundaries of digital interactive technologies and introduce it to the physical world of human 'performance-based' practices such as choreography.¹⁶

Whilst it becomes immediately evident that cross-disciplinary collaboration, (particularly within a number of specific disciplines), would become increasingly necessary to the development of these new four-dimensional objects, traditional educational structures within product design do not always appear to accommodate this¹⁷. The interesting aspect of this project, however, is the richness of its cross-disciplinary development and also the

nature of the particular three disciplines involved. Hence, from the perspective of four-dimensional design, bringing together the disciplines of choreography, control technology and product design could be seen as an exemplary working model. It is within this context, that the final outcome of the *Snake* project could be considered a four-dimensional object; a product which is less defined by its three-dimensional enclosure, and more by the dynamic relationships and activities that it both enables and encapsulates.

(new) product design ¹⁸

As the boundary between what we understand as 'product' becomes blurred, the role of the product designer and the nature of the profession itself needs to be continually renegotiated. Whilst the traditional knowledge/skills framework of the discipline may still have an important role, the fundamental shift of products from the 'hard' and 'static', to the 'soft' and 'dynamic', catapults the profession into a new interdisciplinary arena. The 'interactive architect' Usman Haque¹⁹, suggests that such a transition, (within the context of his own profession), has redefined meanings and roles. According to Haque, as "pervasive computing encourages users to configure their own space [and] people become architects of their own spaces (through their use), the word architecture ceases to be a noun, and becomes a verb."²⁰

Within the context of product design, it is now taken for granted that a variety of new skills and abilities are essential to the practice. Product Designers today come equipped with a vast array of new, so called 'interactive' skills and abilities; crossing the boundaries of graphic/web/multimedia and system design. Whilst these new skills and abilities may enable the (New) Product Designer to engage and practice within these new disciplines, there is an overriding lack of understanding and consideration for the 'non-material' kinaesthetic behaviours and relationships of these new four-dimensional objects – with the main focus for development of most technological products being on their efficiency and 'ease of use'.

In order to develop products which provide meaning and value to our new technologically mediated lives, the discipline of product design must now develop new types of interdisciplinary relationships and a more contemporary knowledge framework. From a (New) Product Design perspective, the *Snake* project is an encouraging example of a project which attempts to harness such new working practices, engaging in the much needed cross-disciplinary discussion and development process.

2.2 WHO IS IT FOR?

to brief or not to brief?

Within the profession of product design defining the 'end user' of the product is an important part of the design process. This would be something that is initially specified in the design brief ²¹ and later further developed by the designer. Within the commercial context that product design commonly sits, the end 'user' of the product is normally classified in terms of 'a market' or 'consumer group'. Hence, the target market would be something that the designer (as an integral part of the design process) would attempt to 'profile' and define as accurately as possible in order to provide a detailed insight into the values and aspirations of their potential customers.²²

Whilst the practice of product design may not always exist within such a consumer-driven framework, the establishment of a clear picture of 'who' the design is intended for remains integral to the design process.²³ The 'who' or more commonly referred to 'end user' of the product plays an important role in defining both the aesthetics and functional elements of the product – and generally exists beyond, and in many cases in spite of, the personal values and aspirations of the designer.²⁴ It is this objective, customer/user-driven aspect of design that, it could be argued, differentiates it from general arts practice – where the motivation for projects and pieces of work may be driven more by personal interests/aspirations.²⁵

Within the context of the *Snake* project, during initial development discussions, it became immediately apparent however, that the 'who' part of the project had not yet been established. Whilst there was a clear understanding and knowledge framework of what the *Snake* was going to be designed 'to do', and the subsequent nature and meaning of the exchange and interaction between the object and the user – the users themselves and their demographic had not yet been considered. It also became apparent in these early discussions that the object-to-user interaction and experience was to be largely dictated by the choreographer (the originator and leader of the project) and would be driven by personal research expertise and interests.

From a product design perspective, the notion of working without any specified external user/scenario/context, i.e., someone or something tangible that could be worked towards, was seen as a very difficult task. Hence, after much discussion between the *Snake* team a decision was made to develop a 'brief' to identify a basic set of criteria for the object to be designed against. Whilst the debate regarding the content of the brief was long and challenging, a relatively detailed brief was eventually developed for the *Snake* project – formulated by the designers. Included in the brief are some general guidelines for the aesthetic/functional elements of the object, possible aesthetic influences/inspirations for the design and a time-frame for the project. The 'Target Users/Viewers' section of the brief however, (which identifies the 'who' part of the project), is still rather vague and has been defined at this point of the project as: "a broad demographic, not restricted by any factors other than the locality of the physical gallery space and the range of visitors it receives".

Although the market, from a design perspective, is still largely undefined, it became evident through discussion within the *Snake* team, that the final 'public' context and delivery of this project, i.e., an exhibit at a variety of local and national public gallery settings, prevented any further user definitions being made. It was agreed, however, that the traditional product design methods of obtaining 'user feedback' through testing the product on a selection of its 'intended audience' would be a worthwhile exercise. Hence, a general audience demographic for a number of possible gallery spaces is currently being sought – with a view to establishing an external user feedback forum at key points in the product's development.

The question as to whether this project benefited from developing a predefined brief and undertaking user-feedback/audience validation can only really be answered at the end of the project. Such exercises, however, could be viewed from the onset (particularly within the artistic context), as being somewhat restrictive – providing an unnecessary framework to a project which is predominately about identifying new, previously undefined models. Furthermore, it could also be argued that the exercise of developing a brief and the overriding need by the designers to identify a firm set of guidelines from the beginning, was in fact a response to designers' own needs to remain within the 'comfort zone' of their own knowledge framework/discipline. The interesting aspect regarding the final brief, however, was that whilst it seemed to provide a basic platform from which to start the project, it still appeared to leave sufficient space for the required level of exploration to take place. It is believed that this was achieved through sensitive dialogue and debate within the interdisciplinary *Snake* team during its development process.

design ethics?

Whilst it is acknowledged that there are many advantages of exploring and developing new types of behaviours/interactions between people and technological objects outside of any socio-cultural constraints, the issue of the 'design ethics' of the final 'outcomes' of the project also needs to be considered. The need to address such an issue, from a product design perspective, is further heightened by the fact that the context of the 'who' for this project could not be clearly established from the onset. Hence, whilst the project is centred, (for exploratory reasons), on the relationship between people and the way they interact with a technological object, it is important to establish how any newly defined 'models of experience' between 'humans' and 'machines' could eventually affect sociological relationships and of course culture. The main questions that need to be addressed through this project,

therefore, are what are the potential threats/opportunities of any new models of experience identified/developed within the socio-cultural framework and how could/might this affect, for example, the value/nature/role of future 'popular' technological products?

2.3 WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE?

experience of visual aesthetics

An important element, from a product design perspective, that also needed some form of definition through the design brief was the aesthetic requirements of the object. Whilst it was fully acknowledged by the designers that the physical representation of the *Snake* would be largely dictated by the technological decisions made prior to the development of the brief, the designers felt it necessary to develop a set of principles for the physical manifestation of the *Snake* itself – in an attempt to provide some form of experience through the object's visual aesthetics and form.

aesthetic influence/inspiration

In order to provide something tangible to work from, beyond the technological function and experience of the object, the designers identified a number of possible visual influences for the design of the object's aesthetics. These were generally defined as: Traditional Eastern Dance Culture/Aesthetics; Middle Eastern Architecture/Detailing and Islamic Art/Sculpture/Textile Design. A number of 'mood' boards were subsequently developed to provide visual referencing material to aid the design process. These particular sources of inspiration were selected based on their cultural relationship to the possible context of 'snake charming'. It was acknowledged, however, that any referencing to these concepts in the physical design would need to be approached very sensitively, allowing the *Snake* to nurture its own aesthetic qualities.

the 3D form

As pointed out the physical, three-dimensional form of the *Snake* was largely dictated, prior to establishing the brief, by technological decisions and limitations. Hence, it was already established that the *Snake* would be constructed from a series of disc-based 'vertebrae', each containing three pneumatic actuators. In the early prototype however (as shown in Figure 2), the discs themselves had been made from acrylic and were circular in form – each one being identical in size. Based on the inspiration material developed, the decision was made by the designers to change the basic shape and size of the discs. The existing identical circular discs of the object, the designers felt, limited the potential aesthetic qualities of the object and made it appear somewhat sterile and standardised. A number of full-scale models were consequently developed to test a variety of possible shapes and sizes for the basic 3D object (see Figure 3).

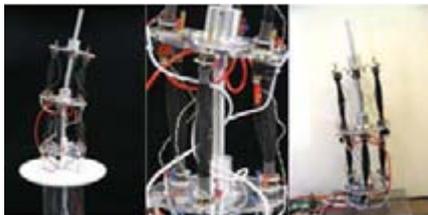


Figure 2

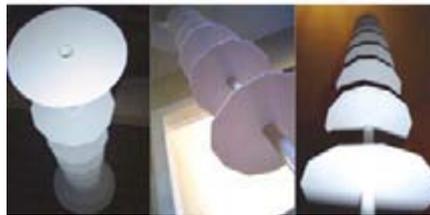


Figure 3

After discussions within the *Snake* team regarding these early prototypes, a number of decisions were made relating to the 3D form of the *Snake*. Firstly, due to anthropometric data and transportation restrictions, the robot would now only have 9 'vertebrae' and not 10 – making the total height of the object now approximately 1.8 metres. At this slightly smaller height, the object could be accommodated in a variety of different spaces, and would not (it was hoped), intimidate or overpower its audience/user through its scale.

The second major decision that was made regarding the object's form was to increase the size quite significantly of the lower discs (the bottom now being as big as 440mm in diameter) and to graduate the discs smaller towards the top of the object – to reach the much smaller size of 160mm disc diameter at the top. This, it was felt, would give the 3D object a richer, more fluid and sculptural quality, which may compliment its interactive kinetic nature (see Figure 3). Furthermore, it was also identified in the brief that "the overall aesthetic and experiential qualities of the outcome should (as far as we could define this within such a project), be 'delicate' and 'sensitive' with a certain level of 'finesse'." The team also felt that this new form helped to create such a 'visual aesthetic'.

Alongside this change in size, two other major decisions were made by the team regarding the basic 3D form – in an attempt to create the desired aesthetic qualities in the object. The first one was that the bottom disc was now to be a 'dodecahedron' shape rather than a circle, and the graduation from the bottom up would also be in form and size. Hence, the discs would now morph in shape from a full dodecahedron at the bottom to a full circle at the top. Again, the aim here is to create a form with movement, and dynamics within the 3D object itself, which would compliment its experiential qualities. It has also been decided, in an attempt to further enhance the aesthetic qualities of the object, to look into the potential of sandblasting the acrylic discs, again following similar gradient/morphing principles employed within the form.

In light of the above, the intent is to give as much consideration as possible to the technological/mechanical detailing of the object and to consider the possibility of detailing or 'hand crafting' any physical engineering components or 'finishing parts'. Hence, it is acknowledged that the final outcome may be one of deliberate 'over-design/over-detailing' to possibly 'charm the *Snake*'.

sustainability of use

The final issue that was identified by the designers as something that, at the very least, should be considered in the design of the *Snake*, was the question of the object's 'lifespan' or 'lifecycle'. Within the context of product design, the issue of sustainability is now an integral part of the design process – particularly within the context of technological products.²⁶ Hence, when viewed from a product design perspective, there are a number of important questions that could be raised regarding this issue. Firstly, what happens to the object over time, could it age gracefully for example? Secondly, and perhaps of most relevance – how is the object to be disposed of after use – could it have an afterlife?

Although it is fully acknowledged by the designers that these issues aren't necessarily integral to the successful development of the *Snake* and its aesthetic/experiential qualities, it was felt that this could, (if integrated sensitively within the design), provide another 'meaningful layer' to the object. Hence, after discussion regarding these issues the following concept was developed regarding the *Snake* and its 'sustainability of use': throughout the process of the development of the final object, the *Snake* team would attempt to retain any components of the final design whose use had 'expired' during the development process. Each component would then be clearly labelled with their expiry date and reason for failure, with the final intention of providing a secondary sculpture (made from these components) alongside the 'live exhibit'.

At the time of writing this paper, a full-scale prototype of the basic 3D form is under construction. However, it is acknowledged that the physical manifestation of the object at this stage, may once again, initiate further changes

to its design. The design and development process of this object to date, however, has revealed a number of interesting points, particularly regarding working methods/roles and responsibilities assumed within the project.

From a (New) Product Design perspective working within the 4D design framework, such high focus of attention on the development of the physical 3D 'static form' against a predefined 'design criteria', could be seen as the designers simply working within their traditional practice models. Hence, despite working within an interdisciplinary team, the question as to whether the product designers here have simply done what they always did, i.e., specify and design a static object in response to the client's needs (whom in this case can be said to be the choreographer/leader of the project), does need to be raised. However, this notion is challenged if we look at the deliberate 'open-ended' nature of the brief itself that was developed by the *Snake* team and the acknowledgement that this was only a preliminary 'working document' to 'kickstart' the project. Furthermore, the development of a physical prototype of the 3D form, to be used by the interdisciplinary team to externalise/visualise and to a certain degree 'test' some of its 'four-dimensional elements' within a selection of its intended audience/users, further extends existing working boundaries. Hence, from this perspective, it could be argued that a new model of product design may be starting to evolve here – one which enables design to operate more as a 'facilitator' of a 'continuous process', rather than simply as a definitive manufacturing process.

the aesthetics of technological exchange

At this stage in the project, there has been limited development regarding the nature of technological exchange between the technological object that is the *Snake* and the user. Largely, this part of the project will be influenced by the choreographer, the control technologist and the company supplying the technology: since the development of the software programming used to control the *Snake*, the types of human presence that the *Snake* detects, and the way that it interprets this presence is specific to those disciplines.

However, whilst the previously outlined process may not require direct design scrutiny, there are certainly parts of this development where it will be imperative that design consultation and consideration takes place: in order for the technological object to successfully embody the design rationale. This is predominantly concerned with providing technological design interventions that prevent transparent or simulated experiences. In his book, *The Transparency of Evil*, Jean Baudrillard describes these types of experiences by questioning the relationships between man and machine. He writes:

Am I man or machine? There is no ambiguity in the traditional relationship between man and machine: the worker is always, in a way, a stranger to the machine he operates, and alienated by it. But at least he retains the precious status of alienated man. These new technologies, with their new machines, new images and interactive screens do not alienate me. Rather they form an integrated circuit with me.²⁷

Here, Baudrillard refers to new types of digital interaction as a diminished experience of reality, where our relationship with technology may be one of seduction. He further illustrates how such technologies conceal processes and often make decisions on our behalf. In this example, according to Baudrillard, we may well become 'part of the interaction'; but we certainly do not 'interact'.

One of the challenges of the *Snake* project is, however, to attempt to provide a design language that does not conceal the technology (and the subsequent knowledge associated with this understanding) to a degree where it cannot be easily accessed by the user, while at the same time enabling the robotic structure to function effectively. For example, some of the technological considerations regarding the types of interaction and levels of 'exposing' those interactions as well as the physical positioning of the technological components, wiring, electronics, etc. will need to be considered in order to fulfil that rationale. The level of balance and any compromise required in design interventions between these components and the object's aesthetic presence is at this stage unknown and will need to be established through the process.

2.4 What is the Rationale of the Project?

critical design

As discussed in the previous section, when trying to describe some of the desired experiences, there are varied aesthetic design factors that also support the rationale and development of the project. However, many of these experiences (such as the decision to 'decorate' the physical nuts and bolts of the *Snake* object with pattern) are in fact already limited by the overriding practical requirements imposed on the project (such as the necessity to have nuts and bolts in order to hold the *Snake* object together). Whilst these design decisions are often a direct result of the emerging physical realisation of the *Snake* object and the restrictions that the technicality and physicality of the object impose, they are also determined by the previously defined design approach that seeks to underpin all design decisions during the course of the project.

The approach explores the boundaries and potential of a new design language associated with the development of work involving the inter-relationship of people, objects, information and space (technological objects). The aim is to provide evidence of research that might support a future for alternative forms of 'interface' (new design language) for technological objects.

Most designs for complex technological objects are typically driven by the desire to make the technology understandable/saleable - which is essentially a 'styling' job for the designer; more often than not resulting in the physical manifestation of a case, body or shell that hides the technology (circuits, networks, electronics, etc.) in order to create a product that is useable, appealing and profitable. Whilst we may accept that it is the role of commercial design to generate capital in this way, we must also understand that perhaps design research should question the role that these products play in our lives. This too includes the need to explore the way that the complex (and popular) language of products may be mediating our experience of the world.²⁸ While there is some very good design research concerned with the exploration of new types of interfaces which explore the potential to achieve a level of design language that does not simply 'wrap up' beautiful and complicated technology, so people cannot interact with it and learn from it²⁹ - there are few examples of such product design research resulting in practical or commercial solutions that go beyond that of mere hypothetical suggestion.

One such example of Product Design research that does go beyond mere hypothetical suggestion is Daniel Weil's *Radio in a Bag* produced at the RCA in 1983. At this time, designs for radios were commonly plastic cases that housed (covered up) radio technology (circuits, electronic components, etc.). With *Radio in a Bag*, Weil actually succeeds in exposing the electronic components of a basic AM radio by simply placing them in a transparent bag. The radio still functions as a radio, but because it does not conceal the technology - it also enables increased access to the potential knowledge associated with the new understanding of how the radio functions. On a very basic level, this visual exposing of the technology enables the user to at least observe the technology, perhaps even make judgements about it/react to it, before actually using it.

However, while *Radio in a Bag* is one example of a commercial product that exposes its technology by presenting its electronic components - it does only manage to expose the 'physicality' of radio technology and does not provide any further understanding of the part of the electromagnetic spectrum in which radio-wave technology exists. Radio is part of the electromagnetic spectrum which is out of the white light frequency and therefore, out of human sight. Consequently, this design does not offer any new design tools that may provide access to potential knowledge and understanding of how the 'invisible' radio technology functions.

Furthermore, since this type of basic AM Radio was produced twenty-four years ago (and at that time required a limited number of technological components to function), the task of exposing those components in such a way is much simpler than that of the more complex, (often networked) technological objects of today. As electronic technologies continue to emerge at an increased rate, so does the existing gap between the design tools/languages we develop and the potential of those tools/languages to prevent transparent experiences and interactions.

passive interaction

With the increased use of electronic technology, objects, systems and operations now frequently cross between the physical and virtual. The rapid miniaturisation of technology has not only catapulted tiny (often invisible) computers into almost every object, but perhaps, and more importantly, computing and telecommunications has also given rise to a new breed of 'intelligent' and often incomprehensible, multi-faceted 'social organisational mechanisms'.³⁰

The emergence of these technologies bring with them the promise of increased experiences, and more free time thanks to a new type of 'interaction' with technology that is much quicker, easier and efficient than previous methods involving communicating with people. The reality, unfortunately, is often quite different and any cynic who has recently tried to contact their utility company or speak to their bank will probably have experienced the mundane and bureaucratic experience that is the result of our fantastic new technology. The irony is that this exclusion made possible by 'user-friendly' design methods may be encouraging a type of 'passive interaction' alienating people from their environment.

Paul Virilio, in his book *The Art of the Motor* (1995) describes this type of passive interaction between human and 'intelligent' technology as an unbalanced relationship, where the human is always a slave to the technology. He writes:

[the] so-called 'interactive user-friendliness'...is just a metaphor for the subtle enslavement of the human being to 'intelligent' machines; a programmed symbiosis of man and computer in which assistance and the much trumpeted 'dialogue between man and machine' scarcely conceal the premises:...the total, unavowed disqualification of the human in favour of the definitive instrumental conditioning of the individual.³¹

Current forms of user-friendly design methodologies for human and technological interactivity often exclude the potential of human and technological engagement by reducing it to that of mere function. Unfortunately, because this type of approach taken by the design community is so popular, it is difficult to find good examples of design-related work that challenge the user-friendly design methodology. There is little consideration given to the wider issues regarding the potential socio-cultural effects of such interaction methods by designers and sadly still too much of this endeavour is left to sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists.

There are various good examples³² of practical design work which offer contemplations for products that are located in a cultural context and there are also some rare theoretical perspectives evident in Thackara's recent books *Design After Modernism*³³ and *In the Bubble*.³⁴ However, to understand the more complicated cultural significance of such practice, the work of cultural theorists/thinkers proves more revealing than that of much design-related work.

The manifesto for the 'user-friendly' design approach (led by the Human Factors community³⁵) is that the implementation of 'invisible' or 'transparent' interfaces should make for an easier user experience of (complex) technological exchange. However, this process, driven by profit, is often carried out in relatively short time frames and in isolation of any contemporary cultural framework.³⁶ Products are developed according to whether or not they meet practical or financial ends and therefore little consideration is given to whether those ends are culturally desirable. There is a danger that the nature of this approach does not enable sufficient dialogue with any potential consequences of those ends, nor does it provide examples of design solutions or possible scenarios for alternative futures and experiences. Ultimately, it is of concern that this approach may result in a diminished experience of reality, since the aim here is not to 'explore' the potential of both human and technology, but to 'harness' it.³⁷

The *Snake* project, being outside of 'commercial design' constraints, provides an opportunity to explore the potential for an advanced dialogue between people and technology, encouraging a type of 'active interaction' that may enable individual expression and subsequently enrich the human experience. This involves the exploration of new types of interfaces for technological objects that could expose the complexity and potential of the technology, and in turn, heighten awareness of this technology. This may require the need to implement 'clever' design (that

prevents transparent use) by 'alienating' people from the product in such a way that they 'observe' it as a product from which they can learn, as well as using it?

PART THREE: CONTROL SYSTEM DESIGN:A PROBLEM OF CONTROL

by Philip Breedon

As explained in Part Two, the *Snake* project has been a considerable challenge for typical Product Design working methods, yet its open-ended character also stimulated ideas that could lead to new ways of thinking about Product Design in general. Given the importance of precision, accuracy and relevance of detail to the development of 'efficient' technological products, the open-ended character of the *Snake's* research process has challenged even more deeply how technological issues were identified, defined and approached. However, it is important to emphasise that this challenge did not concern or affect the technical procedures or techniques regularly employed in the area of control technology. Rather it opened up numerous possibilities to reflect upon assumed relationships between principles which currently underline typical working methods in this area. The project gave the team (and the technologist in particular) the opportunity to see and conceptualise new relationships between these principles, directions, priorities and ultimately meanings as these crystallised around the emerging object during the research. Following a highly complex interdisciplinary process, this conceptual shift eventually reinforced a more 'efficient' use of control technology in this project, which was consistent with its crucially open-ended character and successfully captured in its brief.

At this juncture, it is important to clarify that some of the questions asked by the choreographer and the product designers, such as 'What is the experience?' are meaningless for the particulars of technological research, whereas others such as 'What is it?' or 'Who is it for?' have no effect on the principles which support the technological mechanism. Replies to such questions only refer to the specifics of the materialisation of an underlying technological concept rather than the very nature of the concept itself. When these questions kept being asked by the choreographer and the product designers during the development of the *Snake*, the technologist was not expected to reconsider the protocols of his working methods and techniques. His main challenge was to remain committed to these practices whilst revisiting previously unquestioned assumptions about the principles behind them. Part Three introduces a series of points about this delicate aspect of the project and explains how existing working methods in control technology were revisited in ways which encourage the development of technological objects with open-ended character and exploratory purposes as opposed to those which fulfil pre-determined purposes and precisely specified criteria.

3.1 PRECISION AND COMPLEXITY

Day to day problems faced by the human race can potentially be both complex and ambiguous; individuals face and address these everyday problems subconsciously in a complex real world. Humans have the ability to apply approximate reasoning to complex issues, allowing them to gain an understanding of a real problem whereas at present computers are not capable of addressing these complex and ambiguous problems.

Lotfi Zadeh's principle of incompatibility reads as follows:

As the complexity of a system increases, our ability to make precise and yet significant statements about its behaviour diminishes until a threshold is reached beyond which precision and significance (or relevance) become almost mutually exclusive characteristics.³⁸

Ross provides a simple graph relating system complexity and model precision.³⁹ (See Figure 4.)

Figure 4 shows that for systems with little complexity mathematical expressions can provide a precise system description. For systems that have significant amounts of data but are more complex, model free methods may be

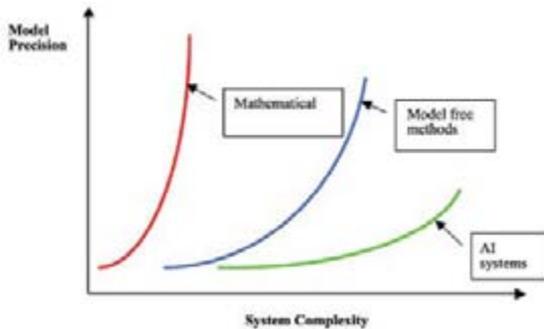


Figure 4: System complexity versus model precision.

employed, ANN (Artificial Neural Networks) being a good example. This type of system reduces uncertainty via learning based on data patterns. For complex systems where numerical data may be sparse and only imprecise information may be available 'fuzzy reasoning' can provide a solution to system behaviour based on the correlation between system inputs and outputs.

A human operator responsible for a defined process is able to cope and adjust to non-linearity that may be present within a system, resolving conflicts and allowing for slow variants in order to satisfy performance criteria. Problems arise, as the actions of the human operator are difficult to model due to variances. These variances may be fatigue, inconsistency, reliability and other errors. 'Intelligent' control could provide the positive attributes provided by the human operator whilst at the same time removing the factors that are detrimental to the control process.

3.2 ROBOTIC SYSTEMS

Robot control systems can be considered complex systems and the design of the controller involves determining the dynamic model for the system. This in itself can be a complicated task due to non-linearity, multiple axes or degrees of freedom control, and the constantly changing working environment.

Problems arise when the theoretical model produced for such a system does not exactly match the actual working environment of the system under control. When developing a controller using conventional techniques a design scheme has to be produced, usually based on a model of the system. In addition, kinematics equations must be derived to represent both the environmental and physical boundaries of the system. Original point-to-point robotic systems rely on a closed loop feedback system using both velocity and position information.

One of the main problems with conventional control lies in the inability to correlate the inputs and outputs of the system using mathematical modelling techniques, which may be either too complex or too large to compute in real time.

3.3 CONVENTIONAL CONTROL METHODOLOGIES

Two basic control system structures exist for the control of dynamic systems:

- open loop control
- feedback control (closed loop control)

The main difference between these two structures is that feedback control has a sensor monitoring the output variable as part of the feedback loop, see Figures 5 and 6.

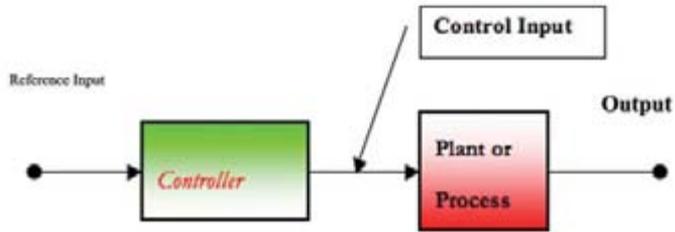


Figure 5: Open loop control system.

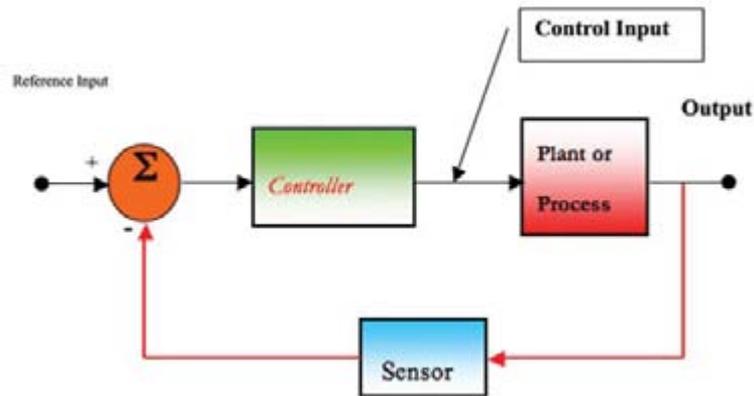


Figure 6: Feedback control system (closed loop).

3.4 CLASSICAL THREE-TERM CONTROL

The classical three-term Proportional Integral Derivative (PID) controller is by far the most commonly used control algorithm. According to Åström and Hägglund (1996), PID is widely used for industrial control applications with 90 – 95% of all control problems being solved by this type of control.⁴⁰

The PID control action is generated as a sum of three terms, the control law being described as:

$$u(t) = u_p(t) + u_i(t) + u_d(t)$$

where u_p , u_i , u_d are the proportional, integral and derivative elements respectively.

The first of the three elements of this classical controller on its own, i.e. proportional feedback control, may allow a non-zero steady state error, but can reduce error responses due to changes in the system environment. Proportional feedback can also increase response times but results in an increase in transient overshoot. The inclusion of a term proportional to the integral of error will eliminate the steady state error but will have a direct contribution to the deterioration of the dynamic response of the system. Finally, the inclusion of the final element expressed as a proportional to derivative term can have the effect of damping the system dynamic response.⁴¹

Multi axis systems are generally controlled using proportional-integral-derivative (PID) algorithms; problems arise, however, as many practical systems are mathematically complex and very difficult to model.

3.5 ADAPTIVE CONTROL

Conventional control techniques often fail when an appropriate model is difficult to obtain due to the sheer complexity or unpredictable variances within a system. With adaptive control, compensation is made for parameter variations by continually monitoring and adjusting the appropriate parameters in order to satisfy the system performance criteria. Adaptive control algorithms can provide a solution to non-linear control but can soon become mathematically complex as system variables increase. In addition, these algorithms are not always suitable for real time systems.

To understand some of the basics surrounding control and feedback systems we must briefly revisit some of the basic elements of control system design, as the robot *Snake* may be considered to be a complex system. Ross⁴² described the seven basic steps in designing a controller for a complex system:

- Large-scale systems are decentralised and decomposed into a collection of de-coupled subsystems.
- Variations in plant dynamics are assumed to vary at a slow rate.
- Non-linear plant dynamics are linearised locally about a set of operating points.
- Sets of state and control variables or output features are available.
- Simple P, PD, PID or state feedback controller is designed per subsystem.
- Controller design should be designed optimally, based on the control engineer's knowledge.
- Introduction of a supervisory control system provides additional benefits in allowing for effects of variations caused by unmodelled dynamics.

In addition, a number of assumptions should be made when the appropriate control system is to be considered for a solution:

- A control solution exists.
- 'Plant' is observable and controllable.
- A solution may be acceptable but not necessarily an optimum solution.

3.6 ROBOT SNAKE – MUSCLES, CONTROL AND SENSOR SYSTEMS

Interactive sculpture movements will be closed loop (feedback) controlled and will use a form of rectilinear motion, but instead of the 'typical' snake-like comparable horizontal motion, this motion will be relative to the vertical plane. The two stage model has been built to examine the feasibility of the design. Initially three pneumatic muscles have been fixed centrally between discs to create the individual vertebrae. Simple control of individual muscles provide the appropriate 'tilt angle' for each individual vertebra.

Originally it was considered that the pneumatic muscles that would be utilised within the design would all be of uniform diameter. A large bending force on the lower 'vertebrae' would be created when the sculpture effectively 'forms' more 'severe' positions. Therefore the probability will be that the lower muscles will be of an increased diameter in the lower sections of the sculpture. This provides the required support; in addition the muscles also provide the extra energy required to move the upper sections when more 'load demanding positions' are introduced as dictated by the overall position of the interactive sculpture.

Ten individual vertebrae will be linked vertically to form the final interactive sculpture. Pneumatic muscle and hence individual vertebrae pitch and roll control is achieved via a dedicated PC interface and the respective control software. The pneumatic muscles that will be used for the sculpture are shown in Figures 7 and 8.⁴³

Ultimately a series of ultrasonic proximity sensors will be utilised to provide the appropriate control feedback and hence movement of the sculpture. Ultrasonic sensors will be investigated as a method to feed back to the control



Figure 7: Pneumatic muscle 'activated'.



