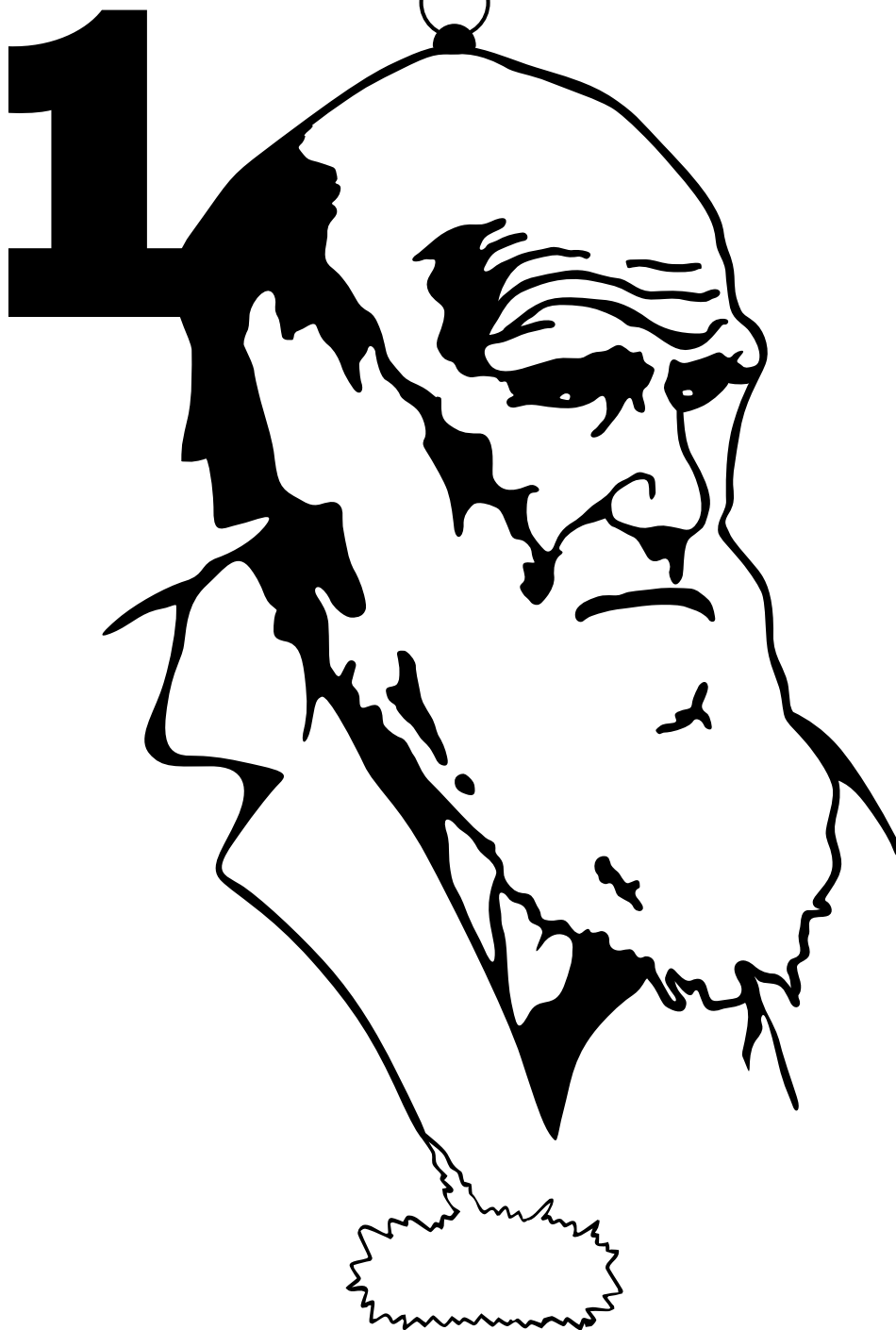


Australasian
art reviews
summer 2004

NATURAL SELECTION



a new adaptation



Natural Selection

Co-editors:

Dan Arps and Gwynneth Porter
editors@naturalselection.org.nz

Designer and Webmaster:

Warren Olds
warren@naturalselection.org.nz

Proofreader:

Charlotte Craw

Subscribe for free at
www.naturalselection.org.nz

Natural Selection offices are at
2/145 Howe Street, Freemans
Bay, Auckland, New Zealand
Telephone 64-9 360 1726

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Thank you and congratulations for downloading and printing out, or otherwise getting your hands on this, the first monster issue of *Natural Selection*. We apologise for any waiting for downloads, technical hitches, your printer running out of ink, and to your loved ones who will now have wait until you have finished this lovely magazine to read it. We have put this magazine together out of our genuine feeling that the world (especially our corner of it) needed a magazine that gave a voice to the arts community and the huge (if a little unwieldy) response is a testament to this.