Figure 8: Pneumatic muscle 'deactivated'.

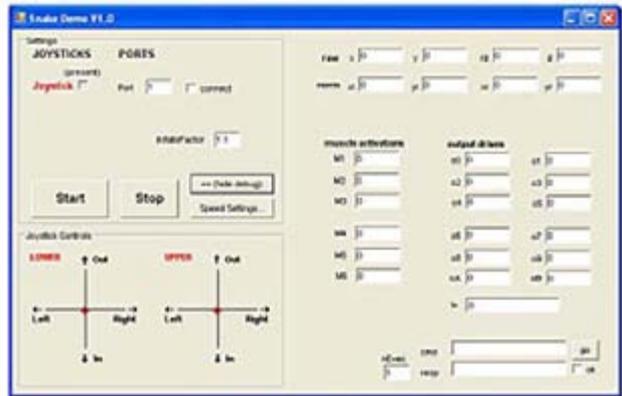


Figure 9: Simple user interface - parameter set up and debugging.

system providing proximity information in relation to anyone 'approaching' the sculpture. The sensors will supply a proportional linear voltage to the input of the control interface, and hence the voltage level being dependant upon the proximity of an object/person relative to the sculpture.

A simple user interface will be utilised to 'explore' the movement of each individual vertebra. This will enable speed, motion and range of movement to be examined for the whole sculpture. This interface also provides a useful tool for development of the relative programme subroutines which will ultimately control the robot. The simple user interface for manual control is shown in Figure 9.

3.7 WHAT IS A ROBOT?

There has been much discussion recently in terms of the use of the word 'robot' and the very interaction of these 'machines' with humans. Bill Gates in his recent article in *Scientific American* writes:

Although a few of the robots of tomorrow may resemble the anthropomorphic devices seen in StarWars, most will look nothing like the humanoid C-3PO. In fact, as mobile peripheral devices become more and more common, it may be increasingly difficult to say exactly what a robot is. Because the new machines will be so specialized and ubiquitous – and look so little like the two-legged automatons of science fiction – we probably will not even call them robots.⁴⁴

C Evans-Pughe⁴⁵ examines current robotic research work and questions robot bodies being self aware, suggesting that robots tell us more about humans; and C Biever informs us that "robots are gaining the ability to encourage us emotionally, giving them a much broader range of uses".⁴⁶

WHAT IS THE SNAKE ROBOT THEN!?

3.8 A TECHNOLOGICAL 'ROBOT'?

A control system can monitor and affect the operational conditions of a *system* by adjusting the *input* variables and consequently directly affecting the output variables of the system.

Biomimicry or biomimetics is a scientific and technical discipline finding inspiration from biological systems to define new engineering solutions and allows us to extend the concept of controllers to more *complex systems*. Correlation can be made with the natural world where individual organisms appear to be equipped with controllers that adjust their internal environment to maintain a stable, constant condition, by means of numerous adjustments and controlled by interconnected regulation mechanisms.

Both manufactured and natural systems demonstrate collective behaviour amongst individuals in which the control systems seek some form of stability. Stability in relation to control systems is extremely important, and is often associated not just with control but also system safety.

The stability of a system relates to its response to an input(s) or disturbance. A system which remains in a constant state unless affected by an external action and which returns to a constant state when the external action is removed can be considered to be stable (see Figure 10). System stability can be defined in terms of its response to external inputs.

- The system stability can also be defined in terms of bounded or limited inputs.
- A system is stable if its stimulus response approaches zero as time approaches infinity.
- A system is stable if every bounded input produces a bounded output.

With a closed loop system the output is continually monitored, usually to ensure that the 'desired response' is achieved. It will be critical to produce a 'bounded' system for *Snake* robot control, however programming alone will not finally define movement patterns. 'Ultimate' control will be based on multi sensor input, the 'desired response will be affected' by other control and input parameters.

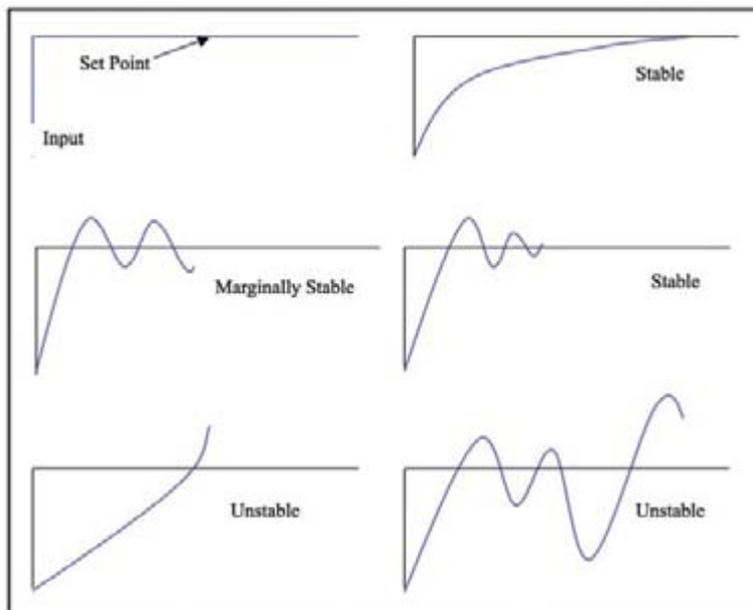


Figure 10: System stability.

3.9 THE DESIRED RESPONSE?

The 'interesting unknown' in trying to create the 'desired response' is, does such a response exist? When a programmed output based on sensor feedback moves the robot stages to a particular position an additional element and input to the feedback loop will be from the monitored stress induced in each lower muscle. If system parameters deem this to be too great a stress the command will be automatically modified to keep the movement bounded and prevent damage to the robot. This provides an element of the unknown.

Ultimately each movement of the robot will have a dedicated programmed subroutine to control an individual movement based on sensory input, but control and ultimate overall movement will be overridden by the safety control of the system within selected muscles. A combination of inputs from the ultrasonic sensor array combined with the pre-programmed safety system input parameters will dictate that ultimate robot 'reaction' and movement. This movement cannot be predicted.

CONCLUSION

by Sophia Lycouris

Object, technology or movement? The interactive sculpture *Snake* is a complex combination of all three, and the result of an interdisciplinary research project which explores the limits of three different disciplines: choreography, product design and control technology. An expanded notion of choreography, which foregrounds the use of energy in dance and is primarily concerned with the communication of kinaesthetic experiences outside traditional theatre spaces, offers multiple possibilities for audiences to engage in 'active' viewing and become physically/bodily involved with the work. From the perspective of design, the element of movement changes the traditional character of the object (sculpture) as static and re-invents it as a dynamic four-dimensional entity, which manifests itself both in space and through time and develops evolving relationships with its users. The *Snake* wants to be playful, have initiative and surprise the viewer, thus generating a number of interesting challenges in relation to the development of appropriate supportive technology. But as Philip Breedon explains in the third part of this article, technology has not managed yet to discover how to reproduce human qualities. So the *Snake* cannot be programmed to have initiative in an 'accurate' manner, yet it can remain playful through constantly negotiating the instructions of its interactive mechanism with the limitations of its robotic structure. This could be perceived as a technological failure, however in an interdisciplinary context the freedom to push the boundaries of traditional disciplinary assumptions opens up unexpected possibilities for the creation of both new 'objects' and underlying concepts; indicating in this way that the participating disciplines can serve purposes beyond their recognised limits.

- 1 *Snake* became part of *Emergent Objects*, a portfolio of projects led by Professor Mick Wallis at the University of Leeds (UK) which aimed to explore design processes through the lens of performance during 2007 (<http://www.emergentobjects.co.uk>). *Emergent Objects* received funding by the UK's Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), as part of their joint initiative 'Designing for the 21st Century' (<http://www.design21.dundee.ac.uk/>).
- 2 The name *Snake Robot* was reduced to *Snake* when the project was invited to be part of the *Emergent Objects* project.
- 3 For a detailed account of this debate please see Lycouris, S (2000) "The documentation of practice: framing trace". *Working Papers in Art and Design 1*, <http://www.herts.ac.uk/artdes/research/papers/wpades/vol1/lycouris2.html> (last accessed on 27 May 2007).
- 4 Liz Aggiss in Alan Bullock & Oliver Stallybrass (eds), *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), 124.
- 5 Laurence Louppe in Laurence Louppe et al., *Traces of Dance*, trans. by Brian Holmes (Paris: Editions du Voir, 1994).
- 6 George Balanchine in Anatole Chujoy & P W Manchester (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967), 202.
- 7 Lois Eilfeldt, *A primer for choreographers* (London: Dancebooks, 1974).

- 8 Guy Brett, *Force Fields: phases of the kinetic* (London, Hayward Gallery, 2000), 2.
- 9 Please see sci/art symposium at <http://www.primitivestreak.org.uk/>
- 10 Poet Dave Wood is based in the area of Derbyshire (UK).
- 11 Over the past decade there has been an increasing trend towards the development of products based on more hypothetical design criteria. Such work is generally constructed within a future context and framed within a particular scenario. The main purpose and role of such designs is to act as a critical tool for debate and discussion regarding particular future social issues of concern and to identify potential threats or opportunities of new technological developments. For a leading example, please see www.dunneandraby.co.uk (last accessed on 20 October 2007).
- 12 John Thackara is a leading design theorist and academic and founder of the international, highly regarded design conference, "Doors of Perception". Thackara's selected works include the classic design critique, *Design after Modernism*, and his more recent publication, *In the Bubble*.
- 13 See J Myerson, "Crucial Timing". Available at: <http://nellydmu.ac.uk/4dd/ct.html> (last accessed on 15 May 2007).
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 A Robertson, "4D Design Futures: Some Concepts and Complexities". Available at: <http://nellydmu.ac.uk/4dd/guest-ar.html> (last accessed on 15 May 2007).
- 16 For further reading on '4D Dynamics' please see *ibid*.
- 17 Unfortunately, traditional educational structures have always been forced to 'pigeonhole' specific design disciplines (essentially for marketing purposes) within particular subject areas and schools. Whilst Product Design's historical links to the engineering/manufacturing fields is now starting to be renegotiated, its link to the 'built environment', appears to remain integral and somewhat overriding. Whilst there are many interdisciplinary links that can be made between architecture and product design, the absence of more fundamental working relationships between the fields of information design, choreography and the more 'interactive/performance-based' practices (the disciplines that the field of (New) Product Design should now harness), is having a profound effect on the richness of the experiences of new products developed and the progression of the (New) Product Design discipline itself.
- 18 Throughout this paper the term '(New) Product Design' is used to draw attention to the fact that the role and meaning of the product design discipline is currently in transition, with any 'New' models of practice identified not yet firmly established.
- 19 Usmen Haque is an architect specialising in the design and research of interactive architectural systems. Haque has undertaken an extensive number of projects exploring the territory of architecture as a "dynamic, responsive and conversant" event. See www.haque.co.uk for further information on his projects.
- 20 U Haque, "The choreography of sensations: Three case studies of responsive environment interfaces". Available at: <http://www.haque.co.uk/papers/choreography-of-sensations.pdf> (last accessed on 18 May 2007).
- 21 By the client or person delivering the project.
- 22 Traditionally markets were classified in terms of their socio-economic groups or personality types. More recently, however, groups of consumers are increasingly identified according to their particular lifestyle affiliations. This is a model which exists outside of constraints dictated by socio-economic 'class' and personality type – and one based on lifestyle affiliated groups and patterns of consumption.
- 23 Even in the more critical, hypothetical design projects that exist outside the commercial constraints (again see www.dunneandraby.co.uk for a leading example of this type of design) the development of a tangible future 'user-based' scenario is an integral part of the design project – providing essential criteria for the development and manifestation of the final products.
- 24 Particularly within the commercial framework, where the designer's primary role is to develop products which are 'consumerable', despite any ethical or socio-political issues that may prevail through such activity.
- 25 Although it is fully acknowledged that it is impossible to draw a line between the boundaries of art and design practice, and there are many designers (particularly those who practice within the more conceptual design context) whose work sits very comfortably within the artistic framework. See www.studioball.co.uk for an exemplary example of this.
- 26 From July 1st 2007 in the UK any business that manufactures, brands or imports electronic products are responsible for the cost of collection, treatment and recycling of obligated Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE). See www.weecare.com for more information on this compliance scheme. Such directives are long overdue, when we observe established models of electronic waste recycling schemes like those in Japan; in which the cost of recycling goods must by law be incorporated into the retail price.
- 27 Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil* (Paris: Verso, 2002), 58.
- 28 For an accessible discussion on some potential types of mediation, see A Dunne, *Hertzian Tales* (London: RCA, 1999). This book includes many examples of how this mediation may occur and is a unique and challenging insight; exploring a potential for product design to assume a critical and cultural position.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 See Jamie Billing & Tracy Cordingley, "Some Kind of Analogtivity: anti-simulation through design", *Personal and Ubiquitous Computing*, 1(2), January 2006, 101-105.

- 31 Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1995).
- 32 In particular, the work carried out by students and staff working within the Interaction Design and Design Products departments at The Royal College of Art. Available at: <http://www.designproducts.rca.ac.uk> (last accessed on 15 May 2007) & <http://www.interaction.rca.ac.uk> (last accessed on 15 May 2007).
- 33 John Thackara, *Design After Modernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998).
- 34 John Thackara, *In the Bubble* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2005).
- 35 The Human Factors community consists mainly of Engineers and Scientists. For further reading, please see cognitive psychologist, D Norman, *The Psychology of Everyday Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).
- 36 Cultural framework here referring to the complex and intertwined sociological relationships between people, objects, technology and the way this affects culture. Not simply the relationship between people and the way they interact with or consume technology, etc.
- 37 However, it seems that the UK government is becoming aware of this. Through its Office of Science and Innovation, in particular the "Horizon Scanning Centre" (www.foresight.gov.uk/horizonscanning), as part of "Sigma Scan" and "Delta Scan", it commissions a huge amount of pioneering research regarding current emerging technologies; resulting in the publication of approx 360 'scans' of possible future scenarios since 1995 (see www.sigmascan.org and www.deltascan.org). Also a recent initiative (Science Horizons), aims to engage the public regarding the possibilities of new science and technology futures, through various forms of dialogue and discussion. See www.sciencehorizons.org.uk for more information.
- 38 Lotfi Zadeh, "Outline of a New Approach to the Analysis of Complex Systems and Decision Processes", *IEEE Transactions Syst., Man. and Cybernetics*, Volume SMC 3, 1973, 28.
- 39 TJ Ross, *Fuzzy Logic with Engineering Applications* (Columbus, OH: McGraw- Hill, 1995), 2.
- 40 KJ Åström & T Hägglund T in Levine W S (ed.), *PID Control: The Control Handbook* (CRC Press, 1996), 198.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 Please see note 38.
- 43 These parts as well as appropriate sensor technology and supporting software are provided by Merlin Robotics based in Plymouth (UK). For further information about Merlin Robotics, please see <http://www.merlinrobotics.co.uk/merlinrobotics/>
- 44 Bill Gates, "A robot in every home", *Scientific American*, January 2007, 51.
- 45 C Evans-Pughe, "Masters of their fate?", *Engineering and Technology*, April 2007, 26 – 30.
- 46 C Biever, "If you're happy the robot knows it", *New Scientist*, March 2007, 30.

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wee hiccup

Ana Terry



Teresa Andrew, *Still Sleeping*, 30 Polaroids, 2006
(courtesy of artist, photograph by Ana Terry).

Excessive repetition has become a growing phenomenon in the visual arts. It manifests throughout a range of current art media including sculpture and video as engaged with by the artists whose work I curated for an exhibition called *wee hiccup* in 2006. In this article I discuss excessive repetition in their practice, either in their mode of making and/or in their representation of motifs. The conceptual premise for *wee hiccup* proposed that: 1) the simple reiteration of the same creates a surface pattern; 2) after a while this pattern becomes familiar to the viewer; 3) this very familiarity can allow the penetration of the surface through the active participation of the viewer; and 4) this participation can result in the identification of small differences within the pattern. (Some viewers may not complete this process and could walk away bored with the pattern which they perceive as mere surface.) This fourfold premise was particularly important in dispelling the stereotype of artists who work in repetitive ways as being either obsessive compulsive in their mode of making or as merely interested in surface effects in their representation of motifs. In order to understand and dismantle these stereotypes, this essay draws on concepts ranging across physiological, psychological and political experiences for a close reading of the works in contention.

In practice, the process of manufacturing the repetitive often requires intensely repetitive actions. On the surface, this process can appear obsessive and one could argue that the practitioner uses repetition as a cathartic rather than a conceptual framework. I suggest that the propensity to infer neurosis in the manufacturer (or artist) from the manifestation of repetition is the result of twentieth-century psychology theory, and that century's development

of systems of control and technology. References to repetition's propensity to malfunction are often reinforced through popular culture. For example, through the factory workers' exhaustive attempts to synchronise with the machine's repetition in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1926) or the robotic-like battalion of brooms fetching buckets of water oblivious to Mickey's summons to stop in Disney's version of *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*¹ (1940), repetition not only runs riot but it is also unreasonable. In both films, the repetitive action generates anxiety and suggests the body's inability to sustain mechanical repetition and our fear of the automaton's mindless repetition, which may reach a crescendo of self-annihilation. Repetition and its association with neurosis and technology have been profoundly influenced by the work of Sigmund Freud and Walter Benjamin.

Freud, in his analysis of trauma experienced by the soldiers returning home from WW1, defined this as a cluster named "the death drive". He suggested that the compulsive repetition of unpleasant experiences was a means to master trauma.² However, in repeating the event the victim "succumbs to stasis, fixation, neurosis". He suggested that while repetition provides a sense of control this will entail a masking of inner chaos. Associations of trauma with repetition were also considered in Walter Benjamin's anthropology of industrialised humanity, which was conceived at the same time as Freud's seminal essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920). Benjamin established links between technology and neurosis, suggesting that the repetitive actions of the soldier on the battlefield mimic the repetitive and automated actions of the factory worker.³ Technology dictates that both the worker and the soldier perform repetitive actions with machinery. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin quotes Karl Marx: "In working with machines workers learn to coordinate their own 'movement to the uniform and unceasing motion of an automaton'."⁴

Mechanistic repetition in body actions not only suggests the treadmill of labour, but can lead to a realisation of our inability to sustain the repetitive action. Artist Teresa Andrew has a history of work in which she deploys the repetitive motif which marks

the body both physically and psychically to the point of exhaustion. Her highly charged performances often reference systems of social control and even extreme fascist regimes through personal rituals such as hand washing. Her use of repetition acutely engages time; repeated visual phrases set up reverberations of recall; and simultaneously suggest the impossibility of complete retrieval. The body may attempt to repeat the action but this cannot be sustained nor can the action ever be accurately repeated. In all instances a narrative evolves from the repetition, suggesting that the body is capable of transformation and change through repetition. In her work for *wee hiccup* Andrew continued to explore these possibilities in a performative action she has coined "repeated stillness".

Still Sleeping is a series of Polaroid portraits of a young woman in various states of rest and restlessness. The work references Andy Warhol's use of the Polaroid, his six-hour film *Sleep* (1963), and his use of repetition in grid format. In this instance, however, Andrew varies each portrait rather than adopting Warhol's serial production in which he likened himself to a machine.⁵ The format and content of her work at first appears to be a shift away from her history of real time performances, where she would use her own body to recall experiences through repetition.

In this instance, the 'recall' manifests through the use of the photograph. The Polaroid captures a unique moment in time that can never be revisited and reminds us of how the photograph functions as a *memento mori*.⁶ Furthermore, the Polaroid, unlike a photographic print, is unrepeatable, a one-off. Her use of this twentieth-century technology also references Warhol's use of the medium – he likened the act of taking a Polaroid to "an event".⁷ Singularly, each 'still' presents a moment in time. However, arranged as a series of still images cinematography is denoted, suggesting a continuous series of frames in a film. A sequential time frame is implied, yet we know that the photographs could have been taken over any period of time. This variation in space and time displaces the repetition and control in Andrew's previous performance work. Furthermore, the artist cannot work autonomously as the work is a

collaborative effort between herself and her daughter. An evolutionary process is suggested by this shift in self-reliance while genetic replication is proposed. In a biological context, life forms evolve and change through repetition; they perpetuate to create difference rather than replicating similarity.

Contemporary French philosopher Gilles Deleuze discusses this possibility of difference through repetition using an evolutionary model.⁸ In *Difference and Repetition* he likens "dynamic repetition" to genetic action. According to Deleuze nothing can recur exactly, as it entails an evolution of continuous becoming which breaks with the habitual.⁹ Using a biological model, he proposes that the body comprehends something else that is lived and evolving, and can never be repeated identically. Thus a sense of differentiation in this becoming is facilitated by repetition. Henri Lefebvre also proposes "dynamic repetition" where he advocates a corporeal understanding of repetition rather than a purely cerebral understanding: "Is it not the body, in fact, since it preserves difference within repetition, that is also responsible for the emergence of the new from the repetitive? Analytical thought, by contrast, because it evacuates difference, is unable to grasp how repetition is able to secrete innovation."¹⁰ This implies that in the purely cognitive apprehension of repetition, the repetitive motif is homogenised, ignoring variation.

One way of experiencing difference, however, is through a phenomenological approach which engages the body in relation to the works. Media theorist Laura Marks advocates a way of experiencing work which calls upon multiple senses through the visual. She suggests that the viewing subject is an entire body: "The engagement of the haptic viewer occurs not simply in psychic registers but in the sensorium."¹¹ Sculptor Emily Pauling activates this way of looking not only through the tactility of material employed and its form but through the internal spaces she constructs which compel us to project our psychic body into their life-sized enclaves.

As if in response to Andrew's work, Pauling constructed an upholstered wall that echoes the quilted surface of the bed pictured in *Sleeping Still*. The white vinyl wall spanned the entire width of the gallery and

was painstakingly upholstered with over 1000 hand-covered buttons. Interrupting this sumptuous moulded surface an illuminated recess at eye level suggests a space for the prone body. The surface embodies repetitive processes but the artist cannot sustain such serial repetition. Each button and its pinched indentation are variable. In this work, Pauling attempts to simulate mechanical seriality but is thwarted by every reiteration as we register variations between each button and the pull of fabric. Claustrophobia speaks through this excessive process and through the funereal associations of the plush upholstery and the coffin-like interior of the recess. A glitch in the surface of repetitive productivity is both felt and seen in the work. The expectation of repetition's eternal consistency is undermined through variance and the implicit reference to our body's eventual breakdown and mortality.

One way in which the body may be represented to suggest sustained mechanical repetition is by way of the medium of virtual realms found through the digital. Rebecca Pilcher explores our apprehension of the body repeating itself in the video *kickn gainst the...* Through manipulation of video footage she extends the performer's ability beyond physical endurance in what she describes as "The frottage of repetition ...getting somewhere without moving".¹² In this video a man appears pinned up against the wall by some unknown force. The camera angle on the subject is disorientating. His body, as if in a fit, gyrates spasmodically. A loud electric guitar riff accompanies the erratic movement. Am I witnessing a seizure during sleep or a young man playing air guitar in the privacy of his room, eyes shut in concentration? My body is tilted towards the screen and a physical engagement with the work manifests. The beat is hypnotic; it is as if the pulse begins to synchronise with the body's own visceral repetitions.

Art theorist Rosalind Krauss discusses the possibility of a psycho-physiological engagement with the pulse of repetition in filmic work and suggests that these threaten comprehension of form and rationalisation. Referencing Freud's theory on repetition and trauma she suggests that the viewer contributes to the "fabric of the film", projecting her or his own biological



Emily Pauling, *Tight Sleep*, (detail) vinyl upholstered wall and recess, 478cm x 210cm, Blue Oyster Gallery Art Project Space, Dunedin, 2006 (courtesy of artist, photograph by Ana Terry).

impulses within the mechanism of the flicker of light emitted through the pattern of 24 frames per second. She suggests that the structural pattern of on/off offers a sense of stability; interruption to this pattern poses a constant threat and holds the viewer in a state of apprehension.¹³

The anticipation of disruption to the continuity of repetition is a device often deployed by artist Kim Pieters. Her work characteristically focuses on the shallow plane of the video projection while exploiting the viewer's expectation of repetition. This strategy threatens the diegetic flow we have come to expect from time-based media and we become aware of the projection's materiality rather than merely its narrative content. Visual strategies include focusing on the shallow space of the screen and the digital fibre of the image rather than plunging the viewer into deep cinematic space. The work invokes the notion of 'haptic visuality' which offers a method of sensory analysis not dependent upon literal touch.

In *highland* Pieters continues this engagement through repetition and the attention to the materiality of the surface. The pulse of an irrigation pump arcs rhythmically across the screen mimicking the body's internal rhythms, the surge of blood or expulsion of fluid. Strangely, a synchronicity begins to develop between my heartbeat and the external visual referent, but this feeling is tenuous. I am hypnotically drawn into the pulse only to be pushed back to the surface by an imposing form that fills the projection. Between the middle distance and the skin of the screen, Pieters exploits perceptual suspension between stasis and mobility; nothing happens on the threshold of something occurring. The interruption of flow suggests a glitch in the machine, in the very fabric of the video projection and draws attention to our bodily engagement with and against repetition.

While the hiccup in the repetition is obvious in Pieter's work, Andrew Last's jewellery piece more subtly indicates a glitch. He works with scientific

models which refer to nature's processes through actions such as duplication, folding and mirroring. His finely crafted works embody repetitive processes which include elaborate and detailed CAD drawings and specifically designed software tools for the task at hand. In this instance, Last constructed a jewellery piece called *Tensegrity* based on the sculptural works of Kenneth Snelson and Buckminster Fuller in the 1960s. A concentrated articulation of repetition is focused in the delicate and complex structure of a necklace. At first glance the pattern appears chaotic but through closer engagement one becomes aware of a rhythmic form of repetition through the interlocking of tiny silver rods.

This work could suggest industrial standardisation. However, the organic associations evoked through the movement create a sense of outward growth and evolution. Last's use of repetition suggests

transformation through biological associations and is further enhanced in its installation. The piece is suspended at neck height in front of a series of mirrors reflecting both the object and the viewer's body from multiple angles and in manifold ways.

wee hiccup offered an alternative reading of the notion of repetition as difference rather than simply as a reiteration of the same. In the works exhibited, repetition allows forms to accrete and take ground both physically and metaphysically through proliferation and variation. Repeated visual phrases shift from the tautological to a series of phrases gaining variation and movement rather than grinding down onto one fixed point. Repetition can invoke bodily memory and experience, and in turn can stimulate reflection beyond mere surface apprehension of a motif or of process as obsessive-compulsively neurotic.

- 1 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1779, translated by Edwin Zeydel, 1995. http://www.fln.vcu.edu/goethe/zauber_e3.html (last accessed on 16 May, 2007).
- 2 Sigmund Freud, *Freud Reader*, ed. P. Gay, (W W Norton & Company, 1989), 599 - 601.
- 3 Lester Esther, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft", *Journal of Design History*, Vol.11 no. 1, (Spring 1998), 7.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 5 Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the avant garde at the end of the century* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 130 - 131.
- 6 According to Susan Sontag "All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt." From Susan Sontag, *On Photography: In Plato's Cave* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 15.
- 7 Warhol produced tens of thousands of Polaroids during the 1970s. He established a rigorous system of cataloguing these including editing and sequencing them into individual Holson Polaroid albums. http://www.parisvoice.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=36&Itemid=33 (last accessed on 27 August, 2007).
- 8 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 70. Accessed in article "Repetition and the Scientific model in Art" by Ellen K. Levy, Spring, 1996, *Art Journal* at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_n1_v55/ai_18299598 (last accessed on 31 November 2006).
- 9 <http://www.iep.utm.edu/d/deleuze.htm#SH4c> (last accessed on 1 December 2006).
- 10 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 203.
- 11 Laura Marks, *Touch: Sensory Theory and Multi-Sensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 18.
- 12 Rebecca Pilcher, "wee hiccup – synopsis", 30 August 2006, personal email (31 August 2006).
- 13 Rosalind Krauss & Yves-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 162 – 163.

Ana Terry is an interdisciplinary artist. She is currently engaged with a Master of Fine Arts project. She is also a Lecturer in Drawing at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin, New Zealand. *wee hiccup* was her first curatorial project.

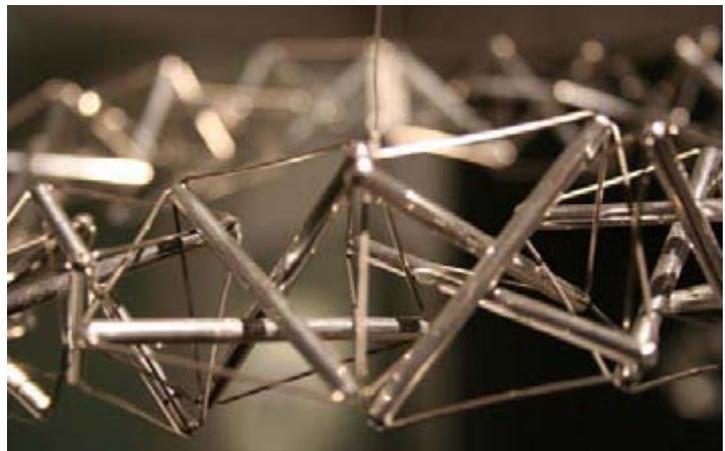
Rebecca Pilcher, *kickn gainst the...*, installation of DVD projection and soundtrack, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).



Kim Pieters, *highland*, stills from DVD and soundtrack 'Flies inside the sun' from Burning Glass CD by Metronomic, 2006 (images courtesy of the artist).



Andrew Last, detail of *Tensegrity*, diameter 22cm, height 4cm, aluminium and stainless steel, 2006 (courtesy of artist, photograph by Ana Terry).



On 'Curating' *Sergeant P*

Brian Wood

As I did not want to put anyone's nose out of joint, I decided, at an early stage of the project, that 'curator' was too strong a word and on this occasion another would have to take its place. The concept behind the show was in place: artist Jim Cooper had already worked on this. My role could be seen as administrator, personal assistant, artist liaison officer, agent, consultant or concept development manager; titles most are familiar with in the corporate world. Project or projects manager seemed the best fit as there were multiple small projects within the overall exhibition. Nevertheless, at this later stage I realise that I did also curate the show even if this was only one of my roles. Looking back on the project so far, it seems to me that it has expanded my interpretation of the function of a curator, and at this point I would like to claim that role for myself. Maybe this has to do with the greater confidence I have gained.

I met Jim Cooper at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic. I saw his figurative ceramic sculptures. These expressive figures with cool hair-dos, cheeky grins and eyes glancing at me were works in progress. Jim was attempting to illustrate sculpturally the lyrics of the well-known Beatle's album *Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and to make direct reference to this iconic album cover. I asked Jim what he was going to do with them – at this stage there were about twelve. He said he would like to find an empty shop in South Dunedin and show them.

I suggested a venue outside Dunedin and a nationwide tour. Jim was excited about the idea, but cautioned me: "Do you know how much work is involved in preparing and touring a show?" Undaunted, I accepted the challenge and together we came to the agreement: Jim would focus on creating the work and I would look after everything else.

First it was a case of the squeaky axle gets the grease, so after only eight or nine phone calls I had made an appointment with a Senior Curator and Tim Walker, the Director of TheNewDowse, a regional art gallery and museum in Lower Hutt. I took along a disk of images of Jim's work in their unfired state. We discussed the concept, scale of the show and the tour. Jim was thinking of 80-100 ceramic figures, each around one metre tall. Two days later I received an email: the idea had been presented to the board and their decision was unanimous – they wanted the show.

Jim was delighted and set about making the remaining figures. I applied for funding to help with production costs and also to compile an exhibition catalogue. We were on a roll and momentum was flowing. Small challenges constantly arose along the way and it was just a matter of dealing with these challenges in a prompt manner. For example, the show was initially scheduled for July, but this timing was brought forward two months. This put a lot of extra pressure on Jim and kilns were operating around the clock. Also, only a few weeks before going to print with the catalogue, our printer closed their Dunedin operation and sold their press to an Australian firm. This meant that I had to find another printer who could do the job to our specifications, within our timeframe and our budget.