Charles Darwin never said evolution was a matter of the survival of the fittest, which, as a clarification, is a good thing for those who exercise infrequently. Instead he said that survival depends on the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. *Natural Selection* was conceived out of a perceived lack of vehicles for art reviews publishing in Australasia. As far as we could make out, there were a lot of benefits in a free-press, non-financial approach to criticism in terms of interfering with the evolution of the art world.

Towards this first issue, we drew on our existing networks of artists, writers and people involved in the artist-run scene in a wider sense, and have, from there, turned it over to blind chance. Rather than dictating contents we left it up to writers to come forward with their choice of subject. We hope that new writers, both friends and strangers, will continue to step up as we want *Natural Selection* to be a community-based publication that will take on a life of its own.

We are intending to hand the magazine over to guest editors at some point in 2004, maybe even with #2, to make things changeable editorially – we hope to alternate editing between Australia and New Zealand – and to spread the work around. One day we hope there will be a friendly or even hostile takeover. We just wanted to set it up, you know...

We encourage writers to engage in direct art criticism, or to take the review brief more loosely. We have also encouraged writers to be as nepotistic and/or self-reflexive as they want – write about strangers, your friends and/or yourself. Pseudonyms are OK too. We gladly receive unsolicited material, but we only run it if we think it is interesting.

We also don't mind if people take a good while to write things up. These fast-paced times do not always lend themselves to the development of considered and well-incubated ideas. (Backlogs too can also harbour gems – we also welcome such period-pieces.) Although this is not to say that we don't like off-the-cuff responses too. You will find examples of both these methods, and many in-between, in this issue.

We never really liked web-zines as reading off the screen is horrible. That is one reason we have decided to present the magazine as PDFs for you, dear reader, to print off at your leisure, hopefully at your place of work. The craft project that is involved in getting a hard copy will, we hope, have slowed capitalist time for you.

Finally, we would like the opportunity to wholeheartedly thank all the contributors for *Natural Selection's* first issue. Our writers were so great about only having December to write – what a crazy self-imposed deadline Christmas Day was. I mean really. Which brings us to the word for the summer quarter: *Cacoethes* – the strong desire to do something ill-advised (from the Greek).