Creating and touring a show of this scale is a massive undertaking and this became apparent when it was time to arrange freight for the works. Even professional art handlers who looked at the job said "there is a box over there and this fits into it – the too hard box". Given the fragile nature inherent in ceramics most people suggested individual crates for each work, but this was not an option given the quantity. Together with Jim and Mark Roach from Exhibition Services we



Figure 1: Jim Cooper, studio snapshot, *The Beatles*, 2007 (photograph by Brian Wood).



Figure 2: Jim Cooper demonstration, Wellington, 2007 (photograph by Brian Wood).



Figure 3 & 4: Loading the truck with Jim Cooper's work, 2007 (photograph by Brian Wood).



Figure 5: Jim Cooper, studio mock-up, *The Beatles*, 2007 (photograph by Brian Wood).

brainstormed the idea and came up with a system of foam-lining a truck, building corrals and an internal mezzanine floor, then placing six figures on each side of the corrals tied in with fibreglass filament tape. We treated the interior of the truck as though it was one big box.

This was ground-breaking stuff in the history of ceramics in New Zealand, but still quite a risk considering that no one else here had ever toured a ceramics show of this scale by a single artist over such a distance by truck from Dunedin to the North Island. The internal fit-out for the truck has to be kept so that it can be re-used on each leg of the tour. It is interesting to note that with over 130 ceramic objects only three breakages occurred, all at the hands of people who are unfamiliar with the nature of ceramics.

For people unfamiliar with ceramics, the figures at first appear to be made of papier mâché. It is only when they pick up the sculptures that they realise their weight. It is therefore crucial when handling these works to hold them from the base: protrusions such as hands, hair, epaulets or elbows can easily break off. One must be aware of this at all times and treat them as you would fragile glass.

A month prior to the works being collected for *Sergeant P* TheNewDowse decided it would be a good idea for Jim to extend the show beyond a single gallery; their visit to Jim's studio generated wonder, amazement and excitement and they wanted to recreate this studio environment in a gallery context. Thus this became a major show by a major artist: the *Sergeant P* assemblage is flanked by two side galleries filled with shrines, dioramas and a wall of drawings showing people how Jim develops an idea and explores it before committing it to clay. These additions to the show are very informative and viewers can get up close to the figures and see details which may be lost at a distance.

Sergeant P is not purely a ceramic show. Even though there are over 130 ceramic objects, including ceramic roses which together spell 'Beatles', there is also a large element of found objects, collage and MDF cut-outs, which directly reference the original cover made up of cut-out figures. Jim Cooper is a multi-disciplinary artist and he uses ceramics as a transformative process,

taking a material that has traditionally been used in craft and using it for fine arts purposes. He is also a writer and a painter and Jim explores a concept through these practices and then extends his ideas further by manipulating clay to its absolute limits. If we were to peel the glazes off his sculptures, lay them out flat and hang them on the wall they would be up there with the best abstract expressionist work such as Willem de Kooning's figurative paintings.

Sergeant P was one year in the making, and the timing, although coincidental, is superb considering that the fortieth anniversary of the original album release has just occurred. It is interesting to look at what the cover meant to society then and what it means now. It is also interesting to look at how people respond to the current exhibition. Children are ecstatic and big smiles can be seen on the faces of young and old. This is a direct response to the show as there is always an element of extreme happiness in Jim's work.

Accompanying the exhibition is a catalogue in the style of an album. It includes a mask so you can dress up like one of the figures, a colouring-in page with a pack of six crayons, a psychedelic poster true to the period, a page showing studio workings with quotes from people who know and understand Jim's practice, a catalogue essay and a selection of postcards, all for \$10! The catalogues are aimed at children and adults in touch with their inner child; they appeal to a broad audience, art lovers and Beatles' fans alike. Limited to 1000 copies, all are signed and numbered, making them potential collector's items as well as hours of fun.

Even though the show is now up and running my role is not yet over. Catalogues need to be compiled, distributed and communications maintained. Recently a couple planning their wedding asked permission to have their wedding photos taken in front of *Sergeant P*. Workshops need to be arranged, as well as international press coverage. In September the show was dismantled, repacked and freighted to Rotorua where it went on display at the Rotorua Museum of Art and History.

With each new exhibition space the show will take on a new experience as lighting and the dynamics of shape and size of room all play a vital role in the

theatrical setting. At TheNewDowse, with sufficient space around the work, it appears as if the figures are shuffling, about to have their photo taken at that precise moment just before the click of the camera. The work is very animated and in a smaller space it could appear a lot noisier as they nudge and elbow for the front row positions.

So where does an emerging curator fit when dealing with an established artist and a selection of public art galleries around New Zealand? I certainly have seen them with fresh eyes and an enthusiastic approach. What I have learnt from working on *Sergeant P* is so enormous it is unquantifiable and could not have been obtained from reading a book or attending a lecture. This experience is hands-on and part of 'the real world'. I have learnt that being a project manager (including the role of curator) means it is crucial to have the right people on board for each project – photographers, designers, printers, packers, freighters etc. I have also learnt that one can never make the assumption that other people know the obvious or understand the medium.

What makes a good curator? I believe it is someone who does not have their own personal agenda. A good curator is someone who is willing to go out on a limb, believe in an artist's work and help convey the messages that artist is trying to get across; someone who has the artist's best interests at heart and not

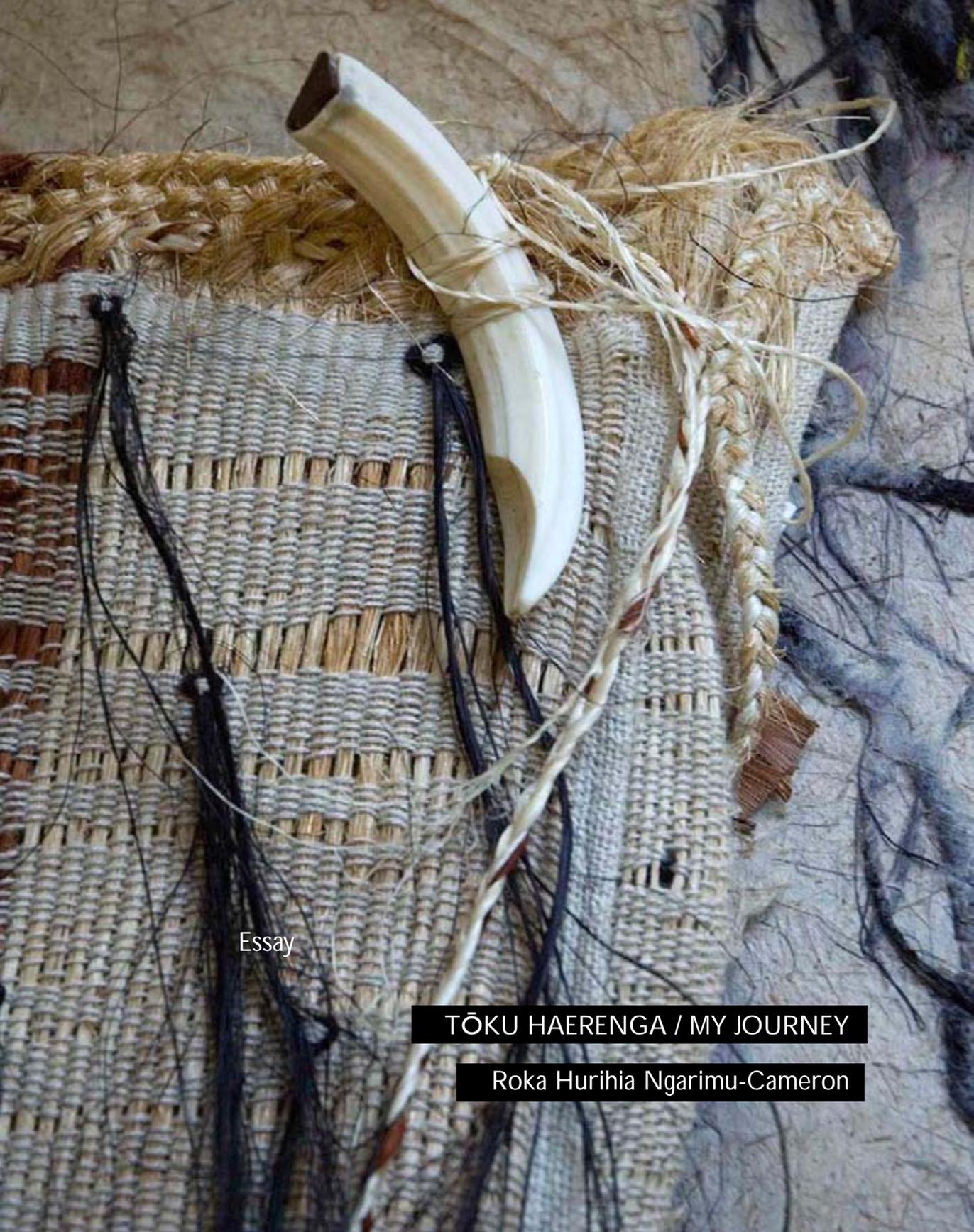
their own self promotion or financial rewards. Being a curator is not a nine-to-five job: it requires 100% dedication, passion, commitment and willingness to do what is required whenever that may be. In this sense, the role of curator and that of project manager are closely aligned and one could say even 'symbiotic'.

Having passion and dedication for my curatorial practice also feeds into my own studio work and vice versa. Having a knowledge base and understanding of clay – a very responsive medium with a multitude of different applications – provides me with the opportunity for a better dialogue with other practitioners and helps me understand the challenges faced when they are dealing with ceramics in contemporary environments.

On a final note, I am very fortunate to have worked closely with Jim Cooper on the *Sergeant P* project. Jim once said "without you there would be no exhibition". But the reverse is also obviously true. I consider Jim Cooper to be dazzlingly skilled with extraordinary intellectual power that is manifested in creative activity. He is original and unique, a man with visionary qualities who is committed to making art everyday.

Sergeant P at TheNewDowse May – September 2007; Rotorua Museum of Art & History, September – December 2007; Whitespace in Auckland, March 2008.

Brian Wood moved to Dunedin in 2005 to complete a BFA majoring in Ceramics and Curatorial Studies at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic. He is now a third-year student and *Sergeant P* is his first major touring exhibition and curatorial project.



Essay

TŌKU HAERENGA / MY JOURNEY

Roka Hurihia Ngarimu-Cameron

Te Kāranga – (Ceremonial Call)

Hirini Melbourne
- Kōauau/pūtōrino (flute)

Karakia – (Prayer)

He hōnore he korōria ki te atua
He Maungārongo ki te whenua
Whakaaro pai ki ngā tangata katoa
Āke, Āke, Āke, Āmine....

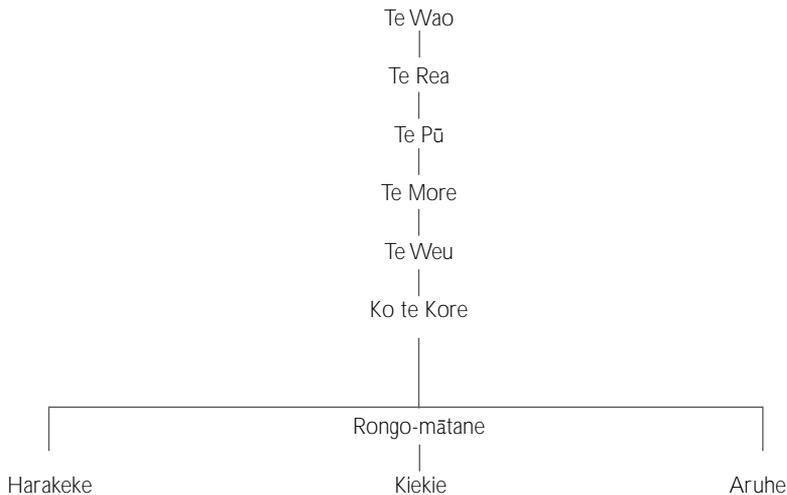
He Tohu aroha ki ngā kaumātua o ngā mahi toi - (Dedications)

Rāina o te Rangi – great grandmother, Roka Kehu Hōtene – grandmother, Te Oti Hōtene-Ngarimu – mother,
Ani tokina Haimona – Kuia,
Rongo Belmont – Kuia, Hinehou Campbell – Kuia, Te Raita Ngamoki – Taua, Taua Doreen – Emily Schuster,
Kath Brown, Erenora Puketapu-Hetet and the recent Kelly Davis.

Mihi – (Introduction)

Ko Rānginui te maunga, Ko Hawai to awa, Ko Te Harāwaka te Tūpuna, Ko Te Whānau ā Apanui te Iwi, Ko
Mataatua rāua ko Horouta ngā waka, engari tetahi o uku waewae kei roto ia koutou, Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tahu,
Ngāi Tai, Te Whakatohea, Ngāti Awa, Ngāi Tuhoē, Te Arawa, Tuwharetoa, Ngāti Airihi

Whakapapa o te Harakeke – (Geneology of the flax - phormium tenax)



Whakatauki – (proverb)

“Hutia te rito o te Harakeke – Kei hea te ko mako e ko?”

Ko Emma Rogers raua ko Dannie Poihihi, Te Whānau ā Apanui.

Figure 1, previous page: Roka Hurihia Ngarimu-Cameron, *Korowai Puketeraki*, detail, 2006 (photograph courtesy of Craig McNab).

AUTHOR'S HISTORY

I was born in Opotiki in the late 40s and lived with my kuia (grandmother) Roka and mother Te Oti at Hawaii. I was raised in a ponga whare (house) at Hawaii on the pa (village) in the rohe (district) of Te Whanau a Apanui. Our whare had a dirt floor, no electricity, no running water, a single door opening and an outside toilet. Roka was in her late 70s when she was caring for me. She was tūturu Māori, which meant we lived by the ways of our ancestors. She could not speak English and so all of my communication with her was in Te Reo Māori. We survived on the tolls of hard work from the land, growing kai (food) – kūmara, riwai and kamokamo – and from the sea, which provided us with kaimoana (seafood): crayfish, kina, ngeangea, paua and ika (sea eggs, eel, abalone, fish). My mother and kuia were master divers and they knew where all the traditional kaimoana rocks were. Nanny Roka was a staunch member of the Ringatū Hāhi and walked the many miles, by beach at low tide, to the various twelfths held at the neighbouring marae (village). She is well known for her journeys from Hawaii to Te Kaha. She was truly a servant of God. Nanny Roka wore a moko (tattoo) and this depicted her ranking within her hapu (tribe), Te Whanau a Te Haraawaka and her iwi (people) Te Whanau a Apanui. The tohunga (master tattooist) performed tā moko (face tattoo) on my kuia at the Kokohinau Marae, Te Teko in the rohe of Ngāti Awa. My nanny Roka was a survivor of the Tarawera eruption during the late eighteen hundreds and it is where my name comes from. Rokahurihia means the tumbling turning rocks. I proudly carry her name and dedicate the mahi (work) that I do to her:

TE WHARE PORĀ

My entry to Te Whare Pora, the house of weaving, was through my kuia and mother Te Oti. My induction into Te Whare Pora was brought about by necessity, the necessity to survive. Our survival depended upon the produce made from harakeke (flax) and the application of raranga (weaving) techniques within our environment. We required rourou (plates) for cooking kai and kete (baskets) for gathering berries and kai moana. Kete riwai are baskets for carrying potatoes; kete kūmara are baskets for carrying sweet potatoes;



Figure 2: Ponga whare, (image courtesy of the artist).

whāriki is a general term for woven mats and korowai for clothing.

The humble and earthly beginnings that I experienced enabled me to be in touch with Papatūānuku (earth mother), and her offspring, Tāne Mahuta and Tangaroa. Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, in her book on Māori weaving, states that “Te Whare Pora can be described as a state of being. The weaver is initiated into Te Whare Pora, the house of weaving with karakia (prayer) and ceremony.”¹¹

Her or his level of consciousness is raised and they become clear-minded and relaxed so that their spirit, mind and physical being are totally in tune with each other. They are in a state of optimum readiness to receive and retain knowledge. As Elsdon Best noted in 1898, in *Clothing of the Ancient Māori*, “The Whare Pora was a house specially set aside for teaching the art of weaving in its various branches, and in it were performed the ceremonies connected with the installation and teaching of the taurira (student).”¹² Te Whare Pora does not necessarily require a physical structure as the word ‘whare’ implies. Traditionally, the taurira underwent an initiation ceremony to enter Te Whare Pora. Very few of today’s weavers experienced this initiation ceremony. One of the reasons for this is that many traditional ceremonies were viewed by the Christian missionaries as being anti-Christian acts. They were discouraged – not forgotten by Māori, just not practiced.

The missionaries held the idea that Māori should be Christianised or ‘spiritualised’. However, Te Rāina o Te Rangi (Figure 3) symbolises the arts of whakairo, our written language and our books. The three fingers in the carving of Māori figures sometimes commemorate the historical happenings of ancestors, but the much older spiritual significance have often been overlooked. Te Rāina o Te Rangi is there to remind us of the spiritual side. I wish to put at rest the minds of some of us who wrongly believe, because of the writings

of ethnologists and historians, that the Māori were worshippers of stone idols and wooden images. On the contrary, the Māori of old believed in God before Christianity was introduced. They knew how to pray; during drought they prayed for rain; when fishing they prayed that fish be plentiful. There were prayers for everything pertaining to living. To clarify the question of the three fingers, one can refer to the carving of our ancestors before even the historical migration of some 600 odd years ago. Our carvings teach us:

FROM HAWAIKI NUI, HAWAIKI ROA,
HAWAIKI PĀMAMAO”

Here by ritual I prepare my self to face the universe.

By the ritual of the earthly realm

By the ritual of the heavenly realm

By the ritual of which enabled our ancestor

TĀNE – NUI – A – RANGI to ascend the firmament
even into the heaven of heavens.

There he met:

IO-MATUA-KORE: God the Parentless(1st Finger)

IO-NUKU: God of Earth (2nd Finger)

IO-RANGI: God of Heavens (3rd Finger)

From whom came the three baskets of knowledge?

TE KETE TŪĀURI:

the basket of Good or Evil (1st Finger)

TE KETE TŪĀTEA:

the basket of Material Knowledge (2nd Finger)

TE KETE ARONU: the basket of Spiritual Knowledge
(3rd Finger)

These were brought down by our ancestors TĀNE-
NUI-A-RANGI and planted upon Papatūānuku
unto this world of form, unto this world of light,
behold the principles of life. It is a coincidence that
when our European brothers and sisters introduced
Christianity to us they also brought three baskets.

THE FATHER: God of the parentless (1st finger)

THE SON: Son of God (2nd Finger)

THE HOLY SPIRIT (3rd Finger)

Christianity brought three other baskets as well:

FAITH or WHAKAPONO(1st Finger)

HOPE or TŪMANAKO(2nd Finger)

CHARITY or AROHA (3rd Finger)



Figure 3, left: *Turirangi*, sculpture 78 x 40cm, 2006, tikumu, paua shell and piupiu harakeke, custom board, Otago Museum (photograph courtesy of the artist).

Figure 4, right: Roka Hurihia Ngarimu-Cameron, *Kupenga*, 2000, harakeke, emu feathers, 170 x 126cm (photograph courtesy of W Tilley, Opotiki).

All the things brought by Christianity are recorded by the carvings of our ancestors. There are many treasures recorded by our carvings that are also recorded in the Holy Bible. It would take volumes to present them. I would like to leave this thought: It is coincidental that when the Holy Bible arrived amongst our people it was already written into our carvings.³

I would like to also make reference to our Poupoumanawa, *Turirangi* from Tunāpahore, 1851 (Figure 4), housed here in our Museum, Te Whare Taonga o Otago in Dunedin. This Poupoumanawa came off one of our whare at Hawai, my Tūrangawaewae. Also, I make reference to Te Whare Taonga o Otago for housing our whareniui Mataatua for many, many years. This comforts me and my whānau (family) here in Te Waipounamu. The whareniui Mataatua has returned to Ngāti Awa te kainga tūturu.

Long ago, Nanny Roka taught me to have respect for my environment and our creator and embraced me into Te Whare Pora, through love, aroha and guidance. The need for her to weave and work hard was paramount as our sustainability depended on it. This work ethic has been instilled in me as I strive to work earnestly in everything I do. I make reference to Nanny Roka as her instilling of this work ethic in me has led to many projects, and has guided my tōku haeranga, my journey.

KUPENGA

Here, I make reference to my work *Kupenga* as it also represents the three-finger Kaupapa. I created the cloak for the *Fibre and Fleece Competition*, held in Opotiki in 2000. This project provided an opportunity for my mum and I to share our skills, tell our stories, laugh our laughs and cry our cries. The competition was entered into to support the event and because it had a Māori Art Section. The *Kupenga* was judged winner of the Māori section and also chosen as the supreme winner of all the sections.

This achievement aroused much delight amongst my hapū and iwi. Before long people were requesting that I teach them the skills of raranga. Wānanga (workshops) on traditional whatu korowai (cloak making) were conducted on the thirteen marae in our

rohe. This had not happened for fifty years. There was huge interest and our marae were full of industrious people harvesting, preparing, extracting fibre and developing the skills of whatu korowai.

At the completion of these wānanga the people wanted more. By now I had started raranga programmes under the Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board in partnership with Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. My ties with my whanau, hapū and iwi were all strengthened and we were involved with many projects in our community and we modelled these for Te Whanau Arohanui in Waitati.

WHARE TOI

During this time a new whareniui was built by my brothers. Stage one of the papakainga housing projects was completed and a new Whare Toi erected on our marae.

As I worked on the tukutuku panels for the Arai Te Uru Marae Whareniui, I was filled with the wonderful memories and precious times that mum and I shared completing the tukutuku panels for our Whareniui Ranginui. My mother featured in Mick Pendergrast's book *Te Tahī* (2005), which shows some of the panels that we worked on. Sadly mum passed away. Moe mai e te whaea moe mai moe mai.

The Whare Toi will house the skills of Toi Māori Raranga – Whakairo and Rauangi. Our aim is to provide an opportunity for people to learn the skills of their chosen discipline, to establish an art co-operative and to provide an opportunity for Green Tourism.



Figure 6: Tukutuku Panels (image courtesy of Mick Pendergrast's book *Te Tahī*).

Our coastline is so beautiful and many thousands of tourists are finding out more and more how beautiful it really is. We plan to provide them with a completely Toi Māori experience and one where they will be taught basic raranga skills as part of their package.

Our Whare Toi holds much meaning for me as it has been built on the site where my kuia's ponga whare stood. It will also be our Whare Taonga, a place to display the treasures of our own master weavers from our own rohe – of those weavers who have not gained the recognition that they deserve.

I am a current member of Te Roopū Raranga Whatu o Aotearoa and I am one of the weavers that made the cloak *Maungārongo ki te Whenua* which was gifted to Toi Māori Aotearoa. At the presentation ceremony for this cloak, I caught up with Dr Khyla Russel. We flew back to Dunedin together. During the flight Dr Russell encouraged, inspired and challenged me to undertake further study at Te Kura Matatini ki Otago/ Otago Polytechnic.

This was a challenge alright. I was scared, excited, honoured. I mihi to Dr Russell for her achievements in the world of academics and for the mahi that she has done for her people and for Māoridom. I also make reference to *The Eternal Thread* exhibition (2005) that I toured with, as working for this exhibition assisted in building my confidence and this, in turn, helped me to accept the challenge to enrol for my Masters of Fine Arts degree. For this exhibition, I was part of a group of weavers that wove a traditional korowai using whītau (fibre) and tanekaha wairākau (dye) from my rohe. I mihi to Dannie Poihipi, Manny Mokomoko, for their Tautoko within these taonga. Our group gifted the korowai entitled *Aramoana (Korowai Aroha)* to America to create a pathway for Māori Art to the American people. It now has a place of residence with the Mayor in San Francisco.

The cloak, *Aramoana*, symbolised the weaving of strong and vibrant relationships between Māori people and the citizens of San Francisco. It was presented by Te Arikini Dame Te Atairangikaahu, the Māori Queen, to Aaron Peskin, President of the Board of Supervisors for San Francisco. Creative Director of the Pataka Museum in Wellington, Darcy Nicholas, explains:

The Māori art meets America event is important because it celebrates the creative achievement of Māori people today in one of the great art cities of the world. The word 'Māori' has immense values in the international arena, combined with the dynamism and spirituality of the arts it is an awesome force. Māori art has unlocked a huge audience and confirms research for a dynamic fit with the vibrancy and beauty of this country:⁴

In response to calls from Māori to assist them to retain ownership and control of their Māori knowledge, imagery and designs, Creative New Zealand has created and registered the Toi Iho Māori mark as a registered trademark (See <http://www.toiho.com/> as last accessed on 30 September 2007.) I am a current registered artist of Toi Iho and would like to acknowledge Moana Davey from Creative New Zealand for the awahi in the Sydney Aboriginal and Oceanic Art Fair, 2004.

THE SCHOOL OF ART

Upon my return from this fair to Dunedin, an opportunity arose to re-establish the raranga programme for Te Wānanga o Aotearoa. Yet again the mauri (life-force) of the harakeke has been able to find sustainability for the whānau. After my return, Dr Russell again challenged me to study further and an interview was scheduled with the panel from the School of Art and my application was submitted. It was a thrill to be accepted, but I was seriously asking myself what I was doing there?

Initially, I became whakamā (shamed); my initial plans and thoughts for my projects were blown away; they didn't seem to fit or I didn't seem to fit. Although my hoa, Rose and Rangī, gave me the support I needed, the Māori art forms of kete, kete whakairo, piupiu whāraki and whatu korowai felt as if they were being drawn away from me. This made me feel very lonely. But, sitting in the corridor I had observed another lonely creature: the loom. I became curious and before long I had attached myself to it. In the loom I found an interest and an entry into the masters programme at Te Kura Matatini ki Otago. The whānau were also proud and excited. I was ready. Was I ready?

My first impressions of Te Kura Matatini ki Otago began to shake my foundations. Feelings of doubt, isolation and of not belonging absorbed me. My studio appeared lonely. The world of Toi Māori that I had been used to as a teacher and learner was far different from the place I was at. Complaints from fellow students about my resources and their smell then also severely rocked my foundation and in order to overcome this I focused on how looms functioned and what could be woven on them.

In the warp and weft I found a similarity to the aho and whenu of the whatu technique required for weaving korowai. Feelings of renewed hope and excitement began to fill my creative world. My creative energy was awoken and I was a Māori artist again. Tihei Mauriora! I mihi to Christine Keller for her tuition on the loom and I have named my first piece off the loom *Keller*. I was learning to weave my wānanga toi Māori world together with the western Te Kura Matatini ki Otago art world. I had found a balance.

My table loom sampler *Keller* is a wall hanging piece with mixed media from tōku haerenga, my journey. It includes bear grass and sweet grass from the whenua of the American Indian Confederated Tribes of Siletz Salem in Oregon. Mihi aroha ki Bud and Robert for their support and aroha in supplying these to me. The tea plant from Hawaii is represented and woven in to be worn so as to keep the evil spirits away. Fijian tapa cloth was given to me by my son Carl who is a barrister in Fiji. Harakeke paper made from New Zealand flax came from the printmaking studio at the School of Art.

Furthermore, I included Māori sweet grass, pīngao and the karētū, in the piece; as well as huruhuru feathers from the native New Zealand pigeon or kererū as well as contemporary materials; asian feathers, wool, mink, as well as human hair weaving together the four generations of my whānau: myself, my daughter, my mokopuna and my mokopuna tuarua.

In teaching the skill of Piupiu making to taurira of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa raranga programme at Waitati, I designed a piece from the American Indian dress made from hide which I purchased in Salem. The glass beads that are also attached to the whītau (fibre) represent the beautiful beadwork of the Indian people and the glass beads from the iwi of Ngai Tahu.

Thus, I was bringing two worlds together. But, for me the understanding of the two worlds of art has been difficult. My tūpuna (ancestor) Nanny Roka's art of survival and story telling, which we consider to be he taonga tōku iho (treasures of our ancestors), is part of the culture but the art of today is quite different. Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* states that "story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research."⁵ Indigenous writers' stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story.

As a research tool, Russell Bishop suggests, storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the storyteller rather than the researcher retains control.⁶ Linda Smith, further states: "Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst us as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions, which are still a reality in day-to-day indigenous lives."⁷ Kathy Irwin characterises Kaupapa Māori as research which is culturally safe; which involves the mentorship of elders; which is culturally relevant and appropriate while satisfying the rigour of research; and which is undertaken by a Māori researcher, not a researcher who happens to be Māori.⁸ My story is important to me as Māori, we celebrate our survival and not our demise. Through storytelling our people have successfully retained their cultural and spiritual values and authenticity.

As my preparation of my materials developed the need for research to kīnaki tōku mahi (support my work) became evident. We are privileged in our community and certainly at Te Kura Matatini ki Otago to have a kaumātua (an elder) of significance such as Huata Holmes. He is a much respected elder in the community steeped in Tikanga Māori and a native speaker of Te Reo Māori.

I prepared myself for an interview with Huata that had been arranged by Dr Russell, armed with pen

and paper and tape recorder. Had we been on our marae the interview would have been conducted in the whareniui embraced by our tūpuna. It would have been held in a place of solace fit for such an interview. However, here at work we struggled to find an appropriate room, a quiet place where he could think, recite and talk.

My interview went well. Huata spoke of the Ngai Tahu language for the Kupu Korowai as his Ngai Tahu whanau use Kahurangi for cloaks. The different dialect is Kahuraki and it comes from our native manu the kahu (hawk). I created a workbook with my images of Tōku Haerenga and named the book *Huata*. During my interview with him, I placed my very old book that I had recycled for my images on the table that our coffee was served on. He told me to remove the book, stating that it was "He Tapu tena Taonga". The book was precious like our many precious taonga. For me, he wove the written language and the oral art together.

I also had the pleasure of Huata's presence at the Te Moana Nui a Kiwa Conference at the University of Otago in 2006. We had a small exhibition and workshop in the textile department to kīnaki (add support to) the conference and I also had the pleasure of working with Kelly Davis in his workshop of Mokihi building with my demonstration of mahi (making) piupiu (a traditional garment somewhat like a skirt).

RAHERA AND TE HARAWAKA

My thoughts then became focused on the preparation of my raw materials for loom weaving and for my sculptural piece, *Rahera*, made from harakeke paper as a prop for my *Te Harawaka* cloak. During this process I gave a workshop in the printmaking section. I would like to thank the printmaking section at Otago Polytechnic for their harakeke papermaking workshops, especially Marilynn Webb and Steev Peyroux; and also Kahu Toi Te Kanawa who gave the flax for the workshop and Te Whare Wānanga o Waitati taurira who participated in the workshop.

I would like to thank Leoni Schmidt for introducing me to Linden Cowell and I wish to make reference to Linden for his koha aroha of the kauri slab, on which my sculpture, *Rahera*, is erected. I also wish to make reference to my son Ricky for the preparation of the kauri slab that is over a hundred years old. This piece of kauri is from a project that Linden worked on for the Otago Museum. The cabinet displaying *Rahera* and the cloak *Te Harawaka* is also made from kauri which is over a hundred years old. "He Rangatira."

My *Rahera*, a paper-mâché doll, is named after my Matua Whangai mahi (care and protection of families). The love and nurturing I received from my kuia encouraged me to nurture others who were less fortunate than me and I thus became a foster parent. The doll I recycled belonged to one of my foster daughters who is now in her 30s. After completing my diploma in theory and practice of Social Work at Otago University under the direction of Dr Pat Shannon, I decided that my skills were still required in caring for people hands-on rather than from an office. "Matua Whangai mahi".

Te Harawaka is the first garment I made on the floor loom. I had prepared tonnes of whītau/flax fibre and I used wairakau tānekaha (a native tree) and traditional methods as part of my preparation. It took me months to do the gathering and working with the raw materials.