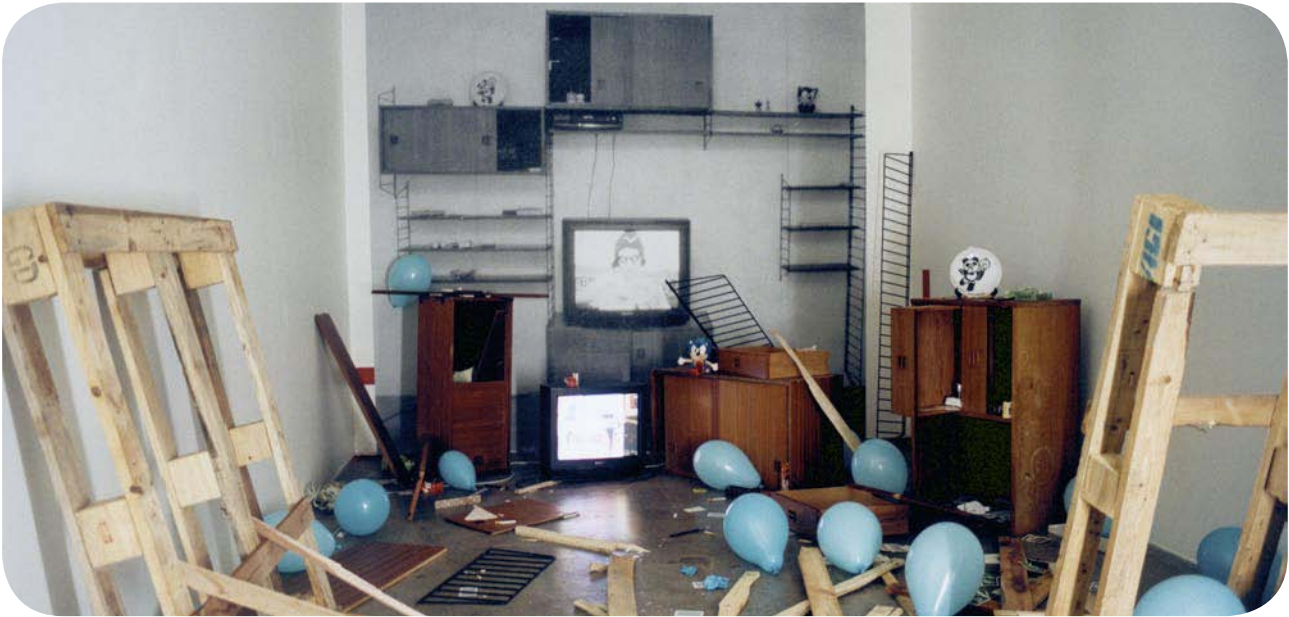
Dan Arps and Gwynneth Porter

Issue 1, Summer 2004

In order of receipt...

-1 Sriwhana Spong, and A.D. Schierning write accounts of their ex-boyfriend Daniel Malone's *malone@artspace* at Artspace, Auckland.
-2 Michael Morley wrote us a picture about the work of Giovanni Intra, RIP monkey-face.
-3 Ken Bolton sent us a poetic review of the work of Guy Auty, Australian critic.
-4 Emma Bugden writes about a Nikki Winnichuck performance at Enjoy, the Wellington project space. The social situation established is eerily akin to some of those set up in her own performances...
-5 "Judge" Judy Darragh gives us a brief account of a particular event as it unfolded at the opening of *Nine Lives* at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki.
-6 Louise Popplewell interviewed Carla Cescon on the occasion of her show at Michael Lett in Auckland.
-7 Lisa Kelly and Ruark Lewis reviewed Gail Hastings' recent showing at The Cross Art Projects in Kings Cross, Sydney.
-8 James Lynch writes a heart-felt account of the spooky political climate in the Melbourne art school he teaches at, the Victorian College of the Arts.
-9 Astrid Mania reviews a recent showing of New Zealand non-resident David Hatcher's in Germany.
-10 Pippa Sanderson writes up on Kim Paton's show at Enjoy, Wellington. She also pulled an account from her archives of two shows at the Adam Art Gallery – a curated show called *Practice*, and an instalment of David Clegg's *Imaginary Museums*.
-11 Tessa Laird wrote many notes during the proceedings of the *Cultural Provocation* conference in Auckland, and here is a portion of that material collated.
-12 Dave Morison on Masato Takasaka and Justin Andrews' residency at 200 Gertrude Street.
-13 jasperjhons ponders a Sarah Ormsby show at the HSP, and ends up relating it to Stevie Nicks.
-14 Mia Van der Rohe reviews the Holiday resort issue of the great Melbourne-based magazine *Pataphysics*.
-15 Jürgen Villers gives us a philosopher's account of the exhibition *The Sky's the Limit* that featured works of homegirl Yvonne Todd and homeboys Andrew McLeod, Peter Robinson and David Hatcher.
-16 Alex Gawronski tells us about a panel discussion he was involved in at the MCA in Sydney about artist-curator dynamics.
-17 Gwynneth Porter with a rambling account of experiences in Venice, of some shows she has seen – Louise Weaver's, Hany Armanious', *Come In*, *Entropy in Reverse*, the Elam open day, etc.
-18 Rob McKenzie writes to us from Melbourne about art in fluoro colours.
-19 Scott Redford has considered his visit to Venice and has some very salient things to say on the Antipodeans-at-the-Biennale scenario.
-20 Honorary home-girl Anya Buechele reviews winter in London (editors' interpretation).
-21 Dan Arps writes up the Ronnie van Hout survey *I've Abandoned Me* at the Auckland Art Gallery.
-22 *The Bio-Power Digest* is an organ of the esteemed New Zealand non-pat agitator Matthew Hyland. He may be a resident of Hackney, but his prose is never hackneyed. The first two issues arrived to the *Natural Selection* offices by email, and we thought far, far too few people received it. Modesty is a virtue, but silence turns even the truth to poison, thus spoke Zarathustra... So, here they are, with a brand new third issue. Quel scoop! (N.B. This addition is the first in a series *Natural Selection* wishes to establish which tardis-like presents issues of woefully under-distributed gems of magazines within the magazine to make the most of the whopper emailing list we lucked into.)

Daniel Malone does Artspace



"Art is a really great excuse to do lots of silly things"
– D.M.