The classic korowai (cloak) that was collected by English navel officer John Fletcher in 1837 from the Motu o Kapiti Rohe o Pōneke (Wellington area) is the prototype for *Te Harawaka*. I wove three titi (mutton bird bones) on the front of *Te Harawaka*, making reference back to the spiritual kōrero (conversation) in the beginning of my story in this essay called "Tōku Haerenga". For me, the realisation of the possibilities when joining together my traditional methods of preparing with the Western techniques of loom weaving is developing into a passion and a story which I am proud to tell.

Figure 7, right: Detail of whītau tags and tānekaha dye, 2007 (photograph courtesy of Craig McNab).

Figure 8, inset right: *Korowai Puketeraki*, 2007, harakeke, cotton and linen, pig tusk capped with granite stone (worn here by Dr Khyla Russell (photograph courtesy of Craig McNab).

PUKETERAKI

The next korowai *Puketeraki* I made was in remembrance of our kaumātua (ancestors). A korowai is a fine cloak with black cord tags. The distinguishing feature of the korowai is the decoration of its kaupapa (main surface) with hanging cords of two-ply rolled fibre, usually dyed black. The aho (wefts) secure the center of each cord so that the two ends hang down as a double tag. When the wearer moves these hukahuka (fibre tags) move too, giving life to the whole garment. These form a subgroup which is loosely rolling tags that appear to be unraveling.

TE WHĀNAU AROHANUI TRUST

Reflecting Tikanga Māori principles (ways of enacting Māori values), my husband and I established the Te Whānau Arohanui Trust (T.W.A.T.) in 1990. That same year the country was honouring the 150th anniversary of the Treaty of Waitangi. This was our little part to play for the cause and our way of holding onto our Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination).

We followed the ways of our tūpuna and creating a path heading into the future. T.W.A.T. acknowledges the support that the rūnanga Kati Huirapa has given to the trust.

Dr Peter Walker, lecturer in the Family and Communities Studies Department, Otago University, wrote an article on the T.W.A.T. partnerships with the rūnanga Kati Huirapa. The method of kanohi ki te kanohi allowed the assessment process to happen orally face-to-face with rūnanga. The respect paid to Kati Huirapa by T.W.A.T. was the foundation of the trust between them. With the blessings of the mana whenua (people of the land) the facility was opened by our Rangatira Rangi Ellison with a special mihi to the Kati Huirapa hapū for their support and belief in the Kaupapa.

The two women pictured overleaf were from the rūnanga Puketeraki near Karitane. The photograph was taken in the late 19th century. The garment on the left has vertical bands. My korowai, *Puketeraki*, has vertical bands of tānekaha. It also has a pig tusk adorning it,





Figure 9: Late 19th-century photograph of two women from the rūnanga Puketeraki near Karitane (photograph courtesy of Ani Tokina).

which I personally capped with a granite stone (see Figure 1) in our jewellery section at the School of Art. The wild boar that the tusk came from was caught by my son Ricky. I make reference to our tŭpuna (ancestor), Ani Tokina, great-great grandmother of Ani Denham – Mihi aroha kia koe Ani for the use of this photograph above of the korowai.

Both the *Puketerak* and *Te Harawaka* korowai made the finals of the Westfield Style Pasifika 2007 New Zealand fashion awards (see more at www.stylepasifika.co.nz as last accessed on 30 September 2007). I would like to thank the Otago Polytechnic for the support enabling me to take part in this prestigious event.

TE WHĀNAU AROHANUI TRUST

I was following the ways of my Kuia through the harakeke. We planted numerous pā harakeke or flax plantations around our whenua (land) and I began teaching my mokopuna (children) raranga (weaving) and the skills of our tŭpuna (ancestors). This gave me much pleasure and it did much to weave and bind us together as a whānau. This creative energy has become the backbone of the already mentioned Te Whānau Arohanui Trust (T.W.A.T) founded in 1990 and a foundation from which members are able to climb their poutama (stairway of knowledge).

With the gift of natural resources from Papatŭānuku and the guardian of plant life (Tāne Mahuta) and the raranga skills of our tŭpuna we had found a way to sustain ourselves. Te Ao Takahuri Gallery is an extension of T.W.A.T., where Māori art can be sold. A mobile gallery (a bus) serviced the marae of the two Islands and was in attendance at a national Hui for Māori Art. Our late kaumātua (elder), Skip Biddle, named the gallery Te Ao Takahuri (The Spiral Life) in 1996.

Moe mai I roto e ngā ringaringa o Ihu Karaiti.

KOWHAIWHAI AND TĀ MOKO

My journey also includes tā moko (skin art) and the kowhaiwhai designs on the Te Whānau Arohanui building rafters which were designed by my son Francis Cameron and my husband Kerry Cameron in 1991. The kowhaiwhai design that adorns our whare uses the koru design to tell of our dual cultural heritage, standing side by side with each other. They represent parents caring for children, men respecting women and the women's whakapapa alongside the men's whakapapa. The whānau tā moko tells of our ancestors and shows the lifeline to the future. The tā moko also promotes the tōi (art) of our tohunga tā moko to be worn with dignity and which holds meaning to our kaupapa of te whānau arohanui. They are worn also to remind our rangatahi (youth) that skin art is a beautiful art form and that our bodies are to be respected in the wearing of true tā moko. As our tohunga tā moko say: "It is better to have tā moko that is meaningful on your body than have skin art that is not" (kōrero a waha).

Much has remained with me from the times I would sit on my kuia's knee and touch her moko; when I would feel its lines and its texture and admire its beauty.

RIMURAPA

During my morning walks with my kuri (dog) along St Clair Beach, I noticed the rimurapa (bull kelp) that had washed up. I was so fascinated by its size and its texture that I selected large pieces and dragged them home. I worked on these pieces with great excitement, stretching them, blowing them up like

balloons, stuffing them with paper and shaping them with a netball. I could feel the wairua (spirit) of the tītī (mutton bird) harvesters that made the pōhā (bag made of kelp) to preserve and carry the tītī. I made sure to give the pieces left over back to Papatūānuku (mother earth).

While collecting the rimurapa I was reminded of the stars Mātāriki and Puaka, and Hekenukumai Busby - the reviver of the Māori lore of ocean-going waka (boats). Around the middle of May both Mātāriki - a star in the constellation Pleiades - and Puaka - a star in the constellation Orion - disappear from the night sky below the horizon. My grandmother would warn us that Mātāriki and Puaka were going to dive "kua ruku a Mātāriki, Puaka". She would say Mātāriki and Puaka's diving would cause currents that would stir up the seabed that loosen off the seaweed. The next morning, at dawn, she made sure we were all up so that we could collect the seaweed which was used to make iodine. This took me back to my Turangawaewae (domicile) where my nanny and I would collect the seaweed after Mātāriki and Puaka disappeared. We also collected karengo (edible seaweed) which was part of our diet; it is a delicacy of our whānau hapū iwi.

HE WHAKAARO

In conclusion I celebrate my survival at Te Kura Matatini ki Otago. My mahi has been undertaken positively and my heart has been opened to the wairua of my resources, tools and environment. The similarities of the weaving techniques – both Māori and Western – have woven a thread of love through my veins. My mahi has brought the ways of my tūpuna Māori and my tūpuna from my non-Māori side Ngati Airihi together. The wairua I felt when I completed my first piece, *Te Harawaka*, was very strong. I was proud of my dual cultural heritage and that my mahi was in harmony with my heart, soul and hands.

Toi te Toi
Toi te Mana
Toi te Whenua
Promote the arts
Promote the prestige
Promote the land the nation benefits
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

- 1 Erenora Puketapu-Hetet, (1989) *Māori Weaving*, (Auckland: Pitman, 1989).
- 2 Elsdon Best, "The Art of the Whare Pora", in *Clothing of the Ancient Māori*, (Transactions of the New Zealand Institute, Vol 31, 1898), pp. 625-658. http://rsnz.natlib.govt.nz/volume/rsnz_31/rsnz_31_00_008730.html as last accessed on 24 September 2007.
- 3 Pine Taiapa korero from kaumātua Wiremu Baker, Nga Puhī (1980).
- 4 Darcy Nicholas Toi Māori Aotearoa, Wellington, New Zealand (2005).
- 5 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 177 – 178.
- 6 Ibid., 84, 145, 186.
- 7 Ibid., 177-178.
- 8 Ibid., 184-186.

Roka Hurihia Ngarimu-Cameron is Aotearoa (New Zealand) born. Roka was raised on the Hawai Marae in the rohe of Te Whānau ā Apanui. She has established three weaving schools within Aotearoa and is currently the head of Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, Raranga programme, Dunedin. Roka enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts degree at the School of Art, Te Kura Matatini Ki Otago (Otago Polytechnic) in 2006. Her postgraduate studies focus on the translation of traditional off loom hand woven garments into a contemporary arts practice in loom weaving in order to weave the two cultures of Aotearoa together. She is a registered *Toi Maori* artist.



Figure 10: *Rimuroa*, 2006, a bull kelp kete with harakeke handles (photograph courtesy of the artist).

REMEMBERING, FORGETTING AND 'FABLING' PLACE

Mary Modeen

ABSTRACT

Uses of places in art to function as sites of memory are well documented. Historical images, from the Middle Ages for example, illustrate 'place' used as the site for mnemonic location. Purposeful 'forgetting' is another act of human will that can be witnessed in terms of locus: artists destroying monuments, altering photographs and erasing drawings enact intentional forgetting. But fables and fabulation, as we understand them in narrative or literary form, might provide a construct for an intermediary step, halfway between preservation and eradication. Far from being 'lies', fables give meaning to our lives and teach us the deep lessons we need to hear. Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, for example, provides a paradigm in literary form that might be extended to visual art. In this article the work of contemporary artists – that of Mary Modeen and others – proposes 'visual narrators', as it were. These examples are examined as suggesting an intermediary point between remembering and forgetting.



Figure 1: Mary Modeen, *Untitled (Immigrants)*, digital inkjet print, 8 x 13 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

'SEEING' PERSONAL AND CULTURAL MEMORY

To begin talking about fables, as I will do in a moment, it is necessary to make a few preliminary comments about memory itself and separately, about art. Let's begin with the 'seeing' part of art.¹ It is not just the physiological process of receiving visual information, but also what Heidegger calls *das andenkende Denken*² (thinking that responds and recalls), in an effort to link thinking with life, to hold one's self open to being.

Is seeing a passive act? Most definitely not. We humans 'see' in ways that are far more complex than organisms resembling sponges soaking up visual stimuli. We select, we scan, we collect, compare, edit and interpret with lightning speed. We respond to the world around us with apparatus that tells us not only the qualities of light and dark but how stimuli are 'read' in ways which convey significance. Let us not forget the element of *vision*, in the imaginative sense of the word, as applied to the act of pre-seeing, of imagining – or, as some people insist on saying these days, 'imaging' (though I find this diction equally misleading). We shall consider how this process of accumulating meaning sits with the collection of empirical visual data, especially for an artist, and especially how the intimation of meaning may reside in fabled representation.

The act of visualising may be said to be the process of envisioning the past, or more precisely, of envisioning *through* the past. Even the most immediate of spontaneous visualisations – say, an abstract expressionistic painting, for example, records physical movement. A moment's brief swing of the arm is tracked in the spray of paint and the resultant gestural 'sploosh'.

And we read it as such thirty years – or a hundred years – after the act of painting. The physical act of making is imbued in the material form. In this sense then, art-making is as much *about* the past as it is the moment of its making. It is the reflection, the mediation, the recording, the debate, the erasure, the celebration, and even the distancing of what has gone before. Art is the record of a past physical process of making, and it is equally an encapsulation of a human creative perception of its own time. Much has been written about textual hermeneutics, the interpretation of meaning through construing and writing³. Making art is in itself an act of interpretation long before it, in turn, becomes the evidence and subject of further interpretation.

Let it suffice here to say that in considering the meaning of memory and forgetting, as well as seeing how this is achieved in the work of a few artists, that layers of interpretation begin to accumulate in the manner of subtextual footnotes along the way. The desire to *see* is the motivation to make visible, and to make visibly clear, as in a piece by Joseph Kosuth (Figure 2). He has offered us image and text, one parallel to the other without exact explication by either. Each may stand separately. In part this piece rests on at least three traditions: that of still-life, *nature morte* (upside down in this case), on photographic representation, and on graphic techniques such as charts and posters which incorporate X's, for example, emphasising placements of note. The conjunction of these hints at a fourth level of interpretation, the 'place' of meaning and meaninglessness, names and labels with and without significance.



Mediation between 'out there' and 'in us' is intrinsic in creative visualising. Artists make, viewers view, but what has been made has not only been seen by the artist but transformed, however subtly, in the process of making.

Attitudes which inform the artist's stance are inevitably a mixture of personal and cultural influences, as in a piece by Joseph Beuys (Figure 3). Those who know something of his life find extra significance in his choice of materials, but cultural and personal influences truly merge in his creative process of visual thinking and visual response. As John Berger states so startlingly, "the past grows around one, like a placenta for dying."⁴ This artistic response is a creative reflection on the past in materials which become a kind of cultural code for both the individual and the collective. Beuys' *Fat Battery* is a Death and Transfiguration in lard and wires.



The confrontation with materiality is internalised and re-formulated in other materials when art is made. To take an example, the internalised landscape begins with '-scape', the viewing process. Looking outwards is the first and primary experience, and framing-selective choice-making quickly follows. Internalising happens

afterwards: that which was perceived has been taken in and altered. Simon Schama voices this opinion in saying "...landscape begins in the mind..."⁵

Memory acts as the abstracting steps in moving backwards from the 'real', the unmediated stimulus outside, to the interpreted experience, the recall of personal and subjective experience. In stepping back, going backwards on the continuum of fixed-point time and space, images (mental pictures, if you like) are re-created through memory recall: stages of abstraction are the process of stepping back from thing-as-it-is out there.

Representation of place finally becomes the sum total of coded signifiers: however unconsciously, self-selected salient elements are recorded in visual shorthand. The retelling, or re-picturing, typifies hierarchical and subjective knowledge. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard⁶ describes visual memory in an example of the attic in one's childhood house: one remembers it as looking up. In the mind's eye, it is always up, never down. Experience has given us the location – transformation has occurred in the internalised re-picturing.

The clarity of internalising is made more evident by the satire of 'externalising': in the novel *The Hothouse By the East River* by Muriel Spark⁷, shadows of the protagonist fall askew, crossing others and leaning towards the light. "Her shadow falls the way it wants..." a character remarks, while her psychoanalyst is convinced that she has altered phenomena by 'externalising' memories. This is a parody of the internalised image, the shadows – or 'real' phenomenological world – that falls askew. Shadows are significant as the choice of altered states because they are both real and intangible, visible and insubstantial. In my work, too, shadows begin to suggest both the presence and physical absence of a person (viewer?); multiplicity of view points; insubstantial 'witnessing'; and the



ephemeral half-presences which contrast so starkly with geological changes in land over time, (Figures 4 and 5).

Having set the stage in this introduction by briefly touching on memory, perception and art, let us consider in more detail the functions and effects of remembering and forgetting.

TWO TYPES OF MEMORY

Aristotle distinguishes between two types of memory, *mneme* and *anamnesis*. This serves as a reminder to us of the differences in qualities of memory, especially as they are used by artists. Aristotle distinguishes between intentional recall (*anamnesis*) – that which is functionally summoned from the collection of information stored – and that which is unbidden (*mneme*), coming to us in flashes, which he calls *pathos*, linked with affection or even habit. If we use his distinctions, and apply them to artistic practice, we have one useful way to describe creativity vis-à-vis the past.⁸

Volition is, in part, the basis of the distinction between the two versions. It is possible that one mode of functional dynamics between making and memory itself is that of a *willing recall* and implementation.

For example, Christian Boltanski (Figure 6) wills the remembering of Holocaust victims in his installations, and uses Swiss newspaper photographs, manipulated to look vaguely skeletal, while documenting both the lost individual and lost humanity. Anonymity might be a stage of losing or forgetting individual identities, but the archives are an attempt to re-remember. Remembering is systematic. It occurs in boxes, labels, and shelves so institutionally ubiquitous that the very effort of remembering is in danger of anonymity here. The paradox is a melancholy memorialising of lost individuality.



The 'unbidden' or unwilling model is a second form of creative functionality. *Pathos* is a model for creativity in which mysterious and essentially ineffable moments of transformation are welcomed, when the artist is anything but a 'normal' self (if indeed there is such a thing). An artist draws forth, remembering with forceful power. A drawing from memory, for instance, loses precise detail and emphasises that which is hierarchically the most important elements. Drawing is a direct link to the subterranean processes of the mind. An artist may think that she knows what she has seen, but cannot know what has really happened in the transmutation of this memory until the act of drawing re-displays that which has altered, subjectively, in the mind's eye.

Is it, then, that imagination and especially imaginative visualisation – or what we must generally refer to as the creative element in studio practice – is, in fact, precisely a negotiated relationship to the past? Let us consider two visual positions relative to the past.

Remembering, as we consider it here, is the use of place in art to function as the site of memory. Documenting through observation and recording has long been a function of art. Drawings, historical paintings, and more recently photographs and documentary film have all served this purpose. Long before the word 'spin' was coined, recording historically with a bit of 'improvement' to aggrandise the past was a favoured strategic move of many dictators who commissioned flattering artists.

The contemporary artist, Mark Dion, provides a different example of artful remembering: his forensic approach to place bespeaks an artistic adaptation of scientific scrutiny. He catalogues, labels, classifies, and ultimately aims to transcend the taxonomy of 'thing-ness' as the meta-data describes patterns of life in a place. The physical evidence of living on a site, for example, becomes the substance of his art. Using methods borrowed from anthropology and criminal forensics his oblique artistic intention is to return us to a directed gaze at how we humans occupy a place, what we use and discard, and ultimately what that might suggest.

Historical images, as well, from the Middle Ages for example (Figure 7), illustrate 'place' used as the site for mnemonic location. In a woodcut from 1520, the image of a town is a device to aid memory: the viewer is instructed to 'see' the village in imagination, and then to place the items to be remembered in exact places within this imaginary place. Later, to recall these things, one 'walks' through the village and literally re-collects them in an act of willed retrieval.



Purposeful 'forgetting' is another act of human will that can be witnessed in terms of choice, outlined here in four different variations and intentions:

- a. The destroying of photographs, records, archives and artifacts of historical documentation, or purposefully obscuring aspects of them is one variant. The artist/philosopher Jean Baudrillard, for example, discusses in his theories the current paradox of the private made increasingly public, and the public made secret. He is fascinated by the transformation of the seemingly accessible made inaccessible, in transforming through the act of 'seeing' something new from something that was once a moment in time. (He also, by contrast, examines the pre-seeing – the 'precession' as he calls it – in representation as it comes before and influences the 'real')
- b. Artists/citizens often destroy monuments, such as in the statues of dictators which are pulled down after liberation from the old regimes, an act of 'dememorialising'.
- c. Erased drawings and other art are destroyed and defaced as an enactment of intentional forgetting, specifically of countering past creativity and the work of an artist's hand. Robert Rauschenberg famously erased and exhibited a drawing by Willem DeKooning.
- d. Artists sometimes decide 'the world is too much with us' and creatively reduce contact or withdraw: according to Blaise Pascal "man lives between the abyss of the infinitely large and the abyss of the infinitely small."⁹ In a similar vein Milan Kundera wrote: "The infinite diversity of the interior world [is] hidden in all things."¹⁰ Clearing the stage, seeking simplicity, moving away from painful experiences, and seeking isolation for meditation are all more positive associations with purposeful forgetting. In such cases it is not as if the past was never there. It is only at a distance, selectively reduced or hidden (Figure 8).



Other creative aspects of forgetting should not be overlooked. To quote Calvino's fascination with the obverse of memory and how its charms might be enumerated, he recounts in *Invisible Cities*:



Fig. 2

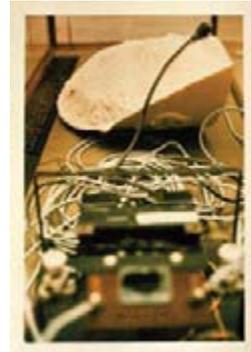


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 9



Fig. 8



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

...after six days and seven nights, you arrive at Zobeide, the white city, well exposed to the moon, with streets wound about themselves as in a skein. They tell this tale of its foundation: men of various nations had an identical dream. They saw a woman running at night through an unknown city; she was seen from behind, with long hair, and she was naked. They dreamed of pursuing her. As they twisted and turned, each of them lost her. After the dream, they set out in search of that city; they never found it, but they found one another; they decided to build a city like the one in the dream... [The woman] had long been forgotten...¹¹

Indeed it is the enchantment of desires forgotten, of times past ineluctably distant that prompt the beginnings of fabulation.

FABLES

Finally, now, my promised return to the subject of fables. I suggest there is an intermediary position between remembering and forgetting, and that we may see this in many examples of contemporary art.

In *The Uses of Enchantment* Bruno Bettelheim¹² says that "...our greatest need and most difficult achievement is to find meaning in our lives." It is through fables that he believes the power of the imagination is freed to hear deep lessons. He cites myths and fairy tales – in short, fables – "...as stories that are derived from, or give symbolic expression to, initiation rites or other *rites de passage*..." Applied to art, this gives us the model for both remembering *and* forgetting in a creative, coded intermediary position. Bettelheim goes further. He writes of the need for fables and fairy tales:

A parent who from his own childhood experience is convinced of the value of fairy tales will have no difficulty in answering his child's questions; but an adult who thinks these tales are only a bunch of lies had better not try telling them; he won't be able to relate them in a way which would enrich the child's life.¹³

His point is that the fable is *not* a pack of lies. It is a compression, the heart of drama. Time is compressed: it is not 'real' time. Narrative, such as it might be construed, is compressed. Place is iconic, a stage that is not 'real'. In fact, all the elements are highly structured and poetically terse: 'reality' or its representation is replaced by dreamtime, by characters, setting, morals and rightness that is appropriate to the actions but which do not function in parallel to wakeful cognisance.

I have been concentrating thus far upon place as the site of knowing-ness, as the context for understanding where we are. But I could equally have focused upon, say, character or plot or any other aspect of fables and applied them to visual art. Place, though, gives us a chance to examine emblematic settings – at once both the atmosphere and the context for understanding – giving us the sense of where we are as achieved by the appeal to emotive feeling rather than by words.

Imagine if it were possible in fables to take a core section of the narrative action. The sample would reveal dense strata of time. In a manner akin to archaeological excavation, moments of understanding, lucid crystals of cognitive awareness, are embedded in masses of ground experience; the senses record in pre-verbal states of knowing even before the full act of perception interprets 'dumb' knowledge.

Fables and fabulation, as we understand them applied to narrative or literary forms, might provide a construct for an intermediary step, halfway between preservation and eradication. Let us consider a literary form for the sake of comparison: Calvino's *Invisible Cities*¹⁴, already quoted above, provides a paradigm in literary form that might be extended to visual art. His seminal book relies upon the retelling of Marco Polo's travel adventures as he recounts to the Khan sensuous details of the far-flung empire that the ruler will not be able to experience for himself. Accounts follow one after the other as Polo tells of fabulous cities in accounting all he has seen. Or, is it 'real' we find ourselves asking? Is this fantastic imagining based on an ability to evoke sensual experience? The implicit questioning brings to the forefront the contrast – and similarities – of sensual invention with recalled past. It is the mediation between the past and narrative present that presents sensual evidences as a series of bridges.¹⁵

More to the point, the fable-like structure of the book cumulatively begins to muster toward a 'lesson' – or does it? Is the point that memory itself is selective, and based so inextricably upon sensual experience, that to 'remember' is to evoke sensuality itself? Calvino suggests the fable-like qualities of how memory works in a graceful *pas de deux* of remembering and forgetting. We read his work with the same power of fables or fairy tales, learning from the imagination, hearing deeply. Through integration and imaginative synthesis, we are graced with gifts from both remembering and forgetting in language as lyrical as poetry.

Concentrating on place, contemporary artists frequently question the contrast between the tale and contemporary reality. In his ongoing work on Scottishness, my colleague Calum Colvin overlays in his portrait of the poet Robert Burns the man's facial likeness with the flotsam and jetsam of a nation's visual culture. His work is interesting as well due to the insistence on perspective and place – viewed from any other position other than exactly the one presented in the photograph, the image would disassemble and become painted fragments of disjointed still-life objects. But since the art exists as a photograph, the viewpoint is fixed. What is the implication of this rigid point of view? Does it offer the suggestion of dissolution of the image into its fragmentary bits? Is it the inflexible Scottish national character which holds the surface illusion together at the cost of recognition of the actual component parts? Or even more subtly, is the 'place' for all these questions as illusory as the fictions of the assembled image?

Many contemporary artists and filmmakers rely upon place in a manner akin to fables; let us examine several examples as their work suggests intermediary points between remembering and forgetting. To begin, let us consider the work of Krzysztof Wodiczko. In his *Edinburgh Projections: Moreturi Te Saluteant* ("We Who Are About to Die Salute You") of 1988, images of homeless people were projected against the pillars of the Royal Scottish Academy on the Mound in central Edinburgh. Like some vast surreal caryatids, these outcasts from society peered back at the viewer from the fluted columns of this imposing building.

In fact, in most of his work, Wodiczko projects photographs onto the surfaces of public building façades, making his 'canvas' the fabric of the city itself. The content of his photographic works are visual fables, commentaries if you will, upon some aspect of the people, and usually politics, of the place. Part of the fable-like quality of his work is the ephemeral nature of the piece – no substance, just light and shadow temporarily transform a building into a vastly scaled sculptural surface for viewing characters who silently enact their parts.

Andrew Goldsworthy, another renowned Scottish artist, uses natural materials in his fable-like creations. In one piece, a halo of golden dandelions glows in the radiance of one day's sun; in others, a bloodline of red is traced in leaves floating on water; or a snowball draws its own watery shadows in an image on paper made from melting. Goldsworthy's work is artificially remembered (that is, it is mechanically reproduced) in the photographic documentation which recreates *timelessly* the all-too fleeting material event. Part of the appeal of his work is as to a child who senses childhood's brevity; he paints with the very colours of the day, framing the landscape with its own constituent parts to direct our gaze (Figure 9).



The films of Andrei Tarkovsky are worth mentioning as well in this context; they are evocatively constructed in spaces which characterise inner space, states of mind, lit with golden light or deepest shadows. The settings Tarkovsky chooses or creates seem to be equally convincing as atmospheric landscapes and dreamlike poetic spaces, similar to the references to the imagination described variously by Bachelard and Carl Jung.¹⁶

Is it possible, then, I hear you ask, to actually have fables in art? Do they do the same thing in visual form as they do in literature or storytelling? Well, in many ways, art has an edge over literature in conveying stories that subvert language. Or, more precisely, art has the ability to convey a visual narrative that has no specific verbal articulation attached to it. Let us consider the *preconscious*, as psychologists have defined the term.

In Freudian theory this is the part of the mind lying between the conscious and the unconscious. Consciousness as a state may be linked with the ability to articulate – to identify and name, as indicative of awareness. Pre-verbal states of knowing – 'feelings', sensings, intuitions, premonitions, and so on, are linked to this preconscious

or subconscious state. It is most definitely *not* an 'unknowing' state – simply a non-verbal state. (The *unconscious* is defined as non-cognisant: axiomatically, not naming, not seeing.) Hence, the artist's role in manifesting in visual form this precarious but essential knowledge is precisely that of associative vision, or peripheral vision – linked to dreams and memories.

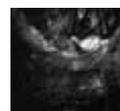


Here is where we have the connection to both memory and forgetting. The realm of memory is in the preservation of the past: the recollection of events, the collection of ephemera, the recording of detail, the intention to memorialise. In this sense, the all-too-fleeting detail is important, and is the critical focus of the work (Figure 10).

In Figure 11 (*Puerto Rican Housewife*), the figure is not just a woman to the late artist Diane Arbus, but a 'housewife' as indicated in the title; the details of her domestic interior define her as both name and role. We seek clues: why the bed? Is this a sexual commentary, feminist politics, a gender statement embedded in a portrait, or all of the above? The soft furnishings, the plunging neckline of her black dress and heavy eye make-up hint at luxury, or at least a pretense toward alluring sexuality. The tension in her face, the tiredness in her eyes and the tightly crossed legs begin to suggest something else in this woman's position, at odds with the supposed ease in a boudoir. Her identity as Arbus has given it in the title is defined by two places, her nationality and her home. How do these define her? Perhaps the fable here is the place in society as this woman's identity – at once familiar and anonymous. It is documentary of *a* home, *her* home, her place, emblematic but ubiquitous in the sense of women who 'know their place'.



Forgetting is the erasure of the past: the deletion of records, the negation of significance, the choice to absent details, the intention to deny, revise or move away. It is the purposeful separation of the past from now – the negation¹⁷ (Figure 12).



Art as fable remembers in the sense that it tells us of something – it tells (or re-tells) a story. *Something* happened. It forgets in the sense that it is interpreted, it has travelled the distance of time and of partial abstraction, it is speaking to us in code, in imagination, and in references not in the present (Figure 13).



As a visual fable it leaves us with the conviction that this is the site of something significant that happened in the past, if only we could recall what has been forgotten. A veil has been drawn over the details of time gone by. It is still there, but obscured, partially deleted, re-interpreted from a different and shifting perspective. In forensic terms, it is 'unreliable evidence': perhaps true but unscientific. In our own lives, it is the sum total of what has gone before, or rather, the interpretation and re-interpretation of what has gone before, subjective as it is (Figure 14).



CONCLUSION

If we accept that fabling is a technique that may be applied to visual art, the final question we might ask would be: "What is the point of fables in art?" Bettelheim as quoted earlier suggests that it is finding meaning in our lives. This is reiterated by Ursula LeGuin in her essay "The Child and the Shadow".¹⁸ She says:

The great fantasies, myths, and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak *from* the unconscious to the unconscious, in the *language* of the unconscious – symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does [and I would add, art]: they short-circuit verbal reasoning, and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter. These are powerful words that give credence to the creative understandings inherent in fables. They hint at the real value of visual fables – speaking straight to those places in our "...thoughts that lie too deep to utter" (Figure 15).



The visual retelling of a well-known story is not in its plot, since that is already understood. It is rather in the qualities of *how*: how is it this time? How is it with these characters? The art of the storyteller in capturing the subtle variations of human repetition is precisely the centre of fabulous art. This time, this way, we see exactly something



Figure 17: Mary Modeen, *Three Moons*, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

at once old and new. Perhaps it is confusing to use a narrative fable with a visual fable, but I believe that Paula Rego's intaglio print (Figure 16) does both well. The strange awkwardness of the girl with the knife is a visible counterpoint to the vulnerable blank-eyed mice. One covers, and one of them even stumbles toward its intended assassin. The girl's face remains impassive, revealing little passion and reading more like a mask. This is the quintessential *how* of the nursery rhyme and fable that we all know from childhood. The story itself may be conveyed tersely; the envisioning is moving.



Artists are in a unique position to fable visually, bypassing verbal language to evoke the sensual and ineffable power of remembering. At the same time they can rely on the structures of the selective configurations of forgetting. In beckoning and evoking, these artworks we have seen, as well as my own work, recall and omit simultaneously. These pieces preserve the mystery of personal interpretive response to age-old states of being and knowing, in which the multiplicity of human perception overlays the slower but equally shifting cultural milieu of our time. Most of all, they re-picture in rich variation stories without words which mediate and reflect upon our singular and collective pasts.

- 1 'Seeing' is used here as in the sense defined by John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (London, Penguin Books, 1972) and expanded in *Ways of Looking* (New York: Vintage, 1992). That is, seeing is more than what is taken in by the eye: it represents comprehension on a level that includes cultural significance and personal meaning.
- 2 Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (London: Harper & Row, 1971).
- 3 Notably Edmund Husserl, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur.
- 4 See <http://www.brainy-quote.com/quotes/j/johnberger150076.html> as last accessed on 3 November 2007.
- 5 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, Alfred A Knopf, 1995). This is an exhilarating and unique book in its creative connections and multidisciplinary approach. It was central to many ideas contained in my writing.

- 6 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
- 7 Muriel Spark, Muriel. *The Hothouse By the East River* (London: Macmillan, 1973).
- 8 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Ricoeur is both eloquent and comprehensive in his reflections about memory and time, history and forgetting. His book was a central influence for this paper.
- 9 Blaise Pascal, *Pensée*, 1660, trans. W F Trotter.
- 10 Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, trans. Aaron Asher (London: Faber & Faber, 1978/1996).
- 11 Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (Orlando, Florida: Harcourt, 1974).
- 12 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Random House, 1975), 3.
- 13 Bettelheim, 118.
- 14 Calvino, *Invisible Cities*.
- 15 It echoes the child asking if the fable is real. Bettelheim advises the parent to answer from the perspective of addressing the fears behind the question: 'there are no dragons here to harm you.' but, not to deny the power of the imagination through which this freedom to integrate experience comes.
- 16 Bachelard in *Poetics of Space* and Carl Jung in his *On the Nature of the Psyche* explore the mind as parallel to place, both reflecting on the archetypal significance of surroundings that describe inner states of mind. Tarkovsky's use of light and shadow, his sensitivity to environment, features this relationship.
- 17 Ricoeur, *ibid*.
- 18 Ursula K LeGuin, "The Child and the Shadow" in Susan Wood, ed. *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction* (New York: Perigree, 1979), her italics, my brackets.

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Figure 2: Joseph Kosuth - *wmaa.00549*, 1997 ((c) 2005 Joseph Kosuth / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York, copyright Whitney Museum of American Art).

Figure 3: Joseph Beuys, *Vitrine: Fat Battery*, 1970 (copyright Walker Art Center).

Figure 4: Mary Modeen, *Seafret and Shadows*, 13 x 8 cm, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 5: Mary Modeen, *First, The Land*, 13 x 8 cm, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 6: Christian Boltanski, *Dead Swiss Archive* installation (copyright the artist).

Figure 7: Johannes Romberch, *Congestorium Artificiosae Memoriae*, 1520, a woodcut of a 'mnemonic city' demonstrating place as a device for remembering.

Figure 8: Mary Modeen, *Untitled (Dresser Ruins)*, digital ink jet print, 21 X 29 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 9: Andrew Goldsworthy, *Touchstone North 4* (copyright the artist and photograph courtesy of Neil Sinclair).

Figure 10: Susan Hiller, *From the Freud Museum*, 1992 and ongoing (artist's books and multiples, copyright the artist).

Figure 11: Diane Arbus, *Puerto Rican Housewife* (copyright the artist's estate).

Figure 12: Jean Cocteau, film still. In this dreamlike image, veils and shadows separate us from clarity of vision: we are moved into a realm of shadows, guesses and supposition. Place is no more certain than characters or events. Cocteau has intentionally constructed a visual set to confound our knowing sense of place.

Figure 13: Joel Peter Witkin, *An Eye for the Forbidden*, 1993 (copyright the artist).

Figure 14: Mary Modeen, *Untitled (Mailboxes)*, digital ink jet print, 13 x 8 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 15: Mary Modeen, *Spirit of the Goodman's Land*, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 16: Paula Rego, *Three Blind Mice* (copyright Victoria & Albert Museum).

Mary Modeen is an artist/printmaker who also works in artist books, installations, and recently, in video and sound. She resides in Scotland where she is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art and Course Director for Art, Philosophy and Contemporary Practices at the Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee. She has recently had two exhibitions in Ballarat, Victoria (2007) as part of a Senior Research Fellowship at the Arts Academy. Prior to this, she was also a Research Fellow and artist in residence in New Zealand at the University of Otago, Dunedin, working and exhibiting with Māori Studies scholars at Te Tumu, School of Māori, Pacific and Indigenous Studies (also 2007).

DALRYMPLE AND THE POSSUM: RE/ENACTMENT AND THE UNCANNY IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Pat Hoffie



Julie Gough, *Force Field*, dead apple tree, bricks, copy of 1825 Van Diemen's Land Magistrate's Report, timber, pages from *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, 2007, exhibited in: *Thresholds of Tolerance* group exhibition at the Australian National University School of Art Gallery, Canberra, May - June 2007.

This essay was written in response to thinking about what contemporary visual art practices of installation and performance might mean against a burgeoning interest in reenactment among historians. It was originally presented at a conference at the Australian National University convened by Professor Iain McCalman in June 2007. I am a visual artist, and as I read further about reenactment, I began to think about some of the pivotal questions it raised for visual artists, and in particular for contemporary Indigenous visual artists in Australia. In her "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?"¹ Vanessa Agnew writes,

Reenactment's emancipatory gesture is to allow participants to select their own past in reaction to a conflicted present.²

The notion of emancipation – and of choice – still seems out of reach for so many Australians whose histories have been overwritten by more official accounts. Julie Gough is a contemporary Indigenous Australian artist whose research delves into history for clues about what might have happened in the past. This essay examines the way in which her installation practice brings events, places and people into the present.

* * *

There are two commonly used ways of spelling re-enactment: one employs a hyphen – a kind of symbol-bridge that conjoins the prefix to the main body of the word while still maintaining a little distance. In this rendition of the word there is a preserved sense that there might be a little territory of in-between-ness in terms of the original event and its simulacrum.

The other way of spelling the word has ingested that junction. Instead, a performative possibility has absorbed the space between past and present tense. As if, perhaps, the past has been swallowed up, or overlaid by the active potential or presence of the present.

For the purposes of this essay I want to propose a third option: a sense of a process that suggests other possibilities. In this manifestation of the word, its two parts have been separated by a forward slash – a kind of sloping barrier that keeps the prefix and the

trunk of the word apart, and which leans like a mirror reflecting back the problems inherent in attempts to re-stage particular aspects of the past.

And importantly, within the context of this essay, this somewhat awkward appropriation of the word is used to suggest the problems inherent when dealing with some aspects of Indigenous history in this country. As with that other re-word, reconciliation, it is difficult for many to see the practicality of a term that suggests the possibility of going back to – of returning – when any attempts at conciliation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous cultures in this country have not yet occurred.

In such cases, it could be argued that there can be no possibility of re-enacting certain events that have been completely erased, denied or eradicated from written historical accounts of Australia, and to argue instead, that *enactment* is what might first be necessary before any performative re-staging of the event can even begin to be imagined.

Central to this essay is a description of an installation/performance/event where a process of re/enactment opened the way for enactments that had previously been denied.

Discussions of re-enactment share certain characteristics with certain practices of appropriation that have been evident in visual art in Australia since the 1980s. In his "Introduction" to the book *Radical Revisionism*, editor Rex Butler argues that a new wave of interest in the history of Australian art from both artists and art historians followed in the wake of practices that emerged during the 1980s, 90s and 2000s. Butler describes how this particular approach to history – represented in his two volumes *What Is Appropriation?*³ and *Radical Revisionism*⁴ – has only become possible *after* appropriation – as if, paradoxically, this history could only emerge after its sequel. He writes:

It is a history that is interested in the art of the past only insofar as it is rewritten from the perspective of the present. It is a history that is explicitly constructed from the point of view of this present, that is understood to arise as an effect of what comes after it. It is a history, therefore, that sees the artists

of the past speaking across what we might call 'time-like separated' areas to contemporary issues. In other words – and we should try to remain aware of just what is so extraordinary about this – it is a history that conceives of the artists of the past as though they were already post-modernists, already reacting in their work to the same concerns that the artist of today do.⁵

The interpretation of history Butler describes seems to fold the past into a *symptom* of the present. His version of history is one that doubles over the reception of both historical and contemporary events within an overview that employs a "radical revisionism". Butler is keen to identify his particular take on revisionism as employing a "certain ironic distance on our part towards it – is in part a survey of these re-readings" and by so doing to position his argument slightly to one side of the phenomenon of revisionism in general.

Convoluted though this argument might be, the idea that certain aspects of the past can be re-activated in the present are also shared by advocates of historical re-enactment. Stephen Gapps argues that:

The practices of historical re-enactment provide insights into the construction and activation of Australian historical sensibilities that are important in the configuration of other popular activities involving history. A bodily, sensory engagement with various forms of historical representation highlights wider attitudes to history. Such personal participation in history making illuminates relations between the self and history.⁶

A recognition of the importance of physical, sensory apprehensions of knowledge is also shared by contemporary artists who use installation and site-specific work. In such works the presence of the viewer and the context and site of the work are inextricable elements of the work itself. Such ideas emerged from developments in conceptual art, when the focus shifted from representation to investigations of how and where and for whom representations were made. As importance shifted from the image or object as the privileged site for analysis; the chosen materials, forms and contexts of presentation were reconsidered as

symptoms of the meaning of the work rather than just as 'framing devices'.

And in turn, the institutions for the traditional exhibitions of art – the white cubes of contemporary galleries, the museums and public spaces – were also critically re-examined as institutional demarcations that could mediate, absorb, reflect and augment as well as inhibit and censor meaning. Many contemporary visual artists turned a sceptical eye to the very contexts of their exhibitions, raising questions, as part of their work, about the extent to which the exhibiting site inhibits or extends or transforms the reception of the work.

Julie Gough is an artist well aware of such complexities. As a contemporary artist of Indigenous descent, she often uses her work to pose questions about the ways in which certain forms of knowledge or experience or locations are privileged.

The authority of the art gallery and the museum, for example, seals in the 'legitimacy' of the work as critical practice in a way that off-site installations rarely do. The authority of written history, as another example, is accepted over and above inference or imagination. And the authority of the world of rational behaviour and explicable events is unquestionably more acceptable than the world of the uncanny.

In the next part of this essay I will discuss the process of installing a particular exhibition. There is a sense in which, for artists, this process is itself a kind of re/enactment – a practice where the ultimate destination is more or less an unknown. For many visual artists, the re/enactment of events gone before often involves processes of chance, serendipity and blind judgement that are necessary if aspects of the unimaginable are anticipated as an important part of the work.

The exhibition I will discuss, and the performance of its installation, are examples of a kind of re/enactment where unwritten history, unspoken truths and the presence of the uncanny emerge to prefigure as the subject of the work. I will argue that re/enactment in the visual arts is often a process of staging a set of variables, not to direct the action or the responses of the participants/viewers/re/enactors, but rather to perform the role of a framework from which experiences of the extraordinary might arise.

* * *

On the night of Tuesday, May 8, 2007, Julie Gough began the task of completing her work titled *Force Field* in the Art Gallery of the Canberra School of Art. Julie Gough is an artist whose Indigenous family members originally came from Tasmania, and she saw the inclusion of her work as part of a larger exhibition, titled *The Limits of Tolerance*, as an opportunity to re-examine an historical event that had both deep personal relevance for her as well as social, political and cultural relevance for today.

The event she focused on involved one of her ancestors, Dalrymple Briggs, who had been employed as a 'native' servant in the home of a Mr Jacob Mountgarrett at Longford, Tasmania. A relative had brought Julie's attention to the life of Dalrymple, and the artist subsequently sought permission from the National Library of Australia to make copies of the handwritten pages of a Magistrates Report from 1825.

At the age of twelve, Dalrymple had been shot by her white employee. In the court case in Launceston that followed two weeks after the shooting, the child had claimed that the incident was a mistake – that her employee had really been aiming at a possum at the time and that she had merely 'got in the way'. Twelve year old Dalrymple's explanation of the attack did not match with the accounts of two witnesses of the event, but in the end, the case against the "fairly notorious" Dr Mountgarrett was dropped. Ten months later Dalrymple had left her place of employment.

As a descendant of Dalrymple Briggs, Julie was deeply saddened. She was also struck by the way in which the event reflected the way in which Indigenous agency has been obscured from written history in Australia. And of how, when included, it has been done so in a highly contrived and contorted way.

There is a sense in which Julie Gough's work for this exhibition has been erected on the site of her own doubt and misgivings – doubt that her ancestor Dalrymple was telling the truth, doubt about whether the existing frameworks of justice could ever 'hear' through the child's claims, and doubt about the possibility of "deliberate recordings" ever to be about anything other than "substantiation, power and culpability, or lack of."⁷ In terms of traditional accounts

of Australian history, there is no place for Indigenous people to call home.

The artist's initial desire to erect a work that challenged the traditional idea of the home and hearth as a place of safety and comfort led to what might logistically have been an impossible dream.

However, as serendipity would have it, nature had intervened in the preceding months, and the title of the work – *Force Field* – may have been used to describe the atmospheric conditions that unleashed one of the worst hailstorms ever to have hit the city of Canberra. The storm damaged several buildings in the city, including the roof of the art gallery in which the installation was to be sited. As a result, the parquet floor beneath the hole had been left badly damaged, and the Gallery agreed that the building of a cement and brick hearth directly onto the floor would be permissible under the circumstances.

However, the artist intended the title of the work to relate to a system of pressures other than the atmospheric, as she states:

The title *Force Field* notes the pressure to accept written history as fact, when it holds layers of meaning and nuance particular to time, place, authorship.⁸

The centrepiece of Julie's work was erected in the middle of the vast room: a solid, stolid brick fireplace from which sprouted the slowly decaying trunk and branches of a leafless apple tree. The empty coldness of the hearth and the naked starkness of the dying tree filled the room with a chilling, vaguely sweet-smelling *ennui*. And fixed, page by page to the wooden mantelpiece above the hollow grate, were copies of the handwritten script taken from the Magistrate's Report of 1825.

Before the cold blocks of that hearth the artist assembled a gridded white floor covering – diligently pasted pages of "a history book I personally detest"⁹ and that "targets Tasmanian Aborigines as 'makers of their own demise'. "¹⁰ The pages of Keith Windschuttle's *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* were laid out like a white territory over which any viewer committed to closer scrutiny would have to travel in order to get a more intimate experience of the work.

Through these simple components the artist establishes a performative arena in which viewers are invited, by implication, to also perform the role of participants. We are called upon not only to use our sense of sight, but also our sense of smell, our tactile senses, and also our sense of judgement, for there is clearly a portentous lacuna between the printed documentation that provides the groundwork of the installation and the handwritten evidence of the Magistrate's Report of 1825.

The artist stops short of recrimination. As re-enactors of this event we are presented with a dead tree in a hearth – an apple tree, a metaphor for the tree of life and the bearer of the fruit of original temptation. And we are also given a platform from which to reconsider the past, and the present: beneath our feet are the black and white words of a contemporary historian, and before us are the officially recorded words from the bureaucracy in the past. The two forms of evidence given through the written word leave no immediate sense of disjuncture. And in terms of the material evidence – the solidity of the bricks and mortar, the presence and smell of the dying tree, the veracity of the printed texts – there is no sense of dislocation.

And yet the experience of the work leaves one vacillating, imagining that there is a sense of unfinished business. Feeling that the subject matter of the entire set-up might just have left the room.

Artworks work on allusions, associations. If we are literate in art history, we may be reminded, instead, of other fireplaces where anything is possible, where other disconcerting apparitions have occurred in the midst of apparent normalcy – the projectile tube of René Magritte's train in *Time Transfixed* (1938) as it launches itself into the grey emptiness of domestic familiarity, for example.

And beyond the cultural associations, the fireplace is the site where the dying flames transform into shapes and wraiths that quiver and dance, and shimmer and seduce; as the wood is engulfed and the ashes spin and spiral, new forms and imaginings are suggested in the flickering light. The sense that this grate has never yet felt the heat of such flames is evident in the unblemished nature of the bricks.

* * *

As has been mentioned, several aspects of this installation bear similarities with the experiences of historical re-enactment. As with historical re-enactment, there is a kind of twin focus at play: one focus asks the audience to maintain an awareness of the here and now while at the same time we are asked to think through the details of another history, about another time and space. Alexander Cook describes the experience of historical re-enactment:

The value of the exercise relies on the premise that the unscripted activities and responses of the participants will shed light on the original situation – often with minimal guidance. The directorial process is essentially reactive.¹¹

This can be compared with the role of the artist when she sets up a scenario where gaps in time and gaps in interpretation form the liminal walls of a kind of maze through which the viewer/participant/re-enactor must make their own choices in navigating the experience. That is, there is no definitive set of guidelines through which the re/enactment can take place.

Rather, in this installation, there is a sense that the option of any original enactment in the past has been elided. And that what we are left with are the very gaps, emptiness and silence on which the work has been constructed.

For the bricks of Gough's installation have been laid on the foundations of a lie, or, rather, on an axis at which the possibility of truth has been elided. Gough does not permit us to retreat from the presence of the present even for the briefest sojourn into the past... Rather, she insists that we are highly conscious of the *staging* of reality – of the way in which even the most apparently solid, timeless props are only ever built on contingencies and contiguities. And in this space, the authority and permanence of things seem all the less so: the question about whether the Magistrate's Report was able to accurately investigate a young Indigenous girl's experience one hundred and eighty two years ago seems to slowly unravel. And the words of the historian recorded on the gallery floor continue the legacy of writing out the silences.

And so, in a way, this installation is a work about wraiths and hauntings: things that may never have taken place at all, words that only ever suggest, but

which fail to actually or accurately describe; feelings that never coagulate into substantial matter, but which hang in the air like a fug of torpor.

It is, therefore, not about what can be performed. Not about what can be enacted. But rather it is about what might be sensed, or alluded to, or intuited.¹² It is an installation about those things that lie just outside any 'proper' – or official – understanding of what experience actually encompasses.

This terrain of experiencing art is frequently fraught with many strange surprises. Julie Gough's own tale of the making of the work is laced with accounts of chance and serendipity, of things that have surprised her in terms of the way they have 'come together'.

Perhaps the most telling tale of all lies in her account of the night prior to the opening of the exhibition, when she was engaged on her hands and knees methodically gluing down photocopies of the Windschuttle treatise to the floor of the gallery.

Alone in the cold darkness of the vast room and completely immersed in her work, her concentration was taken by a small shadow that passed by her to

shamble its way across the Windschuttle text and stopped near the beginning of the book. The artist was surprised, but did not rise, and the little creature continued its sailor's roll across the text in front of the fireplace from left to right, stopped slowly to look up at her, and then continued on its way unperturbed.

The artist is the first to confess her fatigue at the time, and the fact that, combined with her presence alone at night, this granted the event an air of portent, but the presence of the little possum, as if from the very words of Dalrymple's account, bestowed a magic to her experience of the work that has been worked into the re-telling by all who have heard the story.

Fanciful? Perhaps. An irrational side-line to the historical issues that are central to the work? Maybe.

But if we agree with the artist's claim that her work, like so much important contemporary work, is "often about unfinished historical encounters"¹³ then perhaps it is also possible to understand this event as yet another example of those unwriteable encounters that make the re-encountering and re-imagining of history so important.

- 1 Vanessa Agnew, "Introduction: What Is Reenactment?" in *Criticism*, Summer 2004, 46 (3): 327-339 (© 2005 Wayne State University Press, Detroit, M1 48201).
- 2 Ibid., 328.
- 3 Rex Butler, ed. (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art and Power Publications, 1996.)
- 4 Rex Butler, Rex, ed., 2005, *Radical Revisionism: An Anthology of Writings on Australian Art* (Brisbane: IMA, 2005).
- 5 Ibid., 9.
- 6 Stephen Gapps, "Authenticity Matters: Historical Re-enactment and Australian Attitudes to the Past", in *Australian Cultural History*, 23, 2003: 105-116 (© APT Network and the author).
- 7 Artist's Handout, Australian National University School of Art Gallery, Canberra, 9 May 2007: 2.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Alexander Cook, "The Use and Abuse of Historical Reenactment: Thoughts on Recent Trends in Public History", in *Criticism*, 46 (3), Summer 2004: 489.
- 12 "Reenactment thus emerges as a body-based discourse in which the past is reanimated through physical and psychological experience." Vanessa Agnew in *Criticism*, 3327-339 (© 2005 Wayne State University Press, Detroit).
- 13 "Julie Gough: If History is a Picture Puzzle How do I Know all the Pieces Fit?" Interview by Anna Kesson, in *Thresholds of Tolerance*, Caroline Turner and David Williams, eds (Canberra: Humanities Research Centre and School of Art Gallery, Research School of Humanities, Australian National University, 2007), 51.

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ABORIGINES AND THE BAMIYAN BUDDHAS

Peter Cleverley

Cyclone Tracy came into existence in the Indian Ocean off Australia's Northern Territory at 10am on the 21st of December 1974. On December 24th, Xmas Eve, she swerved in towards Darwin town and then back out to sea, only to turn round, head straight for Darwin and within three hours completely destroyed the town. All Darwin's suburbs were flattened, there remained several large structures in the Town Centre area, a Supermarket, the Koala Hotel, the Police Station and cells and several other of the more substantial structures. I was in Bali, Indonesia, oblivious to this catastrophic force of nature; I had made an overland return journey through Java and Sumatra to Singapore so that I could renew my visa for another month in Bali. I returned about two weeks after Xmas 1974 to talk of the cyclone hitting Darwin, the total destruction and the availability of work rebuilding this town. Within days I was with other males winging our way back to Darwin, Australia, in the quest for work. We were flying Garuda, Indonesian Airways, and unbeknownst to anyone beforehand, we landed in East Timor, Indonesia, supposedly to refuel. But, at the airport all Westerners were taken off the plane and searched. I could tell there were all sorts of desperation there, with hundreds of local people at the airport, some armed soldiers, and mayhem basically. If any passengers had what officials deemed incorrect documents or contraband they were held and their seats taken by wealthy Timorese attempting to flee their homeland and escape, what I realise now, were the beginnings of civil war. The Darwin Airport building was non-existent, no Customs, nothing. One was guided off the tarmac by security people and there was a bus to town.

Nothing could have prepared me for what we saw: steel reinforced concrete lamp-posts were knotted up on themselves, completely buckled every which-way. The only thing that remained of housing were those items that were attached to the ground by

pipes, like toilets and bathtubs and sinks. Everything else had just simply disappeared: it wasn't even lying around, just gone completely. I never heard anyone that had been through the Cyclone mention it, like there was nothing more to say. I asked a cab driver how many people had been killed, he didn't reply. It is said that people took the opportunity to disappear from the life they had, pretend to have been one of the fatalities perhaps, and create a new identity somewhere else. All women were shifted to camps set up by the Australian Army, the entire re-building programme was organised straight away, and male workers poured in from all over the world. Something that really amazed me was that twenty four hours before the Cyclone struck all the Aboriginal people living in the area left and went inland several kilometres and returned several days later. Not one Aborigine was even injured. I was told later that local Aborigine elders had noticed the mass inland movement of reptiles: snakes, lizards and goannas; had recognised the signs and followed them into the hinterland.

There was no accommodation of any type so people migrated to the beaches and estuaries and I spent seven days living on a beach, searching for work during the day and returning in the evening to rest. A group of Aboriginal people took care of me, they didn't ask for alcohol, but I supplied them with some in exchange for their kindness. It was very dangerous, animals, including the human, would have had my pack and worldly possessions in no time if these wonderful people hadn't kept vigilance over them. Despite the supportive surroundings it was a huge learning curve for an average white boy. About a week went by and several of the group got work with an American construction company. They were contracted to build Tracy Village, which is comprised of a Medical Centre, a gymnasium with swimming pools, shops and a pub. I was a builder's labourer and the Aboriginal men

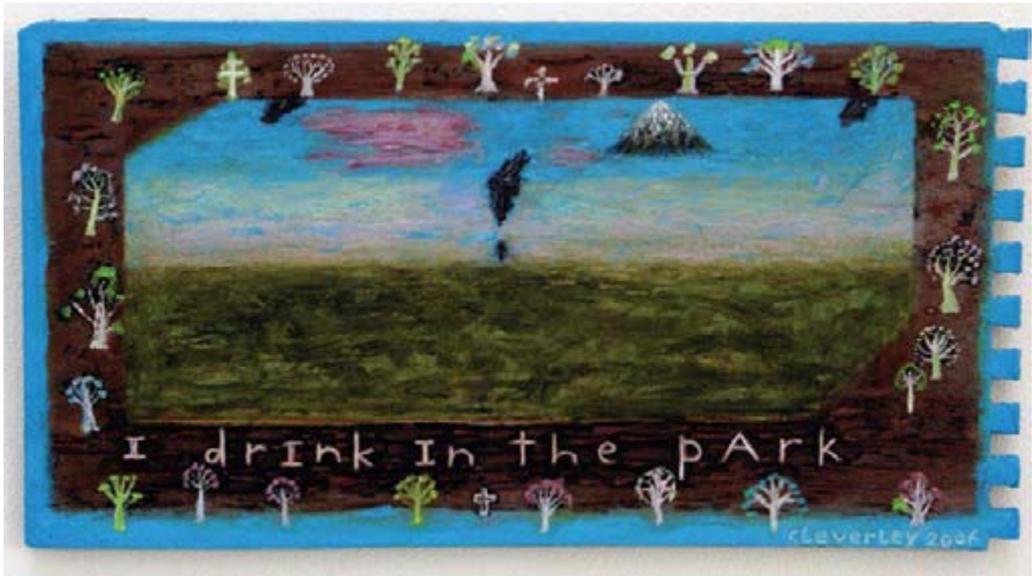


Image above: *I Drink in the Park*, oil paint on wood, 8 x 38 cm, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

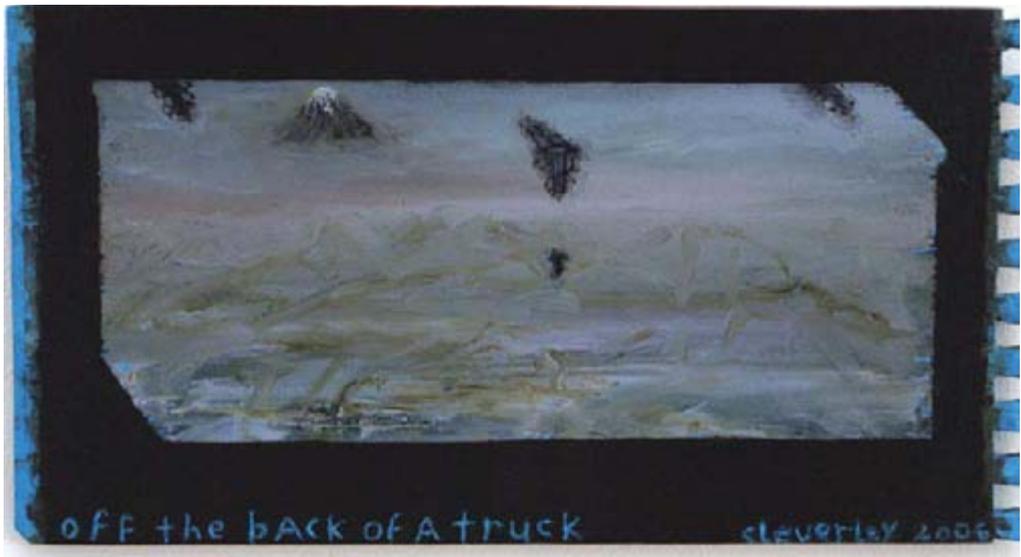


Image below: *Off the Back of a Truck*, oil paint on wood, 8.5 x 38.5 cm, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

were employed as riggers (steel workers). The buildings weren't exactly highrise, but two-storied, and they worked without any safety gear and barefooted. They all had their riggers' tickets as they had worked like this many times previously. Every so-called

'Cyclone Season', they would move to where their expertise was required in the Northern Territory. One very hot midday we heard hooting and yelling and all the Aboriginal riggers literally ran along the girders, jumped to the ground, and chased down what

we later realised was a goanna. They caught it, killed it, hung it in a tree till knock-off time and took it back to the beach to eat with their friends. Not one ate with us at the camp that night. We were all accommodated in working quarters, with all food supplied. I did four months, making enough money to continue my so-called 'overseas experience', after which I said my goodbye to these workmates whose cultural heritage plays out in their everyday relationships with the world around them: their empathy with nature shone through their cooking, their catching of animals; and was manifest through their everyday lives. After I left, they stayed on there, really happy to have good employment on their home ground, and I will never forget their education of me and their kindness.

Approximately three years later, in 1977, on my overland return journey home from England and some of Europe via the Greek Island, Samos, and via Istanbul across Turkey, and through Iran, I stayed for a month in Afghanistan, an amazing country with wonderful people. I travelled into the Northern regions of Bandamia and Bamiyan where the largest art works on the face of the earth existed until March 2001. These were the two very famous 1500-year old idols dedicated to Buddha. Even though these mammoth sculptures were freestanding there were entire villages carved out of the cliff-side; and elaborate tunnels led to a multitude of cave-like abodes, the top ones so high that you could see right through to the Russian border on the horizon. With guides we climbed up through the tunnels that led to the heads of the Buddhas, and with a leap of approximately a metre you could land on the flat of the head. If you missed you would have fallen to your death, an unforgettable experience made even more difficult as one was then obliged to partake in a ritualistic smoking of hashish through a chillum (pipe), with other people perched up there, (some for days), and then you had to make the precarious leap back and descend without killing yourself. I stayed in Afghanistan for as long as my visa would allow and then left over the Khyber Pass into Pakistan, India, Nepal, stayed seven days in Burma, then on to Thailand and Malaysia, and flew to Perth in West Australia from Kuala Lumpur in November 1978.

Later, in 2001, I made a series of works called *Lilac*

Sky over Bamiyan in response to the Taliban's total deliberate destruction of the Buddhas despite an outcry from within the country and from every quarter of the globe. (See for example, the article, "Buddha Bashing", by Robert Hughes, in *Time Magazine*, 23rd March 2001.) This series of paintings was discussed in a column, "Art Beat", by Peter Entwisle, in *The Otago Daily Times*, 28th May 2001 (page 9), in the context of discourse about similar art destructions, perhaps not as iconoclastic as in the case of the Bamiyan Buddhas, but nevertheless disturbing. Entwisle concluded by stating that my paintings would also be thrown on the Taliban's bonfire of false gods!

The two experiences I write about above are connected in my memory. Reflecting on this connection I now realise that I felt a kinship with the Aborigines and with the ancient makers of the Bamiyan Buddhas because I am also a maker of images, as they are. Maybe what we have in common on one level is a vulnerability in the face of any fundamentalism which tries to censor and thus to force us to become mouthpieces for a particular brand of propaganda. My own paintings include motifs that come to me from memory – for example the Australian eucalyptus tree – and they remind me of situations in which I was confronted with the everyday actions that bring people together: drinking in a park, working on a building site, living off the casual benefits of things that come our way in random fashion ('off the back of a truck').

Aotearoa/New Zealand is a young country prone to volcanic eruptions (see my work titled *Today*) and this makes me think that we need to live in the moment, in the *now*, sharing things that are really important rather than eschewing those things for the sake of an abstract idea about gods and ideologies that destroy our commonalities and kindnesses with other people.

This country is still so young, it's still smoking! We have the chance to change things rather than to buy into old hatreds. Using the cross in my paintings is an ironic strategy and perhaps this is suggested through its small scale in the face of eruptions and landscapes much larger than its influence can ever be. When painting I deploy my memory of experiences in the past; and when writing I reflect on these and realise



Image below: *Today*, oil paint on wood, 8.5 x 38.5 cm, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

Image above: *God Box Dog Box*, oil paint on wood, 8.5 x 38.5 cm, 2006 (courtesy of the artist).

that my intuitive use of motifs are actually based on connections with other image-makers in other parts of the world regardless of race, colour or creed.

Peter Cleverley is a painter and a Lecturer in Painting at Otago Polytechnic School of Art. He exhibits regularly in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin.