Installation view of *Destroyed Room* (2003), with *Iag Gnuy Mus fo Muk* (2003) DVD

Walking into the show one might presume that Crazy Dave and his mates had snuck in there the night before the opening and had a bit of a shin-dig. The first thing that hits you is that the wooden walkways from the previous exhibition are still there – "Another Artist's Pallets". The back projection room is filled with a deconstructed/destroyed *Kum of Sum Young Gai – Iag Gnuy Mus fo Muk*, smashed (other artists') pallets, and balloons from the days of *Break and Enter*. The 'Malone' tag that Billy Apple has scrubbed off the Artspace light-box sign outside is now displayed on a giant sticker in the entrance way. Smaller tag stickers are a bonus with your copy of the micrograph (the Teststrip catalogue publications series that has continued to outlive the physical gallery, R.I.P.). O what a magical mess he weaves!

I think the most obvious point to take from the whole Retrospective is that a lot of the work is credited to other artists. David Tremlett, Daniel Malone (of San Francisco), Joel Shapiro, Martin Kippenberger, Billy Apple, Patrick Malone; the list goes on. The micrograph, written by Malone, is also not credited to the artist. Modesty?... I think not.

In this introspective retrospective D.M. semi-detaches himself from ownership of the work, but also makes himself more important through this mere association. Although he hasn't had anything to do with the physical creation of the painting by Patrick Malone, for example, it now becomes a Daniel Malone through conceptual affiliation, and will be sold as such to second cousin Sue Farrell, who had always wanted a "Malone" for her collection.

I've known Daniel for a good few years now and the mad cobweb of intellection that is his art makes perfect sense to me. But to anyone not privy to this understanding what does the show offer? Without reading the micrograph (i.e. not being invited or not having \$2 for one at the show) or going along to the floor-talk (which was really informative and fun but only captured an audience of roughly 20 people) what kind of sense or meaning could one get from the show? I think it's a case of you really have to want to understand to understand, so I guess the "non-believers and haters" are never really gonna get it. More fool them.

On the other hand, if you are not completely turned off or intimidated by the lunacy of it all, you may simply get a buzz from the "softness of breast and nipple" in *HardHayNipple4* by Daniel Malone (SF) as T.J MacNamara pointed out in his *New Zealand Herald* review – this is "the only interesting image". Or perhaps you can find solace in the brush strokes and use of colour in the untitled painting originally created by George Edward Lewis (third husband of DM's paternal Grandmother) then completed by Daniel Malone (NZ) for the exhibit.

In these respects perhaps there is a little something for everyone hidden in Malone's (or some other artists') work. I mean I personally would presume that TJ was both "non-believer" and "hater" and he enjoyed the element of titty.

A.D. Schierning is an artist living in Auckland

Malone Syndrome or The Art of Being Lost and Found

Daniel Malone, *malone@artspace*, Artspace, Auckland, June 2003

Colin McCahon and Daniel Malone are my favourite artists in the whole world. Any serious exploration into the work of Malone will blow your mind, and I encourage everyone to go there (the art that is). Writing this pretty much did my head in, because the more I thought about his work the more expansive it became. Yet he is not daunting. You can come away from any experience of his work with the sweetest, simplest idea resonating in your head for days, and that's art worth viewing.

Malone's work can at first appear alienating to the casual viewer. This alienation however is the key to coming to an understanding of *malone@artspace*. Displacement is a fundamental part of being in the world, yada yada. More interestingly, it is also what one feels when first moving from the physical world, into a discovery of the spiritual realms. Heidegger knew "that to start out towards truth and love it is necessary to tear up our roots, to leave home far behind, to free ourselves from every immediate link connected with our origins, as in that tough passage in the Gospel in which Christ asks his mother, 'what have I to do with thee'."¹

What was the Mother Mary to Christ? In the earthly realms, everything. She was his connection to the earth, to a fixed lineage documented and emphasised in detail throughout the Old Testament. In the spiritual realm, nothing. The spiritual realm exists regardless of race, in fact regardless of anything except (and this all depends on what you ascribe to) faith. All that existed for Christ in the spiritual world was his relationship with God.

The inside cover of *COPY* (the TESTSTRIP Micrograph or map for *malone@artspace*) is Malone's signature colour sky-blue. It is a poor copy of an indefinable hue. Sky-blue, as found in nature, is free from any one description. It is endlessly changeable. Yet its hue is completely dependant on the weather. The lesson here is this: true freedom cannot be described by unattachment. Freedom can only be attained by being in a permanent harmonious relationship with something else. It is finding that other to which we can align ourselves, which is the hard part.