STOPOVERS

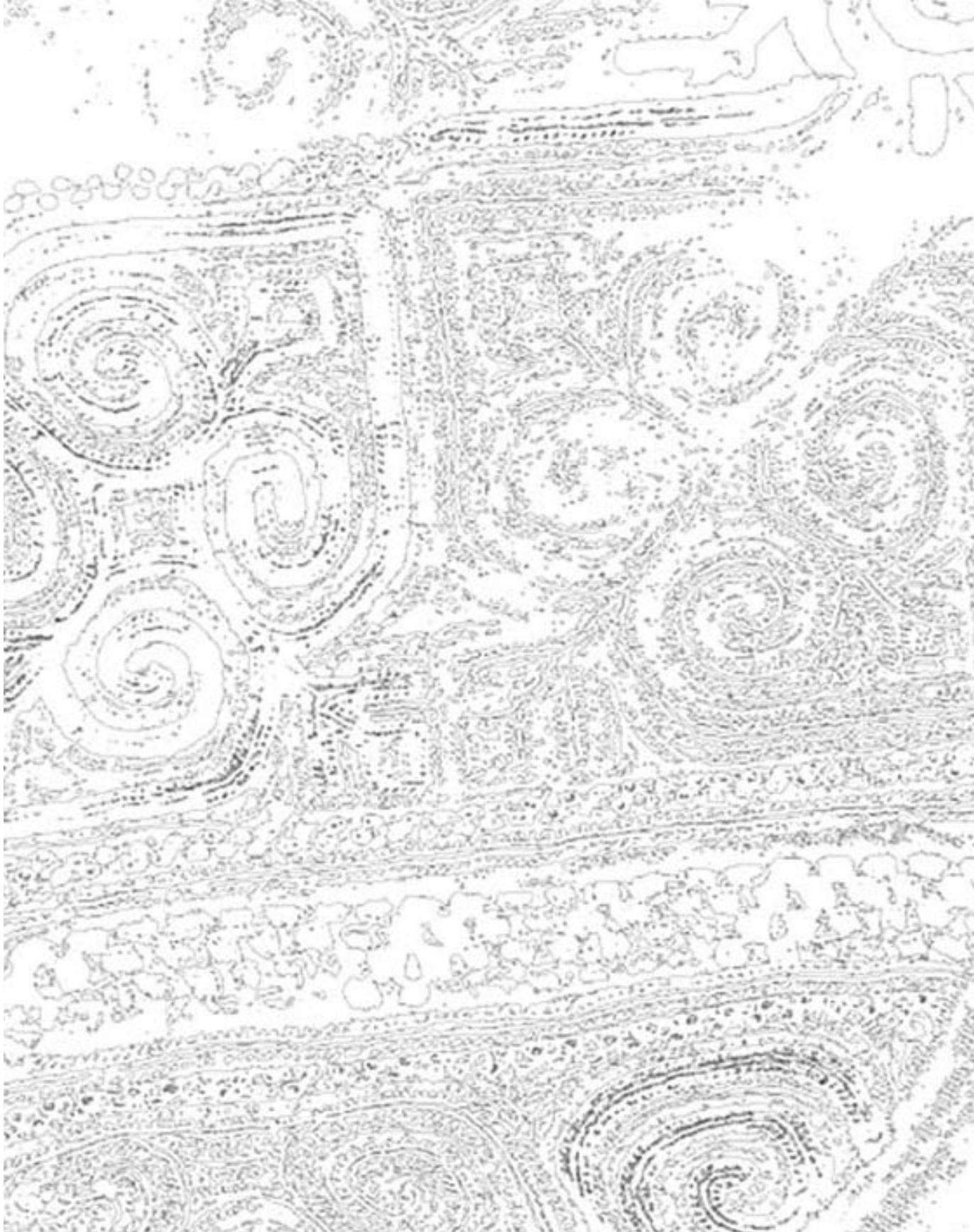
Lamis Mawafi

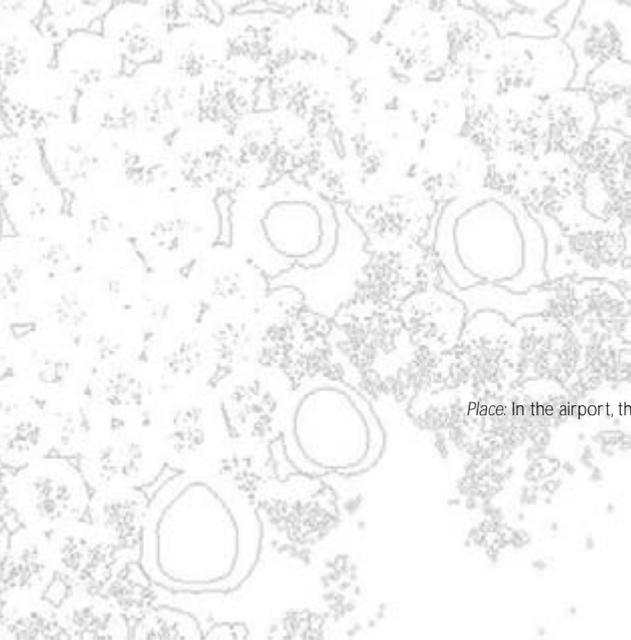
It is no wonder – in our time of mass migrations and culture collisions and easy jet travel, when the whole world lies below us every time we rise into the skies, when whole countries move by like bits of checkerboard, ours to play on – it's no wonder that in this time we've developed whole philosophies of cultural relativity, and learned to look at whole literatures, histories, and cultural formations as if they were toy blocks, ours to construct or deconstruct.

(Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language*, New York, Penguin, 1989: 209.)

It's clear there, as I see it from my window, in this place where I can process my thoughts, while sitting on this uncomfortable chair and getting filled with this feeling of being simultaneously nowhere and everywhere. From this place I can calmly observe the world as I watch it below me every time I fly. As for countries, I visited many, and lived in few. I flew over seas and deserts; flew over my own story, watching the patterns of my life changing while all the processes of adjusting are happening in my soul. We sometimes travel in order to go somewhere, and at other times we travel to go home, but is home still a place that contains a bed, a kitchen, and our things? Words started to have whole new definitions as things around me keep changing while my life unfolds. I write some of the words that stood out through this journey and overlay them with drawings I made to suggest the moving patterns and lines of my travelling life.

Lamis Mawafi completes her Master of Fine Arts project at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art in 2007. Her writing investigates immigration, travelling and memory and her studio work attempts to give material form to these experiences and interests by using woven textiles made in strips, and also informal drawings. Lamis holds a BA in Graphic Design and worked as a graphic designer in Jordan before immigrating to New Zealand.





Place: In the airport, they planted some trees, trying to make the place a bit friendlier
...more familiar. Poor trees, I bet they are forced to stay there.



Points: I am flying to Amman, floating over Christchurch, just landed in
Auckland, I am not yet in Sydney, but soon I'll be on my way to Singapore,
heading to Dubai, but not home yet, never really again.



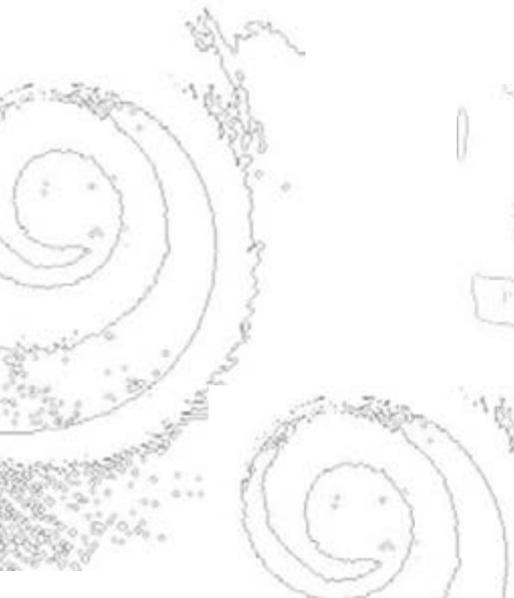
Memory: As long as I can still move

freely in my memories,

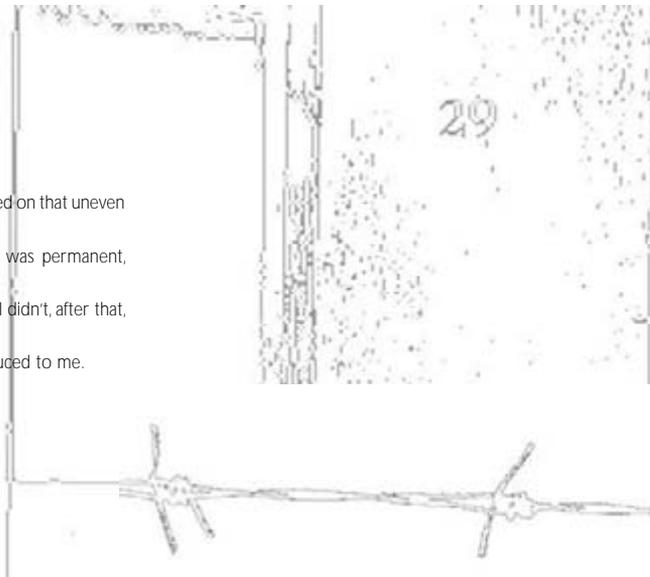
I am never alone. Who said I need

to cross oceans to visit the familiar

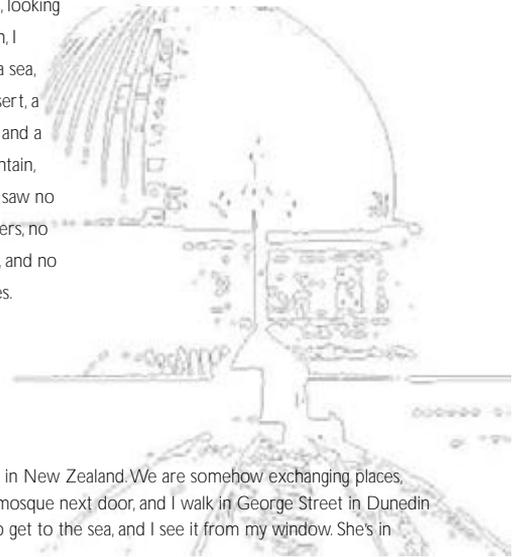
streets of my hometown?



Home: 29 was the number fixed on that uneven wall, for a while I thought it was permanent, I stopped looking at it, I wish I didn't, after that, the word 'change' was introduced to me.



Travel: I was floating over countries, and over lands, looking down, I saw a sea, a desert, a river, and a mountain, but I saw no borders, no walls, and no fences.



Dwellings: There's a New Zealand woman living in my country, while I am living in New Zealand. We are somehow exchanging places, she wakes up every morning in Jordan to the call for prayer coming from the mosque next door, and I walk in George Street in Dunedin hearing the bells of Knox Church. She drives four hours through the dessert to get to the sea, and I see it from my window. She's in spring and I'm in autumn.



LANGUAGE OF DISEASE

Ken Laraman

This exhibition* was a way of grappling with pictures of pain, fear and sadness that would allow the viewer to literally form those images themselves. Reading fictions, our imaginations provide images of the fictional landscape and characters through a relationship between the physical presence of language (written, spoken or visual) and the many meanings that can be constructed through it. In language's fluidity lies both its inherent vice and power.

For the exhibition, I wrote texts. I then asked colleagues to translate the texts into their own first language. I chose Greek, Mandarin, Arabic and German simply because I found the forms beautiful to view and/or lyrical to hear; and I had native speakers who were willing to translate my texts.

I was interested in the question of whether this manipulation of language would lead to a loss of emotion. Even within a language it is easy for the reader to be distracted, to disassociate from another's pain. For example, terms such as 'surgical strike' couch the tragedy of death in impersonal language.

The works collectively deal with personal tragedy, loss, or separation. Cultures may change, but a constant theme is our own individual knowledge of personal tragedy. However, all people filter meaning through their own experience. Translations infer the particular in the universal, while the reader and viewer remain foreign in their understanding.

The works represent a very specific and personal journey through the cultural ganglands of language and its duplicitous use. The poems are thick with grief and loss, reverting to raw emotion in a search for the universal. These emotions are the key to a shared experience of language. The act of translation assumes an outcome of universality that is rarely achieved. Adding a cache of different approaches to the visualisation of language increases the possibility of transferring its emotional impact or diluting or distorting it. My use of lavish and rhythmic emotive language, the persistent sound of a bell and the cool environment were all designed to reinforce a meditative response to the pain suggested by the words themselves.

Curator Ana Wild, wrote in a catalogue for the exhibition:

"*Language of Dis-ease* provides a chance to indulge in the multiplicities of language, to revel in its unravelling and the visual beauty that comes from its complexity and from the act of translation [...] through these lines and the rivers of type, laid out according to culturally diverse sets of hierarchies...we can see the language of language itself."

Image: *Language of Dis-ease*, (detail) acrylic and vinyl on prepared board, 110 x 900cm.
5 inset images: details of translations from the exhibition catalogue.

* The exhibition was held from 30 March to 20 May 2007 at the regional Forrester Gallery in Oamaru, New Zealand. The DVD component of the exhibition is available on the online version of this issue of the journal. See www.thescope.org

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LOST IN SPACE

Alexandra Kennedy

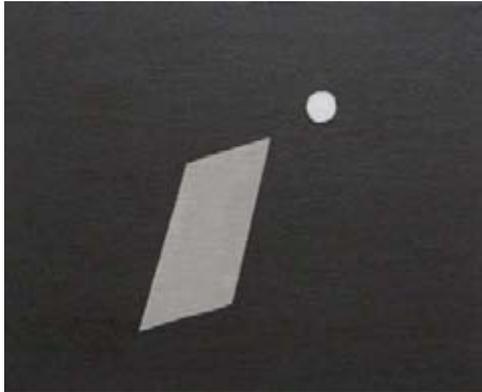


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

HOLES IN SPACE

The 1960s science fiction TV series *Lost in Space* tells the story of the space adventures of an astronaut family and their robot stranded on an alien world. The group, shipwrecked on their way to Alpha Centuri, the 'first port of call' in interstellar travel, find themselves in a sort of 'no place'. Further adventures in their quest for intelligent life see them trying to find their way back through space. Their experience is that of being lost in a void, an empty space. The story can be read as a cipher for the virtual space of television itself. That is, those 'holes in space' created with the developments of the industrial revolution during the early modern era and the advent of telemachines – telegraphy, radios and, eventually, television and cyberspace. These all create infinite, limitless spaces in which there is much activity but which at the same time are an experience of emptiness. Such spaces are a mirror of the infinite void of the cosmos.

AESTHETIC OF THE VOID

Since early modernity an emptying out of space has been occurring in painting. Represented by an aesthetic programme of absence and of the void, the denial of the image in space is an iconoclastic gesture with a long history in Western art. Revived again in painting during the late 19th and early 20th century, it was acted out in a range of 'last paintings' and 'zero' gestures by artists such as Malevich and Rodchenko; Mondrian's ideas concerning the dissolution of all art forms including painting into art as environment;¹ art's abandonment in the early part of the twentieth century by Marcel Duchamp who saw the readymade as a negation of painting; Ad Reinhardt's 'last painting'; and, other such 'zero' gestures. By the 1960s a subversion of this programme of negation, which in

a Greenburgian sense had painting going *somewhere*, was underway. By many artists and critics the zero gesture and other acts of negation were seen to be going nowhere and “condemned to an increasingly conservative rehearsal of strategies and gestures that had lost their original significance.”²

PROJECTS OF INFINITY

Out of this impasse – beginning in the 1960s and continuing to the present day – practices have emerged which reassert the possibilities for painting as a site for criticality. Many of these practices self-consciously engage with painting’s own position, genealogy and historical status.

Among the range of practices addressing the ‘end of subject matter’ in painting are ‘projects of infinity’. In 1967 Oliver Mosset painted a series of identical paintings of a black circle in the centre of a white square canvas, with the intention at the time of repeating this act indefinitely; and Daniel Buren, in the 1970s, began painting endless stripes in a sort of parody of the painted gesture. The conceptual artist On Kawara’s project, his *Today Series* begun in 1966, goes on – or at least has the potential to go on – ‘forever’. This project, in which a monochrome surface is inscribed with the date of the day on which the painting is made, in the language and calendrical conventions of the country in which it is being executed, is engaged with existential concerns, dealing as it does with notions of space and temporality.

My new work begins a project of infinity, an endless project of recording the universe, beginning with those groups of stars long recognised as constellations which, while understood by some as having a mythological dimension, for others merely define imaginary regions of the sky. The groupings of stars drawn into constellations represent a heterogeneous description of space – they do not map time or space in a consistent or homogeneous manner – pointing merely to groupings which lie in approximately the same direction.

SPACE AND REPRESENTATION

These paintings describe in-between spaces, spaces which are between the conceived and the lived or



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

experienced. That is, they are between 'representations of space' and 'representational space' as defined by Henri Lefebvre.³ Representations of space are the conceptual spaces of the architect, map maker or cartographer. They are abstract, conceptual spaces. Constellations are not representations of space in this sense, yet they have become a map of sorts. Existing in the consciousness of humanity since 5000 BCE, they have achieved the status of a fixed thing, of an organising principle, an abstract concept.

Representational space is the lived space of experience, "spaces which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate."⁴ Suggestive of the imaginary

and the symbolic in the visual motifs employed – holes, passages, empty space – and of existing outside of notions of the temporal, these works attempt to evoke displacements which are fluidic, and at times, dreamlike. Established themes in painting such as consistency of visual formulae also begin to become displaced by a programme which favours a breaking down of a sense of consistency or visual cohesiveness and is rather directional, situational, relational or qualitative. As such, the work, in a show and accompanied by this text, moves between the idea of a space and the experience of a space.

- 1 Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence" (1920) quoted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1900 -2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005). "The future of the New Plastic and its true realization in painting lies in chromoplastic in architecture..." (290) and: "The new sculpture and architecture must destroy the work of art as an object or thing" (291).
- 2 John Gaiger, "Post Conceptual Painting: Gerhard Richter's extended leave taking", in Gill Perry and Paul Wood (eds), *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press and The Open University, 2004), 89.
- 3 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 38-39.
- 4 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 39.

Figure 1: Alexandra Kennedy, *Lyra and Vega*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 2: Alexandra Kennedy, *Delphinus and Aquila*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 3: Alexandra Kennedy, *Somewhere near Deneb*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 4: Alexandra Kennedy, *Black Hole (2)*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 5: Alexandra Kennedy, *Black Hole (1)*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 6: Alexandra Kennedy, *Deep Space*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Figure 7: Alexandra Kennedy, *Lost in Space*, oil on canvas, 30 x 25 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

Alexandra Kennedy is a painter and Lecturer in Art Theory & History in the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand, where she is completing a Master of Fine Arts.

CODAE¹ TO LOST IN SPACE

Leoni Schmidt

*

Some ideas entertained with and alongside Alexandra Kennedy's exhibition at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space entitled *Lost in Space* are proposed through four codae to her suite of twelve paintings presented as four sets of three units each. These ideas pertain to the suite as a whole, while also picking up on particularities of some of the units.

*

score & note

A process of editing has led to the choice of the suite and the four sets contained therein. Similarities in size, format, horizontal alignment, colour and surface treatment group the pieces together. Still, they do not read as a series as this would entail sequence and progression.² Here, the units within their sets refuse these characteristics of the series as each seems to be a fragment split off from a larger entity which we never encounter. The experience is somewhat like reading a part of a musical score through identifying the notes written there, without being privy to the whole composition. A tune starts to form but one cannot complete it. Its incompleteness begins to haunt one, but no manner of further looking can solve the conundrum.³ The reason may be that the full score exists elsewhere, while we see only some of its bars and notes. This is especially evident in the unit entitled *Somewhere near Deneb* (a star in our constellation).

*

map & tilt

Kennedy works from a constellation map. Her suite has a genealogy that stretches back to the early twentieth-century ideas of Nikolai Fiodorov concerning cosmic space as the arena and anti-gravity – or the overcoming of gravity – as the project for artistic activity.⁴ Some years later Kuzma Petrov-Vodkin posited his notions concerning 'planetary feeling' and 'tilted space'⁵ as ways of overcoming the Euclidean perspective which would place things frontally, up and down, hierarchically: "having lost gravitational pull [objects] appear ready to break loose from the earth's sphere."⁶ Kennedy's aim is not to give them new anchorage through a representation of the constellation map, but rather to explore small unstable intersections and alignments within the interstices of the map. She finds an oblique directional connection between, for example, the constellations of *Delphinus* and *Aquila* and the resultant image reads like a diagonal disruption of Euclidean space. Her way of working with space here is not one of copying space but one of "opening up space through information."⁷ And, the information provided functions on four levels: *data* (constellation relationships); *agency* (disruption of Euclidean space); *genealogy* (connection to the history of ideas about warped and shaped space)⁸; and *discipline* (material manifestation of the above through painting). It is argued below that the relationships between fractal and splinter; and between black and silver support the discipline-specific information provided through Kennedy's paintings.

fractal & splinter

Benoit Mandelbrot defined a fractal as a largely isotropic “rough or fragmented geometric shape that can be subdivided in parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole.”⁹ The notion of the fractal seems to have inspired many artists to explore self-same patterns, an example being painter Simon Ingram in New Zealand, who discusses his work in terms of internal logic and self-generation.¹⁰ Related ideas concerning ‘meta-patterns’¹¹ have led to understandings of recurrence in pattern-formation, while sometimes manifesting in work characterised by a homogeneity which admits little formal tension. Like Ingram but also very differently, Kennedy avoids the regularity of the fractal. She does this through exploring the oblique relationships in space mentioned above and by deploying a splintering of shape which seems random, unpredictable and anisotropic. This last characteristic entails the opposite of homogeneity in all directions as it is a property of being directionally dependent and can be defined as a difference in a physical property for material when measured along different axes.¹² In a unit entitled *Black Hole (1)*, Kennedy’s splintering of shape is especially obvious.

black & silver

Offset by subtle variations of rose and blue-grey, it is the black and silver that speak eloquently in Kennedy’s suite. They refer to how one sees images of and in outer space through a powerful telescope. The dense black of shape (and of field in some units) also retains an enigma of form as it is impenetrable, whether read as (rorschach) blot, (black) hole, void, or space. But, again, the black also brings the genealogy of an almost impenetrable field of colour – including black and white¹³ – within contemporary art into the reading of Kennedy’s work. The viewer remembers Kasimir Malevich’s black squares; Mark Rothko’s sublime black and grey canvases; and Yves Klein’s invitation: “Come with me into the void!” alongside his creation of dark blue monochromatic fields.

With Donald Judd one could say that colour and space occur together.¹⁴ Jane Alison writes about “the space that colour opens up, the space between the aesthetic and the conceptual, the material and the immaterial, simplification and mystification...As the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty pointed out, to perceive colour entirely I must ‘abandon myself to it and plunge into this mystery.’”¹⁵ The small size and density of Kennedy’s black shapes and fields pull the viewer closer for this plunge. And, coming closer and closer one becomes aware of the silver aspect of the units. There is a line drawing in silver to indicate direction and connection in one work; and the silvery, reflective sheen of surface buffed to a fine polish in others. Again, the genealogy of a material¹⁶ (in this case) becomes part of the reading of the suite: silver as a transitional metal with an alchemical history; silver as a catalyst for chemical reactions; silver as – in this case, a painterly – reference to photographic processes; silver as complicit in the history of the ‘black mirror’ in art; silver’s role in what Gerhard Richter has called “‘a kind of cross between a monochrome painting and a mirror’.”¹⁷

In *The Undiscovered Country* (2004)¹⁸ Russell Ferguson considers painting after the so-called ‘death of painting’ – as signalled by the birth of photography – and concludes that it is alive and well today through maintaining the particular pleasures that only painting can provide and making accessible ways of seeing only possible through painting. Kennedy’s work plays between these pleasures and possibilities; and attests to a modest and incremental exploration of painting’s reinvention and vibrancy through a coherent exploration of contemporary ideas about spatiality and materiality. Her suite makes no bold claims for the discipline of painting, but rather shares with the viewer the slow discovery of moments of aesthetic-conceptual surprise through exploration with the tools of her trade: size, format, directional alignment, measurement, density, colour, surface, shape, field, space, and their relationships as notes marked across a partial score.

- 1 *Codae*: Passages of "more or less independent character introduced after the completion of the essential parts of a movement..." *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (London: Oxford, 1996), 456.
- 2 *Series*: "A number of magnitudes, degrees of some attribute, or the like, viewed as capable of being enumerated in a progressive order...order of succession, sequence." (Ibid: 2737)
- 3 *Conundrum*: "...puzzling question or problem...enigmatical statement...a thing that one is puzzled to name..." (Ibid: 543)
- 4 Nikolai Fiodorov, *The Philosophy of the Common Cause* (trans. Moscow: Verny, 1906) Vol. 1: 350.
- 5 Kuzma Sergejevic Petrov-Vodkin, *Euclidian Space* (trans. Leningrad: Samarkandia, 1930), 581.
- 6 Yevgeny Kovtun, *The Russian Avant-Garde in the 1920s and 1930s* (Bournemouth: Parkstone & St. Petersburg: Aurora, 1996), 113.
- 7 Janet Abrams & Peter Hall (eds), *Else/Where: Mapping: New Cartographies of Networks and Territories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 28.
- 8 See Isaac Asimov, "Plane Truth" in Howard K Congdon (ed.), *Philosophies of Space and Time* (New York & Oxford: University Press of America, 2003), 207-18, in which the author traces the history of the development of non-Euclidean space in order to assist us towards contemporary understandings of the universe.
- 9 Benoit Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature* (Gordonsville USA: W H Freeman, 1982), 7.
- 10 Simon Ingram, "Machinic Practice in Painting", *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, # 2: System 2004: 33-44.
- 11 See Tyler Volk, *Meta-Patterns: Across Space, Time and Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- 12 See the "Oilfield Glossary" for 'anisotropy' at www.glossary.oilfield as last visited on 15 April 2007.
- 13 Jane Alison writes: "The question of whether black and white can be truly considered colours has perplexed thinkers for centuries. For Newton they certainly were not, but for Goethe they emphatically were. I take them to be true colours, believing that for their wider cultural and psychological significance alone it would be perverse to exclude them from a study of chroma." See Jane Alison (ed.), *Colour after Klein: Re-thinking Colour in Modern and Contemporary Art* (London: Barbican & Black Dog, 2005), 10.
- 14 See Donald Judd, "Some Aspects of Colour in General and Red and Black in Particular" in Jane Alison (ed.), 171 (see endnote 13).
- 15 See Alison (endnote 13) with reference to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1945/2003), 249.
- 16 See "A History of Silver: A Brief Esoteric Overview of Silver Use" at www.silvermedicine.org as last visited on 15 April 2007.
- 17 Quoted in Arnaud Maillat, *The Claude Glass: Use and Meaning of the Black Mirror in Western Art*, trans. Jeff Fort (Cambridge Mass.: MIT: Zone Books, 2004), 188.
- 18 Russell Ferguson, 2004. *The Undiscovered Country* (Los Angeles: University of California, Hammer Museum).

Leoni Schmidt holds a doctorate in Art History from the University of Johannesburg (RAU) and an MA (Fine Arts) from the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. She is currently Academic Leader: Research and Postgraduate Studies at Otago Polytechnic School of Art. Her own research focuses mostly on contemporary drawing and its relationships with other practices, such as with painting.

APPEASE THE SUN

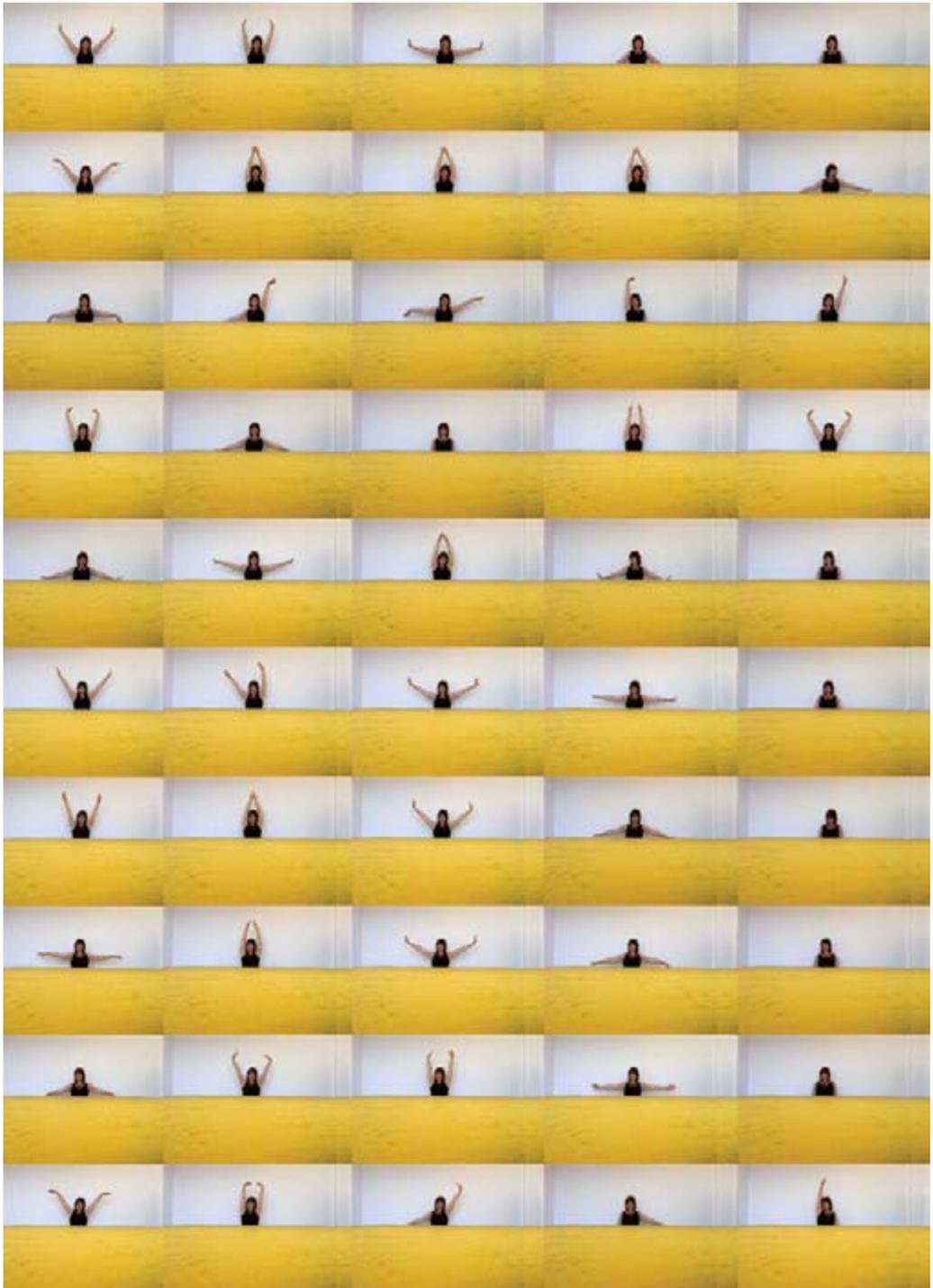
Margaret Roberts

These artist's pages are experiments with photographically documenting artwork* that seeks to be continuous with the place in which it is located. They document *Appease the Sun*, an artwork made in the SNO (Sydney Non Objective) exhibition space in Marrickville in May 2007. The work was a high table-like structure in the same proportions as the room in which it was built. It was also the same height as the window ledge and faced out onto rooftops and the sky, with its planes, birds and sunshine. The table had a dry, hand-marked yellow pigment surface, and it was located so that people could walk around it. Even though the rationale for SNO is Non-Objective Art, the table did represent something – the sun – in the sense that it was yellow, it was very big and dominated the space, people could circle it and rub their hands in its yellow pigment. It also had another role in the physical place in which it was located, which was evident in the active physical participation it incited, initially by children who claimed the space underneath as theirs on the opening night.

Later we discovered that the work encouraged physical exercises and made some sense of them by converting them into arm signals made across its yellow surface and towards the sun. These have a role in the documentation for their potential to represent the life of the place in which the work was located. While the literal place is inevitably absent from the photographic record that remains after the work has gone, the photographs record that dual role by showing some of these arm signals with part of the yellow surface. Together, they are evidence that the place was as much a component of the work as was the yellow structure.