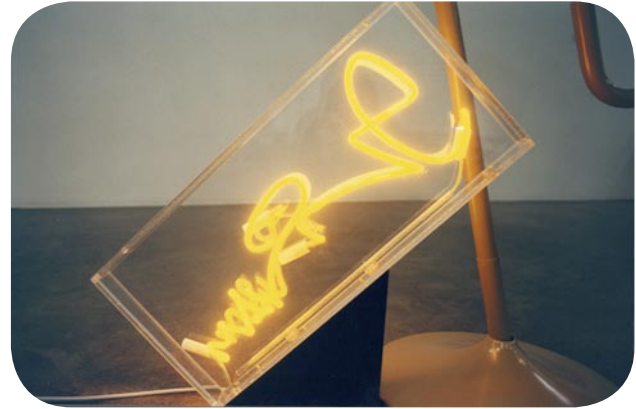
The soul of man, therefore, desiring to learn what manner of things these are, casteth her eyes upon objects akin to herself, where of none sufficeth.² The first time I ever spoke to Malone he was looking for his house keys. I soon realised he was always looking for his wallet, phone, keys... The world sucked them in, and only very rarely spat them back out. Malone was always looking for objects, which he felt, through some tenuous relationship, belonged to him. In *COPY* Malone aligns himself with a handful of people, in a multitude of ways. Here Malone takes the role of calligraphy student, assistant, grandson,

cousin and friend. He also connects himself with an artist from San Francisco who shares his name, and a Joel Shapiro sculpture entitled *Malone*. Each fragment makes up the mirror ball which reflects Malone. We see our passions, thoughts and desires mirrored in many things, but these can only ever be a poor copy of who we are. *COPY* reads like the prodigal son so removed from his homeland he has to construct himself out of the debris around him. Objects, names, works, writing by loved ones, all identified with, and fitted together to make a whole.

Just as moonlight is the reflection of sunlight, *malone@artspace* takes the direct sources hinted at in *COPY*, and creates something both fragile and melancholy. The show presents Malone's practice in many facets. It is a framework fitted snugly together, yet so loosely interwoven in terms of disparate origins, that one can't help but feel the whole thing could crumble any moment. What is left is the narrative of an identity, scavenged from everything around us, our experiences, our past, our dreams, our friends. Malone deliberately never showed at the opening, but was instead spotted at Michael Lett's further up the road. Disengaging himself from the present moment, Malone removed any trace of his real existence. The beautiful simplicity of the I, who lives and breathes in the present moment regardless of anything else, was in absentia.

The opening work is *Caveats Aside*, a documentation of Malone's performance *Blow-up* at the Auckland Art Gallery's New Gallery. The images are arranged in the form of a capital I, mimicking the paintings of Colin McCahon and Stephen Bambury which appear in the documentation. The I which constantly surfaces in McCahon's work, can be seen to refer to Christ's declaration of himself, the I AM; the I which connects earth to the spiritual realms. During *Blow-up*, a panel taken from the New Gallery toilets becomes the foundation for Malone's own 'I' portrait; a portrait that cannot be completed by Malone himself. Something other is needed. In *Blow-up* it is the architecture of the gallery. *Malone@artspace* describes both past and present attempts at finding other grounds on which to place his I. The most obvious is Malone's use of another artist's work, creating pieces which claim dual authorship. Other works show an attempt to locate a completed portrait through other cultures. *Kum of Sum Yung Gai* or *Iag Gnuu Mus fo Muk*, as its reverse is titled, is an attempt at integrating, yet at the same time alienating oneself within another culture, in this case through the addition of prosthetic eyelids. If learning Mandarin helps you to think like the Chinese, then Malone has done this also. More recently, Malone has taken the way of the Wiggas, as presented in the show's vatrine. Not merely listening to hip-hop, but writing it, and getting scars shaved into his eyebrows. These are however merely traces of the original, and all removable. Just like the sticker tags which make up the cover of *COPY*.

If true freedom is achieved by being in perfect harmony



with something else, what must follow is a state of personal deletion or selflessness. It is pointless to distinguish between mine and thine in the union of true love. Malone plays at deletion of self, by becoming lost in the trace. The Malone tag describes the written trace, which is constantly deleted from the street, and can now be detached from the cover of *COPY*. Ironically what is being removed is not Malone's tag, but that of the original Malone tagger Crazy Dave. It was this tag which inspired Malone's spate of vandalism/urban enhancement, and by removing the sticker we also delete a piece of Malone's personal history. Through the use of other artists work Mal(bad)one, takes the trace of another, and trains it in his own direction. In doing this he takes the standard original and bends it to his own ends. An attempt at freedom from a perceived norm.