* Acknowledgement and thanks to SNO CAP (Sydney Non Objective Contemporary Art Projects) and performers Beata Geyer, Billy Gruner and Margaret Roberts.

Margaret Roberts is an installation artist whose work is documented on www.margaretroberts.org. She is also a Lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts in the Sculpture, Performance and Installation Studio and as Foundation Coordinator.



THE 420 PROJECT: LIFE, THE UNIVERSE AND 26 STAFFORD STREET

Adam Douglass

INTRODUCTION

The 420 Centre is an activities-based centre/service for people recovering from mental illness. The Centre is a safe environment for people to come for support, art sessions, work groups, cheap lunches, outings, meetings with friends, a coffee, a tea, a smoke and the odd game of pool - and it is the namesake for a community arts project called *The 420 Project*.

The final incarnation of the finished art project was installed at the Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Dunedin from July 10 through to July 28, 2007. Participants in the process are as diverse as they are many. They are artists/patrons of the 420 Centre, artists from the wider Dunedin community that include established, emerging and decorative artists, art educators, students and individuals involved with the Blue Oyster Art Project Space. In the eight months that the project has been running, two hundred and fifteen people have been involved.

PHYSICAL PROJECT

Two x 360-degree drawing installations consumed the two upper spaces of the Blue Oyster Art Project Space and the lower space was used for Tuesday art sessions involving 420 patrons and the wider community. Exhibition-goers could paint a panel there throughout the duration of the exhibition, until there were no panels left. The mural/installation was made up of around 1300 35cm² recycled plywood panels. Artists were encouraged to take a panel from the work in progress to an area allocated for art sessions and create it with the group. Some people have felt uncomfortable, or have been unable to attend and have worked on a section in their own space. The project became an evolving drawing and documented collective meditation.

Objectives of *The 420 Project*:

- o to make the creative process accessible to everyone who uses the service
- o to create a new and powerful aesthetic experience
- o to empower people through creating the opportunity for them to have a voice and to develop their own artistic language
- o to explore artistic possibilities in a supportive environment with therapeutic benefits
- o to develop a dialogue with the wider community
- o to attempt to further eliminate the stigma attached to mental illness
- o to have fun together
- o to develop an appreciation for the arts
- o to create an artwork which reflects an aspect of social consciousness in Dunedin
- o to document a culture and subculture
- o to integrate participants into a wider artistic community, and thus
- o to further develop dialogue amongst artists and
- o to reinforce the idea of art not just being for the élite, but having community roles also



Top: *The 420 Project*, work in progress at the 420 Centre, December 2006.
Below: *The 420 Project*, painting individual pieces, work in progress at the 420 Centre, Dunedin, February 2007.

In my project proposal to the Blue Oyster Art Project Space, I outlined the objectives:

I'm interested in the artist's role in society, status, art as a therapeutic activity, art as a language and a vehicle to develop dialogue, art as an aesthetic experience, perception, and the creative process...Within this project I hope to bring a range of artists together from different disciplines, who have different objectives, different status, different mental states, gender, sexualities, a range of people basically.⁴ I want to document a social consciousness, and in the process eliminate some stigma, develop a dialogue in the community and create a platform for recovery.

Grant Kester has written on this issue, taking snippets of text from Jürgen Habermas in order to discuss some of Habermas' concepts related to dialogical aesthetics:

Every subject with the competence to speak 'or express their voice is allowed to take part in discourse', and 'everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever', as 'everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatsoever', and 'everyone is allowed to express his or her attitudes, desires or needs'.¹ This egalitarian interaction cultivates a sense of 'solidarity' among discursive participants who are as a result,² intimately linked in an intersubjectively shared form of life'.³

I can identify with these ideas in relation to *The 420 Project*.

EVOLUTION OF THE 420 PROJECT

For the past two and a half years I've been employed as an art coordinator at the 420 Centre. Basically, I'm employed to facilitate an atmosphere where patrons can create. I've found collective/collaborative projects to be really positive socially, creatively and in terms of recovery. *The 420 Project* is the third collective/collaborative project, and the first to actively involve the wider arts community, and to be viewed in an art space context. The inspiration for the project was drawn from a collaborative drawing made in 1999

and involving Bryn Corkery, Lara Cook, Jane La hood, and myself (then flatmates, and still good friends). At that time, we would tape a piece of card above the fireplace; one person would draw for five minutes, and would then make way for the next person. We predominantly used oil pastels. It was a fun way to draw with great potential and a considerable chance element. This way of drawing was also a really productive way to meditate on attachment, impermanence and to focus the mind. One would also experientially develop an appreciation for different perspectives.

Fast forward six years, and I'm working at the 420 Centre (the then 420 Drop-in Centre) in Dunedin. After a few experiments with arts and crafts, I decided to try an evolving drawing. Because of the nature of the 420 Centre as a place where people drop by when they choose, one can never predict who and how many people will be there at a certain time, and what sort of mental space an individual would be in. One had to be open to anything. People there didn't necessarily want to learn anything specific but liked having the option to create. Therefore, there was a lot of potential in the evolving drawing idea; as with an evolving drawing, there is always a source of inspiration (previous drawings) and thus one doesn't require subject matter to draw, it is already there. Some people choose to be connectors and bring in shapes, colour, subject-matter or form from the surrounding panels. Some people tend to create explosions of their own with no connections to adjacent panels. It is inclusive to have the balance of both in the creation of an object: there is room for everyone. I draw with everybody else, sometimes by myself, mainly connecting... I try to make myself accessible to people who would like to learn a certain technique, or who need a hand to work out what they want to do. Discussion is encouraged, but not necessary. I like the idea of people developing their own language, sometimes through trial and error. Experimentation is encouraged, and over time an individual could become aware of a common thread and discover themselves and their own interests in their artwork.

PROCESS OF THE 420 PROJECT

The 420 Project was accessible to everyone and there were no boundaries with regard to subject matter or medium, although we had limited resources and if an individual wanted to use a medium that we could not supply they had to bring their own. People were expected to respect other people's art work and each individual involved in the centre. There was a certain degree of structure in the project, which ensured the physical balance of the big composition, but there was also a large enough chance element to create a really exciting object. As Herbert Read wrote:

Any considerable work of art has two distinct elements: a formal element appealing to our sensibility for reasons which cannot be stated with any clarity, but which are certainly psychological in origin; and an arbitrary element of more complex appeal, which is the outer clothing given to these underlying forms.⁵

The painted silhouettes (taken from photographs of patrons, staff and artists projected onto the square panels) act as a link between panels, which helps to hold the piece together, and they create an interesting dynamic juxtaposed against the psychedelic, psychological landscape of the whole composition. Perception, the artist, the mind, the viewer, the artworks and the community interacted.

Time and time again, people expressed their reservations when painting a panel, but after a little coaxing (sometimes) people got involved. For me, it is rewarding to see people focused, enjoying themselves exploring possibilities. More often than not people are surprised at what they have achieved, which sometimes acts as a catalyst for more creative pursuits. I have been constantly surprised by the standard of work completed for the project by everyone involved. Some people who don't see themselves as artists showed natural flair and intuitive understanding and many artists contributed a lot of love, time, intelligence and energy to works without any financial return or obvious recognition. I have been continuously inspired by this sharing, generosity and creative activity. All completed works were viewed in the same light, and the interaction between these works is what takes

the viewer's experience to another level. Seeing one's artwork becoming an integral part of something bigger can fuel a sense of self belief, and when someone sees a friend or acquaintance contributing their voice they are potentially inspired to do the same. Knowing that the work is going to be exhibited and donated to the community further reinforced the importance of the artwork and the individual's involvement.

When an individual's mind is focused, an exchange of ideas can happen with less effort than expected, and exploring visual potential can also free up the mind, creating a spontaneous, easy, natural dialogue. People became involved in dialogue without even opening their mouths!

With the participation of a variety of artists other than myself, people also had access to a range of approaches and could choose how they wanted to communicate.

Different philosophies, objectives, aesthetics and ideas were represented. People could meet other people and experience the personalities behind the artwork. I appreciate a range of creative endeavours and have a knowledge of a variety of art options, but I also have my own beliefs and artistic pursuits. Some people identified with certain individuals and their mode of communication. This was very positive as I can only offer so much and different people may require different options. *The 420 Project*, I believe, was beneficial for the patrons in terms of integrating them with a wider community outside of mental health services. Artists, on the other hand, were introduced to an important sector of society, a sector which is often overlooked, even though they can offer so much.

"It's great to get down from my ivory tower, I enjoyed being part of a community", said Greg Lewis (participating artist/painter) when referring to time spent at the 420 Centre.

This dialogue in the community will develop further. Awareness of the centre and its role has grown. Everyone is in the position to develop an appreciation for other perspectives. This project was a productive opportunity for the individuals involved to exhibit together in a well established and respected art space, and to experiment and develop new ideas. The project



also challenged the perception of some members of our society with regard to mental illness.

Rather than requiring a finished object as a catalyst for dialogue, the project has been a continual dialogical work, which may further stimulate discussion on completion and installation in the Blue Oyster Art Project Space. Site-specific work is going to be installed and loaned around the community, communicating ideas through aesthetic experience, and hopefully further stimulating discourse in the public sphere. Possible installations (permanent and temporary) include projects at the Dunedin Public Hospital, Wakari Psychiatric Hospital, Otago Polytechnic School of Art, Dunedin Public Library, the 420 Centre, the Pact Group head office and others. Any potential profits from the sale of the art work will be divided between the 420 Centre and Blue Oyster Art Project Space. As Grant Kester wrote:

We typically view the artist as a kind of exemplary bourgeois subject, actualising his or her will through the heroic transformation of nature or the assimilation of cultural difference – alchemically elevating the primitive, the degraded, and the vernacular into great art. Throughout, the locus of expressive meaning remains the radically autonomous figure of the individual artist. A dialogical aesthetic suggests a very different image of the artist; one defined in terms of openness, of listening and a willingness to accept intersubjective vulnerability.⁶

The process is as important as the finished object. A step inside the creative process – walking, talking and interacting in an artwork, and turning the everyday world into art – can potentially heighten an experience; can create the sensation of being more fully present in a particular moment in time; and can potentially extinguish some feelings of anxiety. The idea of ‘living an artwork’ can be a positive experience and may create a positive subjective truth.

I have learnt so much from the patrons of the centre: so much wisdom. Many of the people who use the centre have experienced a lot of suffering and have thus developed non-judgemental, accepting attitudes, compassion, openness, honesty, spontaneity and some pretty wicked humour too! The project has been positive because a section of the community has experienced and expressed some of these qualities together.

Acknowledgements:

Many thanks must go to the Pact Group for funding *The 420 Project*; to all the artists who have donated their time and expertise; and to JB Reilly, Fiona Panarau and all the staff at the 420 Centre; to the Blue Oyster Art Project Space and Katrina Jones and Sally Williams; to Bridie Lonie and Leoni Schmidt from the Otago Polytechnic School of Art; to family and friends; to Annette Seifert, Cargils Enterprises and Southern Film. Also: in loving memory of Christine Kendal and Brendan Alexander.



The project has been supported by the Pact Group who provides community and residential support for more than eight hundred people with intellectual and/or psychiatric disabilities (mental illness).

A documentary film is being made about the project by filmmakers Katrina Jones and Sally Williams and this has received support from Dunedin's NHNZ and the Dunedin City Council's Creative Communities.

- 1 Jürgen Habermas, "Discourse Ethics: Notes on a Program of Philosophical Justification," in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Webber Nicholson (Cambridge: Mass.: MIT Press, 1991), 89. In his essay "The Gift in Littoral Art Practice," Bruce Barber uses Habermas' concept of "communicative action" to elucidate recent projects by Wochenklauser (an Austrian arts group), REPO History, Istvan Kantor, and others. Versions of this essay have been published in *Fuse*, 19, 2 (Winter 1996) and in *Intervention: Post Object and Performance Art in New Zealand in 1970 and Beyond*, ed. Jennifer Hay (Christchurch: Robert MacDougall Art Gallery and ANNEX Press, 2000), 49-58.
- 2 Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*, from the section "Dialogical Aesthetics". Kester elaborates on a Jürgen Habermas quote, referenced in endnote 1, pp. 80-81.
- 3 Jürgen Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity," *Philosophical Forum*, 21 (1989-90), 47.
- 4 Text taken from Douglass' proposal to the Blue Oyster Art Project Space, proposing *The 420 Project*, June 2006.
- 5 Herbert Read (1893-1968) "What is Revolutionary Art?" in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (London: Routledge, 1994), 512.
- 6 Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art*, from the section "Dialogical Aesthetics". See endnote 2. Kester discusses the role of the artist in a dialogical aesthetic in relation to Jürgen Habermas' concept of an "identity forged through social and discursive interaction."

* All photographs courtesy of Adam Douglass.

The subtitle of this report, "Life, the Universe and 26 Stafford St", was inspired by the title of Douglass Adams' fictional novel, *Life the Universe and Everything*.

Adam Douglass is an artist working with drawing, painting, and the community. He is currently engaged in a process-based dialogical drawing within the community. Adam exhibits nationally, and has been working alongside the patrons of the 420 Centre as an art coordinator for the past 3 years. (The 420 Centre is a service for people recovering from mental illness.) To view the finished assembled project, related works and text, visit www.adamdouglass.co.nz

Images opposite page, above and below: *The 420 Project*, work in progress at the 420 Centre, Dunedin, March - May 2007.*

*all the days of my life so far –
and all the reels it took me to make it*

Christine Keller

The work of which a detail is shown on the opposite page as well as a full image is a handwoven textile panel on which the lines are digitally embroidered. The number of the lines relates directly to the actual number of days I have lived so far – over fifteen thousand.

My practice is situated between traditional techniques such as weaving and their contemporary counterparts found in digital textile processes, for example in digital embroidery. With the piece featured here, I am starting a new personal engagement with the subject of time, I mean the way in which I am handling my own lifetime. Everyone will know how we perceive time in our everyday experiences in different ways. Sometimes hours and days fly by, sometimes minutes seem to never pass. We live our lives and without our doing something about it, the days are always going by.

Mentally we do not count identical units like a clock would but for this piece I chose to visualise time through embroidering a line for every day I have lived so far, as mentioned earlier. I intend this to provide a reflective view on my existence. I am interested in how we have only one time, only one try for doing things in our lives. While we can choose to repeat a specific task, we cannot make things un-happen. It is up to us to take responsibility and make the best of our one chance at living. We can take opportunities or let them pass by and we will never know if it was for better or for worse. Regarding my own personal growth I am not particularly proud about everything I do but I am trying to arrive at a balance between

Image opposite page: *all the days of my life so far...*, nylon sewing thread, digital machine embroidery on handwoven textile, 2.65 x 0.85 m, 2003-2007, detail while the backing gets washed off (courtesy of the artist).

Inset opposite page: detail with backing on (courtesy of the artist).

the different opportunities, demands and challenges that come my way. When I am exhausted or worried or scared, a few lines I heard Al Jarreau singing many years ago come to my mind:

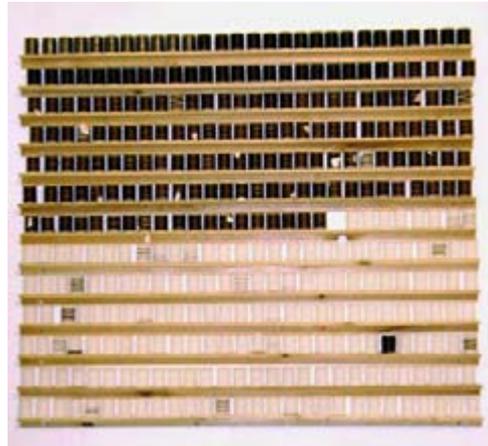
you really only got two choices
you can lay down and be weak
or you can stand up where you're at
and still be strong

This is to me an appeal to do the best I can. It is easy to give in to weakness, but doing that disengages one from life. I think this is what is being suggested by Jarreau's lyrics. Looking back at my own past, I realise how much time was spent in agony, selfpity or depression. It still happens at times, but now I try to be more aware and appreciative of my life's time. My looking back has changed my attitude towards how

I do things in life and I hope this entails a change for the better. I try to live my dreams and be appreciative of people I meet.

On the panel, I have left lots of free space. This signifies the potential that might still be left to me. In *and all the reels it took me to make it* the bobbins of the sewing thread are collected and arranged: the empty ones are included as metaphors for all the resources already used in life, while the half full and full ones reference the resources we still have at our disposal. Together they can be seen as a record of time in themselves. None of us know how much time and opportunity we have left to live our lives but I have learned that choosing and taking on challenges are what matters. If we accept life it should be no problem that there is an end to it. Death is part of the cycle and can be accepted as long as one's life is 'used' to its best ability.





Left: *all the days of my life so far...*, (photograph by Shirin Khosraviani).

Above: *...and all the reels it took me to make it*, 13 wooden shelves, 364 nylon reels (courtesy of the artist).

In visualising the time I have lived so far I am trying to make peace with past times not lived so well. This delicate weaving made with a material that resembles my hair was made in the spirit of celebration and appreciation of a life; one which we can measure but which we will never be able to understand.

The work of German-born New Zealand-based artist **Christine Keller** is positioned between traditional textile design and weaving, new media art and innovation. She is interested in the clash of tradition and new technologies and its social and political implications. Her work has been exhibited internationally and was featured in the publications, *Techno Textiles 1* and *2* (1998 and 2005). She is an award-winning designer for her woven and felted design work for the "Handweberei im Rosenwinkel" (1998-2001) in Germany. Christine Keller has taught textile design, weaving and textile arts in Germany, Mongolia, Australia and Canada and is currently Head of the Textile Section at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, New Zealand.

Exhibition Review & Notes

*lightweight?**

Editors' Notes: This project entailed a collaborative exhibition – held at Salisbury House Gallery in Dunedin and in the Foyer Gallery of the School of Art, Australian National University in Canberra. This collaborative project involved almost fifty students and staff of the textiles departments of the School of Art in Canberra and the Otago Polytechnic School Art in Dunedin. *lightweight?* provided a snapshot of the work of both departments and allowed an opportunity for exhibitors to experience new perspectives on contemporary textiles as a medium. Both the show and some participants travelled to both sides of the Tasman, which proved to be an invaluable experience and the continuation of the dialogue between the schools. The texts that follow include a review of the exhibition by Ralph Body and four brief sets of notes on the exhibition by the organisers and travelling lecturer-artists.



Above: Visiting New Zealand group singing a waiata or traditional Māori song at the opening of *lightweight?*, Australian National University, Foyer Gallery, Canberra, October 2007.

* A CD catalogue with images of all the work is available from Christine Keller at christinekeller@tekotago.ac.nz

REVIEW by Ralph Body

The Salisbury House Gallery in Smith Street, Dunedin, offers a domestication of the traditional white cube display space. Divested of furnishings and whitewashed throughout, it nonetheless evokes memories of its former identity as an inner city townhouse, its appropriation suggesting a domestic realm charged with creative potential. It is thus the ideal venue for *lightweight?* an exhibition showcasing the variety and artistic possibilities of contemporary textile art. The exhibition features works by students and lecturers from both Dunedin and Canberra, its title referring to the limitations placed upon the weight of works which were to travel between the two cities. It also refers to the position of textiles as a marginalised art form, dismissed as a nice, genteel hobby. Much of this prejudice stems from its position – in post-Medieval Western society – as a predominantly female practice, separated from the 'high' arts by its relegation to the domestic sphere. The location of the Dunedin exhibition, in a home-turned-gallery, provides the perfect setting in which to challenge these prejudices without endorsing the assumptions that underlie them.

Perhaps one of the benefits of textiles' exclusion from traditional histories of art is the absence of any central canon. This is not to suggest that textiles are without a heritage. Indeed, the histories of textiles descend from numerous traditions encompassing a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds. As such, contemporary practitioners can engage with a variety of different media, processes and purposes. This richness and diversity of practice is amply represented in *lightweight?* Works included utilise such varied processes as dyeing, stitching, tapestry, weaving, printing, felting, beading, and embroidery, as well as a number of conceptually driven pieces which use unconventional materials and challenge the boundaries between traditional categories of art. This sheer variety makes it difficult to generalise about the exhibition. Nonetheless, some interesting parallels emerge between the works. This review will discuss specific works which appear to address recurring themes; however, it neither attempts nor claims to be representative of the exhibition as a whole.

Textile work has traditionally brought together the artistic and the functional, a union which has frequently

seen it dismissed as 'craft' or 'applied art'. It has been viewed as too closely connected to everyday lived experience, lacking the necessary separation to facilitate aesthetic appreciation. While few of the works in the exhibition could be described as functional, neither are they concerned with achieving an autonomous status. Instead, many refer to an external context through the use of borrowed imagery or recycled materials, the memories associated with these thus informing the finished art work. This is evident in Bianca Wall's *Face Towel* where pieces of old towels have been used to create a pixelated image of a human face. The work evokes the daily ritual of washing, emphasising the intimate connection of its materials with bodily experience. Its loosely suggested patchwork portrait suggests a Saint Veronica's veil-like imprint.

It is precisely because of their close relationship with the human body and lived experience that textile objects can become such potent bearers of memory. In *Reflections*, Anna-Lee McLeod has embroidered images taken from old family photographs. This transference between mediums has resulted in a greater degree of stylisation and distortion – a smiling bride and groom almost seem to grimace – but this idiosyncratic quality helps bring them to life. The application of this imagery to fabric suggests the residue of personal histories, invisibly inscribed upon numerous pre-loved textiles folded away in top cupboards. The issue of memory is addressed somewhat more obliquely in the three woven panels of Lucy Eliason's *Journey*. I usually dismiss the notion of life as a journey as a trite cliché, the sort of thing spoken about by contestants on reality TV shows. Fortunately, this work addresses its theme with a greater reticence. The daily cycle of waking and sleeping is evoked by a series of bands, much like the rings on a tree. Throughout, this repeated pattern is subtly nuanced, suggesting variations of experience.

A number of works have made use of natural materials, such as plant dyes, in a manner which relates to the themes they explore. Roka Hurihia Cameron used materials entirely sourced from Blueskin Bay for her work *Ngā Karu o Tangaroa – He Who Watches*, such as shellfish buttons to represent Pupu, as the eyes of the spirit energy that lives in the water. Sally Blake's *Animated Pods* was inspired by the form and function

of eucalyptus seed pods (gum nuts). These protective pods have been created from a woollen blanket, suggesting that the potential for future life has been tucked up warm and safe. Plant dyes have then been used to render them in a variety of cheerful colours. In addition to these organic origins, the work gains a playful humour from its subtle anthropomorphism. Variations in size and posture suggest the forms are engaging with one another, like swishing flounced skirts or a band of genuflecting Christmas trees. They recall beloved soft toys, suggesting plants can be just as endearing as soft, fluffy animals.

Julie Ryder makes use of not only natural materials, but also natural processes in the production of her work. Her panels of silk are patterned through the innovative use of fermenting fruit. Over a period of several months, the bacteria and moulds produced by the rotting fruits have stained the cloth with natural dyes. In works like *Chiaroscuro* the striations of the lemons used have left an ethereal trace of their former presence. The repeated patterns produced resemble cells or molecules.

Scientific and biological imagery has been utilised by a number of the exhibitors. While not subject matter traditionally associated with textiles, the two work together strangely well. The repeated molecular forms of the microscopical rendered large recalls patterned fabric, while the delicate qualities of many textiles create a membrane-like surface. In her work *Viralart*, Jeanette Pearce has placed a series of machine-embroidered pathogens in petri dishes. As these works are sold and disseminated the artist's 'virus' will spread. It is intended that the new owner will email the artist with photos of the works in their new environment, thus allowing her to track the progress of the epidemic. The viruses all possess an identical form, recalling the branding of corporate logos.

Textile work is often presented as a delicate and decorous pastime, in turn reinforcing notions about feminine delicacy and vulnerability. Many of the *lightweight?* exhibitors, however, have committed acts of violence against their materials, exploring the artistic possibilities of destruction. Fabric has been stained, cut, torn and in the case of Brenna Mary McCann, subjected to chemical burning. In some works, patches of sumptuous silks have been

roughly stitched together and loose threads left hanging. In painting, evidence of the artist's hand in the form of visible brush marks is often credited with imbuing the finished work with a sense of its creation, a permanent sense of its coming into being. Conversely, in these textile works, the scars, threads and delicate materials produce a sense of ephemerality and decay. In the case of Rebecca Thomson's *Viridis Eliptica* the bunched and warped surface of her chiffon ground instils the felted wool leaves that decorate it with a decidedly autumnal character.

The elaborately worked surface of Bev Bruen's *Pelt Sampler* suggests violence through different means. Using machine and hand stitching on a felted shape, she has created a simulation of wounded flesh with all the sensuality of a Baroque martyrdom. Coloured with a mix of chemical and eucalypt dyes, her various folds and stitching suggest the veins, innards and tissue of mutilated flesh. As her point of departure, she has taken the ambivalent environmental position of the fox in Australia. An introduced feral carnivore, it poses a threat to native species. At the same time the hunter is itself hunted, its pelt sought after as a trophy or material for fashion items. Issues of fashion and appearance are addressed by a number of other exhibitors who, through the use of textiles, have been able to use the very materials of their subject matter to question the values and conventions it espouses. Like so many others in this diverse and varied exhibition, they have demonstrated the rich potential that exists in textiles as an art form.

NOTES by Jennifer Robertson

The idea for *lightweight?* stemmed from a series of miniature international textile exhibitions that began in the 1980s – easy to transport, limited by weight and sometimes also size, allowing freedom of expression whilst also establishing a theme for textile artists to work to.

Facilitating cultural exchange between two great institutions, this exhibition was all the more interesting as it exposed some common and diverse contemporary themes and approaches, made clearer by the large number of participating artists.

Following the movement of fibre art textiles from the USA, some works from Dunedin explore 3D



Images: Installation details of *lightweight* at Salisbury House Gallery, Dunedin (photographs courtesy of Max Oettli).

soft sculpture, narrative and humour. An interest in deconstruction is also apparent in the work from both institutions, with some works referencing cloth and clothing. Other textiles explore the inherent characteristics or properties of materials, such as wool and felting.

Some artists use traditional skills such as crocheting, weaving, embroidering, and tapestry weaving. However, these skills are often interpreted in new forms, analogue and digital, exploring ideas about current cultural and social issues. There is also a resurgence of interest in natural dyes, with textile works from both places echoing the beauty of natural colour, resist and incidental mark marking.

Now back in Canberra, I am delighted that the exhibition was widely received in Dunedin and that during the reciprocal visit to Canberra the exhibition and cultural exchange achieved further development.

NOTES by Julie Ryder:

Don't Forget the Question Mark

Flying over the Pacific towards Dunedin I was bombarded with advertisements for the latest mobile phone, iPod and Blackberry in my in-flight magazine. These essential tools equip us for survival in the ever-increasing pace of today's society, and they all have something in common. They are all faster, lighter or smaller than the previous model. For aspects of communication, it seems, *lightweight* is a highly desirable quality.

I pondered on the meaning of this word whilst helping to install the textile exhibition *lightweight?* Developed through necessity to subvert economic and international freight restrictions between the two relevant institutions, the concept of 'lightweight' is also reflected in the materials used for fabrication, and the way in which the pieces engage with space, either on an internal platform, or on a physical one.

But that is where I believe 'lightweight' ends and *lightweight?* begins. Consisting predominantly of undergraduate student work, these textiles navigate a path through weighty issues regarding identity (cultural, personal and sexual); social and environmental relationships; and sustainability. By juxtaposing traditional materials and techniques with contemporary

ones, these works act as communicators – crossing geographical and cultural boundaries, to inform, enlighten and engage us. The miniature scale of many of the works compels closer inspection, promoting a feeling of familiarity and intimacy that only textiles seem to evoke.

The works exhibited by the lecturers are assured articulations in concept and execution. They act as signposts for the direction of contemporary textile practice, and illuminate the pathways towards a career in fibre for younger practitioners.

Cultural exchanges such as *lightweight?* continue to keep the lines of communication open, encouraging discourse and enriching our visual language.

NOTES by Christine Keller

When Jennifer Robertson asked me about a year ago if I would be interested in doing a staff and student exchange show between our two art schools, I said yes without much hesitation. Jennifer and I have met a few times over the years; at conferences and during residencies. I knew who I was talking to and I trusted our mutual professionalism. Our art school here at Otago Polytechnic has a textile department which is not very large – fourteen students in years three and four and a couple of staff members. This includes enough people to make a show like this work. So, I happily forgot about it for six months and did not worry. About five months before the show we needed, however, to become more specific and it turned out that we wished to include the Master of Fine Arts candidates. What a great opportunity for students to be part of an international exhibition! I got a bit concerned when our final count rose to fifty contributors in total from the two institutions. While many things can be planned beforehand (like the gallery, hospitality and the catalogue) others cannot be anticipated. 'How do the works match? How much space do we need exactly?'

It was important to have one coordinator in each city. In the beginning I tried to be very democratic and sent copies to everyone about everything. However, in the end the emails were only sent with great frequency between Jennifer and me. I allowed for more group discussion than the students enjoyed at

times but I consider this a valuable way to provide transparency and to allow the students to learn from seeing all the different production steps that happen behind the scenes of the staging of a project like *lightweight?*

Reflecting on this experience we are generally satisfied with the result and the inevitable tensions that occurred during the process are overridden by pride in a successful project.

NOTES by Victoria Bell: The Semantics of Cloth

"What you see is what you see." (Frank Stella)

Textiles arrive in the 21st century burdened or abundant with the (*well made?*) luggage of several lineages and histories. In a contemporary visual arts environment, fine art, fibre art, applied art, craft art, fashion as art and 'the domestic arts' converge to subvert the dominance of any single ideology within textile practice and education. The works developed

for *lightweight?* employ these multiple positions as departure points in their creation.

Past divides between art and craft have been much discussed. Each new generation of art graduates subvert, redeploy and challenge these hierarchies in their making. Some choose not to prefix the term artist with the word 'textile', as post-media and interdisciplinary practices signal one way forward, while others locate their emerging practices squarely within Textiles with a capital 'T'.

In referencing textile methodologies, artworks may move outside the expected frame, as seen by the increasing number of painting graduates who use knitting and crocheting as brush and palette. However, they are still places for technique and careful labour. Many works in *lightweight?* showcased exemplary dye, weave and stitch processes, affirming a continued position for the discipline in the wider field of visual arts.

Ralph Body is currently completing a Master of Arts in Art History and Theory at the University of Otago. The subject of his dissertation is the Dunedin artist and teacher Alfred Henry O'Keeffe (1858-1941). He has previously worked as a tutor, visual resources curator, and arts editor for the student magazine *Critic*.

Jennifer Robertson was born in Somerset, England and studied at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design University College and the Royal College of Art, London. She migrated to Australia in 1986 and established a weave studio in Fremantle, Western Australia. In 1997 Robertson moved to Canberra to lecture in Textiles at the ANU School of Art.

Initially trained in science, **Julie Ryder** graduated from the Melbourne College of Textiles in 1990, and completed a Master of Arts (Visual Arts) degree at the Australian National University, School of Art in 2004. She has been the recipient of many awards and grants, and in 2005 was awarded the inaugural ANAT Synapse New Media Artist in Residence at the Australian National Botanic Gardens in Canberra. She has exhibited in ten solo, and over ninety group exhibitions, both nationally and internationally.

The work of German-born New Zealand-based artist **Christine Keller** is positioned between traditional textile design and weaving, new media art and innovation. She is interested in the clash of tradition and new technologies and its social and political implications. Her work has been exhibited internationally and was featured in the publications, *Techno Textiles 1* and *2* (1998 and 2005). She is an award winning designer for her woven and felted design work for the "Handweberei im Rosenwinkel" (1998-2001) in Germany. Christine Keller has taught textile design, weaving and textile arts in Germany, Mongolia, Australia and Canada and is currently head of the Textile Section at the School of Art at Otago Polytechnic in New Zealand.

Victoria Bell is a practicing artist and Master of Fine Arts candidate. Currently a Lecturer in Textiles at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art, she relocated to Ōtepoti Dunedin from Ōtautahi Christchurch, after receiving the Olivia Spencer Bower Award in 2005.

LINES THAT FLOAT

Sudhir Kumar Dupatti & Peter Bewan

The Faculty of Visual Arts Gallery at the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, India, is an institutional landmark for contemporary Indian art. My show entitled *My Mind's Wank* (1996) was both an artist's statement and also an installation work which was submitted as a curatorial project to the University's Research Department .

It is sometimes hard to judge the results of an audience's visit to a gallery. Often viewers are more tuned to common, stereotyped exhibitions, where much is anticipated before viewing. It was my intention to bring this operation into play and at the same time to dismantle and dislocate the audience's preconception of what an exhibition could be. To this end, Peter Bewan became involved and his critical comments on my show have since become quite integral to my experience of that work and has severely challenged my comfort zone about my own work. His comments accompany images of the work and my own writing below – acting as radical criticism and as counterpoint alongside my information on this show – which has been seminal for my practice as an installation and drawing artist, so much so, that I am revisiting it again now while involved with new projects from a new base in New Zealand.

PB comments: Fortunately the human capacity to be surprised is never fully extinguished and as we enter the gallery we have the most pleasing experience to be had there, because it is unexpectedly good. Where we expect to see an interior space we are captivated by a “new” external landscape. The brown earth from outside has been taken inside, softening and counter-pointing the geometry of the architecture. For some minutes we may be beguiled by our general appreciation of this



“new” space: this space of imagination, but the beauty of this initiation is not sustained. On closer inspection the installation has a rather “thrown-together” look and although some of the fish-men are drawn with a fresh eloquence, much of the graphic work is somewhat crude and clumsy. In my view this deliberate draughtsmanship undermines their credibility.

SKD comments: *My Mind's Wank* was configured within confined boundaries of the existing gallery system. The drawings on the canvas (43 X 1.5 metres) operated together and the uneven floor with soft soil and found objects and paintings on the floor connected the elements of the show into a single work.

The manipulation of a gallery space was in itself a conceptual act, enabling me to open up different avenues of projection and disorientation. The gallery space there negates the indoor space by redefining its authority, by redesigning the bare floor into an outdoor landscape environment. Hence an attempt was made to transform the given space into a whole

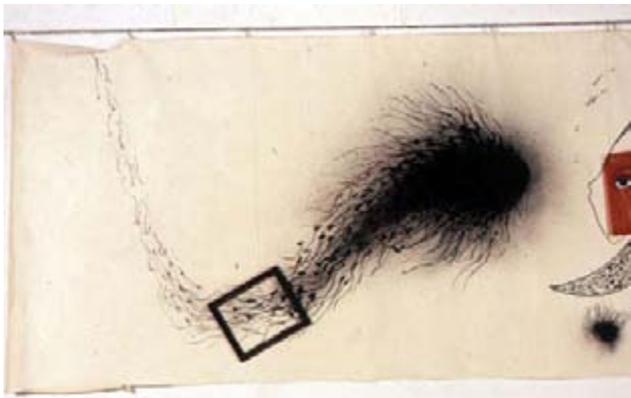
three-dimensional space, blurring the traditional/conventional definitions of painting and sculpture. If space implies the existing gallery conditions/terms (authority) then being accepted within that space is to a certain extent an endorsement by that authority to freely experiment. My panoramic canvas ran all around the gallery wall at eye-level. This continuity extending beyond the capacity of human sight at a single moment, providing a possibility of being part of my imaginative world. The images on the canvas, the canvas in relation to the stretching space outside it automatically represented a model of the real world of which the viewer was a part. In other words, it meant that there was no confined space in the gallery, yet it was seen as confined from outside. The one-piece canvas focused on the aspect of my imagined world over which the coloured visuals on glass overlapping the drawings in black represented the otherwise framed works in a conventional display.

A human being is also said to be operating on a horizontal plane both mentally and physically. In order to 'trip' the viewer from this position, my floor was manipulated to the extent of causing a mental disjunction in a viewer while the soil offered a soft tactility.

PB Comments: But as we acclimatise to this perversely "dry" sub-aqua world other more important issues begin to arise out of the fact of our very presence, and this is when my hackles rose. We are invited to walk on this lumped earth amongst "fallen" images

or symbols caught in "cages" viewing the fish-men on the walls as though in a mirror! Indeed, we have become unwittingly, participants ourselves: elements in the exhibit: creatures in this invented landscape! As we stumble self-consciously about this desert floor we gradually realise that we may be likened (by the artist who is there watching his audience) to the bestiary surrounding us. It is not the beasts we have come to see, ourselves amongst them. In fact, we are participating in the "minds wank", whether we like it or not. Until perhaps, the realisation sinks in, and then we may well retreat out through the door: For who would want to be an unconsenting cast-member in some-one-else's orgasm? The artist had pulled the wool over our eyes or, to use a more appropriate fishing metaphor, "caught us, hook, line and sinker".

PB Comments: However, there is credit due: the artist is certainly courageous to so publicly conduct his experiments in the forms of art: audacious, to be so challenging to our intellect and sensibilities: certainly tenacious, for it is an ambitious and extensive work; and earnest, there is a kind of naiveté in the directness of his expression. I think "expression" is an apt word; (to express: to force out from) the artist had expressed (ejaculated) his position, but I think it appears more a symptom of confusion and frustration. He has cleverly drawn us into the net of a complex debate he is having with himself, and the debate is long in the tooth and will never be finally resolved, and why should it?



An institution devoted to the study of art is precisely the sort of place in which the debate should take place. This installation, I think, signals the complexity of issues involved but I am not convinced that there is sufficient coherence in statement from which we can learn. I think it is because the formal and visual languages are confounded; the earth is “real” enough, it is of the real world; the isolated blue-gray painted silhouettes are vaguely reminiscent of international visual information boards – a kind of visual esperanto; the creatures drawn onto the canvas wall come from a fertile imagination or indeed, a fertile culture which stretches at least from here to Picasso’s Spain. The upturned bicycle stands are brothers to Duchamp’s *Bottle Rack*; the footprints around the base of the wall yet another “language” in between the real (having been made by real footwear) and the image of the real – a trace perhaps of past events; the isolated

coloured fragments, potentially precious, appear to be arbitrarily placed – themselves under question; the text at the door – an honest and impassioned manifesto stating that anything and everything can be art.

The work is altogether too self-conscious, it questions and undermines itself at every turn – an intense intellectual struggle leaving little for the audience to do but be its unwitting guinea-pigs. Being uncommitted to any one idea it puts them all together in a rather indigestible conceptual soup

As a matter of fact, when one is confronted with a work of art one reacts with indifference or dislike, almost as when meeting a stranger. They seem to me like greetings from an unknown sphere, or a kind of wave between our subconscious and conscious being. On this level of sensibility art affects us as our inner experience, an intuitive rather than logical knowledge.

Sudhir Kumar Duppati is an installation and performance artist with qualifications in Painting and Art Criticism Studies at BFA and MA levels from the Maharaja Sayajirao University in Baroda, India. He has been a practicing artist since 1995 with over 35 national and international group and solo shows to his name. He taught in the National Eritrean School of Art in Africa before joining Otago Polytechnic School of Art as a Lecturer in Painting in 2005.

Peter Bewan was a Lecturer at Glasgow School of Art in Scotland at the time of responding to the work of Sudhir Kumar Duppati.

Image on page 139: Sudhir Kumar Duppati, *My Mind's Wank*, installation view, 10 X 10 square metres, 1996 (courtesy of the artist).
 Images on pages 140 -141: Sudhir Kumar Duppati, drawing details, 1996 (courtesy of the artist).



Kinnen (Remembrance)

Inge Brennan

By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land as a foreigner; he lived in tents ... for he was looking forward to the permanent city, whose architect and builder is God.
(Hebrews 11, *The Bible*)

As a kid growing up in small town New Zealand I wasn't normal. Perhaps to someone walking down the street I would have appeared so, but not to other kids: to them I was most definitely not. They would see my parents, bringing me to school or taking me home, and it would become clear: I was not 'one of them'; I was different, the only truly criminal offence in the court of childhood. There were often taunts: 'ching-chong', the odd 'heil Hitler' 'because my father is German'. Kids doing what seems to come so naturally, zeroing in on anything 'different' and proceeding to make a spectacle of it, others joining in to guarantee that the scrutiny would not be turned on them lest they be pronounced 'different' too. The teachers unwittingly would make things worse. A weird name, the kind that, on a class register, makes a new teacher stumble, coming out with something sounding more like hinge.

Weird parents. Weird name. Weird kid.

I loved my childhood and I completely adore my family but alongside it there was always a longing to fit into wider society, to not feel so different. What would it be like to be like the other kids, for whom every third person was their cousin. Sometimes the tension even entered the innocence of family life. A kindergarten dress-up parade. A kid who wanted to be a blonde princess. A mum who wanted to dress her in a yukata or summer kimono. A kid sent to her room.



In an oblique way my hopes of belonging as a child were, at times, realised, but outside of New Zealand. It was only when visiting my mother's family in Japan that I found a place where I felt I fitted in. Family,

friends, strangers treated me like everyone else. Going there felt like going home. I would cry on the flight home, not because I hated New Zealand, but I missed what I had away from it.

As I entered my teenage years and later as I went off to university, a strange change seemed to come about: I became normal. Others began to see that I didn't look all that different. I had the same accent as everyone else. Culturally I was a New Zealander. I began to be more accepted. My trips away became fewer and I felt more and more integrated into New Zealand society: a multicultural citizen of a multicultural country.

At 22, having been away from my mother's country for nearly six years I returned for a short visit with my mother and brother. In my mind, I was going home again, to another home, my memories of the acceptance I enjoyed there preserved from childhood. But just as things had changed in New Zealand they had changed there. In public places I found myself stared at for looking like a foreigner

and I could speak little of the language. My looks and my dress seemed more foreign than they once had. I began to realise the world which I had enjoyed as a child was my mother's world, a world of family and friends to which I was connected only through her. Outside of that world, and now as an adult, people responded differently. I might have felt at home but others thought otherwise.

The question of who I am and where I'm from remains. In terms of resolution between different countries, there isn't a perfect one. And this imperfect resolution becomes clear only as I look away from them to something else. My identity must ultimately rest on something more permanent, more unchangeable, a "permanent city".

The images included in these artist's pages are disparate in subject-matter but they share something: a weirdness, a sense of something being out of place. This is achieved through point of view or placing a motif in an unexpected context.

Inge Brennan is a photographer who is currently undertaking an MFA project at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Photographs by Inge Brennan, *Untitled*, 2007.



*songs of ascension:
poems for Chil /raiment series*

Jane Davidson

The *Divergence Project* exhibition was held at the St James Theatre in Wellington in 2000 and a series of my digital laser prints was included. Images of these are incorporated into these notes from the exhibition. The following text was later developed as a parallel text to accompany the images. This text was developed to further explore and unravel the themes inherent in the visual work; a series alluding to the disjunction between fictional history and the urban reality of surviving the nightmare of political chaos. This disjunction is reflected in the contrast between the harsh realities suggested in the writing and the softer and more romantic nature of the images. My project explores – amongst other things – the potential resonance of such a contrast. Ernst van Alphen points out how extreme trauma – for example through the Holocaust – can be enacted in art by the use of play and toylike motifs. He argues that the direct representation of trauma is impossible and that toys and playful images can be used to allude to the ‘unreality’ of extreme historical events.¹

raiment / korowai / cloak / wings: clothing, apparel, dress/ migration; needing wings: symbols of transformative and protective device; mixing metaphors of exile as flight and wishing a final flight for the *los decaparecidos*: *the disappeared ones*, who were denied their own history.

horse: symbol of colonialism, symbol of ‘mares’ of the night...‘with or without wings, the horse used to be a common symbol of the soul journey: a trip to the other-world, or to the land of the dead where the visitor might learn the great secrets of life, death, and magic; and return with god-like wisdom...’²

butterfly: symbol of survival from *Papillon*.³ Also, traditional prison ‘signature’ icon scratched on cell walls, signifying a logo for the nameless; symbol of regeneration, transcendence, survival, freedom, flight; symbol for the ‘disappeared ones’.

alien-skin: symbol of citizenship for illegal immigrants/ exiles/ who endure ‘alien’ on their passbook until legitimised. A series of enlarged and enhanced black and white random drawings (saved ‘doodles’ or subconscious markings). Overlaid, sometimes uniting two objects in the frame. These small illustrations look like tubes, arteries and cross-sections of veins are passport stamps over a fictional photograph. Reality is mirrored and inverted, as the invisible-people, literally erased on paper even after their corporeal time, now become envisible. As the ‘ghosts’ of bad history they are loud in their silence. Demanding identity: acknowledgement, affirmation, apology, and justice.

...Beside her was a carved wooden figure of a man with wings, folded at his sides. On the couch lay a carved heart,



also with wings, made from the same red wood. ...This winged heart is ours... It knows how to fly to the heavens & how to return...

... you must promise me you'll look for that city & take me there. Only a few ever enter. When



someone falls & loses their way, another takes their place & continues on ...taking on the mantle of the elect...



... this picture is for you / never knew / was kindled into a war in land / daylight / a ford / passion / never seen again / a daylights / night / he was



only a young man / & a young wife. My brother looks like him / my mother misses him. Where do you go over winter little butterfly?



Chill
A disease of denial
21st c. malaise

3,000 blank masks
bodies flying
to the ground
in the name of a military régime

gull looks like mother & fathers, lovers,
-won't go away
memory looks like children having nightmares
silence screams like torture
am I the
ghost of my mother's mother

forgotten children / broken
on the run
exile / alien
on the run
missing persons
on the run
never born now
on the run

you who have never taken life / given birth
what do you know of war, soldier-boy?

These images are part of a series of work in progress using photography and sampled texture from personal sources as a starting point. Messing around with mixed media. Hi-tech vs lo-tech. Narrative and image. Text as texture. Fabricating fiction and mixing metaphor. Mending; a necessary stitch, with invisible thread; (no photos, no passport, no papers, does-not-exist-now) – some sort of cloak.

Currently exploring issues of relating to Chile and lost relations in Chile, this work is to do with Chile and the 'disappearance' in the mid 1970s of my mothers' only brother and his wife. Incorporating ideas of regaining/ reclaiming identity for the disappeared/ *los decaparecidos* who have had their identity stolen, even after death. Trying to come to terms and resolve feelings around issues of past history, relating this to contemporary politics and looking at the idea of somehow moving on...

This work is also connected to an especially profound story of loss in a family context and the effect on identity this has. As a family myth unravelling during my childhood, it spoke, in spite of family history between the gaps (absence) of death, loss, exile and erasure. (Death and the Maiden, this time: La Llorona.) As a series, I try and translate this, trying to come to terms with political and personal family history relating to Chile and how the effects of such times are continuous and far-reaching.

It is a highly personal interpretation, with information gained from a range of sources, e.g. readings of South American history (and the almost permanent state of plunder and siege it has endured primarily for its mineral resources),⁴ combined with a file of contemporary news clippings I have built up of the unfolding Pinochet-in-exile story, 1999-2000.

This story continues today with the instigation of the International Criminal Court in 2002. The death of the dictator and the unresolved issues it raises, show it is still an unfolding episode of history. First there is silence, only now are people able to open up to try and process bad politics. My mother still searches the archives for evidence. The latest version is he never existed. History is twisted.

Because it is a personal, emotive and an on-going story from my family background, I have been able to

take some poetic liberties. Mixing truth and fiction, taking for inspiration and also asking permission or blessing. I realise along the way, that stylistically, the artwork relates to the magic-realist style of contemporary latino fiction, literature I have been immersed in for years: multilayered meanings, collage composition, playful colour and poetic narrative.⁵

Trying to express multilayered meaning in a positive, colourful and personal style, I am not so much aiming to seduce the viewer, rather to leave them with a positive spin.⁶ Playing, yes; trying to subvert some metaphor with subliminal combinations: slightly acidic colours to leave a taste of thought in the viewers mouth, hopefully. Ultimately a feeling of faith in spite of the underlying seriousness of this sad chapter of human history...

BUTTERFLY FOR CHILÉ/LOS DECAPARECIDOS

Beside her was a carved wooden figure of a man with wings, folded at his sides. On the couch lay a carved heart, also with wings, made from the same red wood... This winged heart is ours...It knows how to fly to the heavens and how to return...you must promise me you'll look for that city and take me there. Only a few ever enter. When another falls and loses their way, another takes their place and continues on...taking on the mantle of the elect.⁷

With esoteric lessons from Miguel Serrano, the text seemed appropriate for butterfly imagery, alluding to flying/ cloaks/ death, and spirit and hope. Appropriate appropriation for *los decaparecidos*?

Kitsch fridge magnet brooch aligned, still-frame style, next to a skeletal silver butterfly, alluding to the fragility of life, also.

CABALLO DE LOS SUEÑOS/DAWN

Caballo de los sueños, literally translates: 'horse of the dreams' aka dream-horse/nightmare. Dawn is the time of street kidnappings/this is a red dawn and shepherd's warning for sure, despite the folk-painted, wooden, puppet-play-horse ...*I have heard its red horse neigh.⁸*

White horse represents Jon/Juan Poirot-Robinson. He spent part of his life as a working horseman. The over-dubbed-like text messes the fact with the fiction.

BLACK HORSE/CABALLO NEGRO

Representing wife of Jon, also 'disappeared' for many years, though possibly still alive.

CHILÉ

First we will kill all the subversives; then we will kill their collaborators; then...their sympathizers, then...those who remain indifferent, and finally we will kill the timid...
(General Iberico Saint Jean, Governor of Buenos Aires, May 1976).⁸

CHILÉ

A disease of denial
20th century malaise
3,000 blank masks,
bodies flying
 to the ground
guilt looks like mothers, sisters, lovers,
– won't go away.
memory looks like children having nightmares
silence screams like torture
 am I the
ghost of my mother's brother

forgotten children/ stolen/ broken
 on the run
exile/alien
 on the run
missing persons
 on the run
never born now
 on the run.

¿you have never taken life/ given birth
what do you know of war, soldier boy?⁹

With thanks for words from Pablo Neruda/Miguel Serrano;
essays from Eduardo Galeano/John Simpson and Jana Bennet;
also for many conversations and much support from Ana Poirot.

Dedicated to Juan Poirot-Robinson b. 1930 - d. 1985?

- 1 Ernst van Alphen, "Playing the Holocaust", in *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 184.
- 2 B G Walker, *Womens' Symbols & Sacred Objects* (San Francisco: Harper, 1988).
- 3 Henri Charriere, *Papillon* (London: Harper Perennial, 1970). *Papillon*: French for butterfly, H Charriere named after the butterfly tattoo on his chest.
- 4 Eduardo Galeano, *The Open Veins of Latin America/Las Venas Abiertas de America Latina* (first published as an essay 1970).
- 5 E.g.: Eduardo Galleano, *Faces & Masks* (Memory of Fire trilogy), Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude & Love in the Time of Cholera*, Isabel Allende.

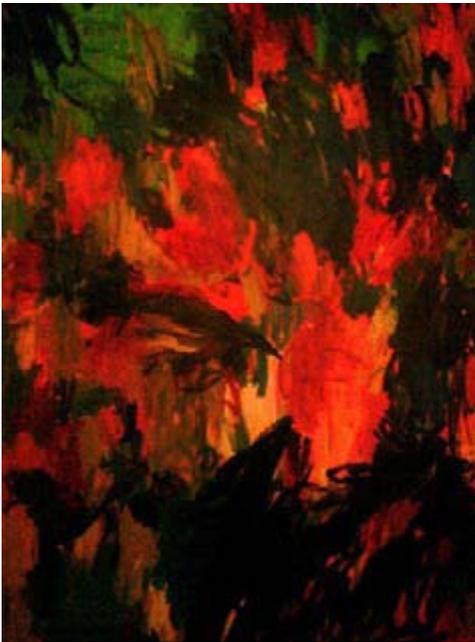
- 6 "There is a kind of allegory between the cultural loss that has been experienced in the Pacific...and the loss that migrants have sustained, but these paintings are not at all pessimistic...work(s) to generate positive energy, to put art into the world in a way that can help cure individual ills and the wider problems of who lack a sense of place. Despite its personal character, this art is part of a wider effort of collective affirmation". Nicholas Thomas, *Oceanic Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995).
- 7 Miguel Serrano, *El/Ella, Book of Magic Love* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1973).
- 8 Pablo Neruda, *Residence on Earth/Residencia en la Tierra* (London: New Directions Press, 1973).
- 9 John Simpson & Jana Bennett, *The Disappeared: Voices from a Secret War, 1976 – 83* (London: Robson Books, 1985).
- 10 Jane Davidson, poem: *Chilé*, (Sept 2000).

Jane Davidson is currently enrolled for an MFA Degree at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, and she works with digital photomontage.

FASHION, ART AND ROCK-AND-ROLL

Lily Fraser

"Artists of the past created works out of bronze, in marble...even with televisions; [b]ut there is one quality they have never used, and that is the quality of love and tenderness that we human beings have for what does not last." (Jeanne-Claude, 2006)¹



Lily Fraser, *Preliminary Sketch (of Cake)*, acrylic on canvas, 148 x 102 cm, 2007 (courtesy of the artist).

PART ONE

Clothing is an heir to postmodernist art and thinking. The theatre of art – culture – critically probes its own content. Art's relationship to culture becomes a chicken and egg scenario. Early theatrical/art events such as public executions, ritual dancing, religious communion, puppetry, political satire and bardship, provided strong shared experiences allowing the investigation of cultural boundaries and relationships through interpretation and response. The cultural dialogue debating where 'god' ended and the 'self' began often meant violent uprisings and oppression. Concepts of the self infused relationships with religion, politics and science and all forms of everyday life and art practice with questions about value and power. The 'self' – especially the poor and exploited 'self' is described and protected via legislation explicating dominant moral restrictions and cultural taboos. Ideas about the central position and importance of the 'individual' continue to flourish, forming a negotiated equality.

The art-making practices of postmodern artists such as Marcel Duchamp, Joseph Beuys and Vivian Westwood (before the chronological advent of that era) addressed the collision of culture with the body/self. Each of these artists created works which involved placing the body at its centre, and the 'self's' response to the world around them as the focus. These artists created mythocentric, exaggerated selves of high drama that flowed in and out of their work and dealings with the public. These presented selves and

artworks share a commonality of 'baseness', placing themselves in opposition to what is accepted as 'nice and clean'. By their persistence and commitment, they helped to create new understandings about value that bypasses traditional ideas of virtue. Willingness to bring their 'base' offerings to the public helped break down art's already disintegrating singular aesthetic and conceptual boundaries.

Artists taking advantage of the reinterpretation of these boundaries, such as those involved with Surrealism, Minimalism and Abstract art, pushed and probed their own particular positions. Techniques using conceptuality as a divining aesthetic flourished. Primitive ideas of degradation and decay permeated art. The boundaries between life and art became heavily contested; and responses became mediated by performance. Art-making practices developed to include following and recording, imprinting and collecting trace. Temporary works, the privileging of degraded media (bodily excretions, paper and fabric) and making art primarily about sex helped set new artistic precedents. The minutiae of culture and experience became art's most pressing discourse, as well as the eternal pointing to art by *art*.

Punk did much to bring art and the quotidian of cultural minutiae together. Punk's art/fashion fusion extends from a lineage of social/political 'movements' that rejected dominant cultural parameters (these movements include the Teddy Boys, Rockers, the Beats, Flappers, conscientious objectors, vegetarians etc.) and they dictated fashion and behaviour. Punk's participants asserted a lack of interest in the more powerful social body, the state, having authority over their choices. Music's base or primal mystical nature and complex social relationship made it the perfect conduit to explore ideas about the 'self' and cultural and personal identity and personae. It is my assertion that this rebellion developed in unknowing exchange with the artistic and life style choices of artists involved with such movements as Surrealism, Fluxus etc., illustrating the journey from art to cultural exchange on the street.

The implications of punk's crossover to mainstream culture from its extreme, dangerous roots are staggering. Rock and rolls (sic) theatre of fun,

fashion, sex, art and intelligence describes a rhizomic relationship to the sensibilities of taste and style. The importance of art, fashion and music to everyday high/low culture should not be underestimated. Fashion has so many positions, all with multiple variances, that it can't help creating a rich heterogeneous display for/of interaction. Art stars and music stars have fused, creating the rock-star-artist.

PART TWO

Contemporary artists dealing with fabric and its accoutrements, such as Australia's Mikala Dwyer and New Zealand's Violet Fagan and Susan Jowsey, use textiles and culturally superficial knick-knacks in their assemblages. Pretty vintage frocks delicately stained with multicoloured felt pens adorn the walls of Fagan's art shows. By manipulating context to help shift meaning, Fagan challenges the consignment of everyday objects to passivity. She plays on the objects' surfaces and points again and again to their 'other' positions. And while she addresses the assembled objects' histories she also constructs new, more dangerous ones for them.

Susan Jowsey's work simultaneously includes a historical and contemporary point of view. In her delicate work *Flutter*, Jowsey screenprints images of birds onto the gallery walls with light pink foundation (make-up). These motifs bridge the space between the memory of the audience (personal-smell, -touch, -taste, -texture and public-social value) and the work's practical realities - their delicacy, fragility and the inevitability of their erasure. Jowsey is participating in the discourse on where the edges of use and value lie, reassigning assumptions about beauty and value. An insistence on subjugated media, plastic birds, stained blankets, stitch and soap as art helps clarify her position as investigator and recorder.

True Love is a 'painting' from a series, made of nail polish on canvas board by Mikala Dwyer. At the Dunedin Public Art Gallery (in New Zealand) where I saw this piece, a table had been set up for children to make their own 'Mikala Dwyer' with card and nail polish, pointing to postmodernist art's desire to mix humour with purpose and value. A need to explore possible other interpretations of materials, to shift and

examine their function, both practically and socially, appears to drive Dwyer's work. Her reckless use of colour and materials inevitably throws up ideas that juxtapose with each other and respond to the forms she has created. Dwyer places herself well within art's discourse by mimicking art's registers of colour, form and context, and her work cannot be defined simply by her collapsed sculptural/craft aesthetic.

Importantly, Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen earlier used fabrics in their artwork, continuing historical conversations about value and permanence. Artists such as Gretchen Albrecht later investigated the qualities of their canvases by applying paint speculatively, with their support material helping to generate meaning. Painting and sculptural practices can include responding to the material questions posed by fabric. Re-using the discarded remnants of painterly activities for jewellery and clothing and so forth allows for less wastage of materials (in line with environmental concerns), as well as addressing the complexities of erasure and reconstruction as a way to generate meaning.

By using textiles and its trappings, each of these artists nods to fashion and the position of craft and fabric in history. Their artworks illuminate a far corner of fashion's parameters where fabric itself becomes central and important in a practice. The exploration of the implications of fabric has a fetishistic edge, a symbolic love that describes more than just materiality. It offers important, cryptic messages, coded with unspeakable earnestness about the state of the world and its values. By being prepared to tackle everything, art has thus entered into a discourse with culture in relation to the everyday, the everyday life of the fabrics we wear close to our self/body.

PART THREE

While some claim to not care a fig for clothing, cloths are unavoidably worn next to the naked skin, as well as being both practical and representational. Clothing – and its function within culture and in relation to sub-culture and in working against these constructs – describes the accumulated spatio-temporal experiences of the individual.² Clothing speaks to and from the unconscious, explicating desire and

status. Fashion's immediacy and rich contextual nature means that aesthetic values are easily subverted by fascination and desire. High and low styles are meaningfully distorted by our active participation. Watching, wearing, making, pretending; the play and equality promised by post-modernism is delivered by clothing.

While our attire may point to our desire for status and sense of self, our clothes equally describe a culture that has little to do with individuality. In our fast-paced postmodern utopic playground, novelty is an exponentially increasing phenomenon, exactly because we yearn for some sign of individuality. The consumption of media products and the simple accumulated experiences of our fellow humans have created a rich vein of potential life experiences or choices you could make, have, or wear.

The multiplication of media images has helped create an ever-increasing commonality, an endless exchange of signs and symbols to create ever-multiplying 'realities'. Whilst the notion that humans are like physical holograms endlessly reflecting our continuously imprinting selves at each other might sound a little chilly, it does provide a liberating sense in that by accepting that it is being done *by me*, I become the subject, rather than the object that it is being done to.

To my mind, identity and self-presentation are part of a rhizomic reality described by Jean Baudrillard as the "hyper-real". Baudrillard's system³ takes notice of the functional (what the object does, e.g. a toaster cooks bread) and exchange (money, trade etc.) values of society as well as the more subjective symbolic (cultural/tribal) and sign (status/desire) value of 'things'. This framework helps us to understand clothing's importance in culture.

While notions of functional and exchange value are easily understood as being practical and familiar, the symbolic and sign value of clothes is what helps create the culturally hysterical response generated by clothing. Events like the Stella McCartney⁴ line launch at Target (Australia) and its aftermath demonstrate fashion's blind desire driven by status. The ridiculous proliferation of popularised images and slogans from Chairman Mao (people's hero?) to Napoleon Dynamites' 'vote for Pedro' point to an important

cultural conversation. The accessibility of cultural stimuli and the desire to be inventive, or to seek status and identity, means that what may pass as exclusive and specific (art, punk, or Chanel suits) will eventually return to the everyday. This cross-pollination between politics, fashion, art, and cultural intelligence is done with almost no effort on the part of the world's citizens. It is as easy as breathing.

And as long as an individual can never escape the complex array of media and cultural images and information that is presented to them, this will hold true. Simply by being, we each participate and contribute to the ever-extending definitions in our collective dictionary. The multiplicity of viewpoints

afforded us by postmodernism allows us to digest and contemplate the complexities of our communities, and of our relationship with the shirts on our backs. To dismiss fashion as 'trivial' is beside the point. The clothed body (like the unclothed body) is the inscribed body.⁵

* Acknowledgement: I would like to thank Jessica Friedman for editing collaboration. She is a Melbourne-based freelance writer, editor and student. She currently edits *Farrago* at the University of Melbourne and is co-founding editor of the experimental fashion journal *a cloth-covered button*.

- 1 Quoted in Cathy Newman, "Christo and Jeanne-Claude Unwrapped", *National Geographic*, November 2006: 36-41.
- 2 These statements reflect my own poetic musings on culture with ideas loosely related to my reading of Carl Jung's biography *Jung* by Deirdre Bair, reminding me of the complex development of ideas of the unconscious and the "Tribal" mind. See Deirdre Bair, *Jung* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2003).
- 3 Jean Baudrillard, "Subjective Discourse of the Non-Functional System of Objects", in *Revenge of the Crystal* (London: Pluto, 1993).
- 4 Jen Melocco, "Surviving the Stella Wars", *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, March 12, 2007: "There were scenes of pandemonium at the Bondi Junction Target store as women tried to grab hold of the limited edition range by the top line British designer. 'Someone just ripped a jacket out of my hands,' said Lori Herbert of Vaucluse. Another woman, who refused to give her name, said a clothes rack had been rammed into her side and she feared for her safety in the crowd."
"Up to 300 women started queuing outside the store since 6.30am intent on bagging a bargain". Rachel Wells and Peter Weekes, "Many Unhappy Returns for Stella", *The Sunday Age*, April 15, 2007. "When *The Sunday Age* visited the retail giant's Bourke Street store soon after the launch, racks were laden with hundreds of the unwanted designer garments – many being returns from disappointed customers who admit to having been 'sucked in by the hype'. One such shopper is 26-year-old marketing director Georgia Moore, who drove from Fitzroy to Target's Bendigo store to try to avoid the opening day crush. She spent \$2000 on the designer threads, only to return all but two of the garments last week. Her sister spent \$800 the same day and has since returned the lot."
- 5 Also see Marcia Morgado's article entitled "The Semiotics of Extraordinary Dress: A Structural Analysis and Interpretation, in *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 2007; 25: 131-155 concerning many of the ideas posited in this perspective.

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