This attempt at freedom from a prescribed norm is reflected in the physical forms some of the works take. The bent lamp of *Les Fleurs du Mal* is a direct replica of Martin Kippenberger's *Untitled (Lamp)*. Yet Malone's copy is not the vision of a drunkard; its title, after Baudelaire's, translated *The Flowers of Evil*, gives the lamp the appearance of being weighed down by guilt. In *Wooden Cast* based on *Malone* by Joel Shapiro, Malone makes a mould for Shapiro's bronze sculpture *Malone*. Like *Les Fleurs du Mal* it is also bent in structure. This cast is the only major hiccup in the show. Poorly made, you could never pour molten bronze into it. As a mould, it would only serve to produce the most munted copies of Malone. Malone knew its failure, which is why he threw it out. It's a stand-in, all the more beautiful for its fallibility and quite possibly my favourite work because of this. Which is why, unbeknownst to him, I saved it from the trash. Bentness of form resurfaces again in the videos, which are both played backwards, reminding me of the myth that Satan speaks through certain records played in reverse. This reversal could also be an attempt to resurrect the past. Now resurrection certainly involves 'reversal' of natural process in the sense that it involves a series of changes moving in the opposite direction to those we see... It means, in fact, playing backwards a film we have already seen played forward.³

Malone@artspace presents itself as a retrospective of works from 1992-2003. This is not his first. TESTSTRIP hosted Malone's *The Artist as Criminal (A Retrospective)* in 1992. *Malone@artspace* is not a succinct, finite summary of the past work of Malone. It is the narrative of a past, in much the same way as history is created by the additions and correlations bought to it by writers. Through the

My Name in Lights (2003) neon, and *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1996) mixed media, installed as *BREAK A LEG, MAKE THAT TWO* (2003)

presentation of new works, as well as the changing of old works specifically for the show, we have no sense of a past removed from the present moment. History becomes not a linear progression, but merely a reshuffling of cards. The clearest example being the decision by Malone to retain, in a changed form, NICJOB's walkway from the previous Artspace show. For each of us time will either one day run out, continue on into a linear concept of eternity, or repeat itself through the process of reincarnation. Malone appears undecided. In the main room a Malone tag in lights turns a written trace into a gesture at eternity. The drooping lamp of *Les Fleurs du Mal* deflates any ideas of posterity in its flaccid form. These works are placed in direct relationship to each other, presenting a cross road between eternal life, or the big sleep.

The final room, NICJOB's walkway reshuffled and retitled *Another Artist's Platform*, leads us to is the apocalyptic *Destroyed Room (for Giovanni Intra)*. In keeping with the show, this is not the last room you inhabit. The architecture of the gallery forces you to retrace your steps before you leave. Back through the past. My favourite detail of *malone@artspace* is found here. Within this room of constructed chaos, is strewn a couple of packs of cards. The game of life undone. One set from Japan depicts a set of exquisite Bonsai gardens. Maybe it was Malone's *Breaking and Entering* documentation, or pure sentimentality – and I am a sentimental kleptomaniac – that caused me to steal away with the Jack of Hearts. It describes a miniature spruce, positioned within rocky crags. It is still thick with foliage, free to live and breath in the moment, despite the severe constrictions of its form. It is only in this present moment of breathing; the only dimension in which we live, that we can hope to connect with God.

Notes

1. Claudio Magris, *Danube*, pg47.
2. Plato. This attribution is controversial, as there is some doubt as to whether these words are his.
3. C.S. Lewis, taken from his essay "Miracles" compiled in *God in the Dock*, pg 319.

Sriwhana Spong is an artist living in Auckland.

Giovanni Intra – Jesus Saves

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must
 flow,
And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate
 men.
And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stoake, why swell'st thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

– John Donne, Holy Sonnet X, 1618

I wanted to talk about the approach utilised by some artists to ponder cosmology and its effect in producing works that ruminate around ideas of mortality, and the desire to map this mortality in some way. This imperative to map which influences the breaking of the picture plane into a grid of intersecting lines, not only informs the perceived view but also acts as a 90 degree projection of the landscape realised as a grid, or in plan. This breaking of reality into a grid pervades contemporary arts practice, in the form of the pixel, but it is also informed by its use through painting's history, as a way of organising the picture plane.

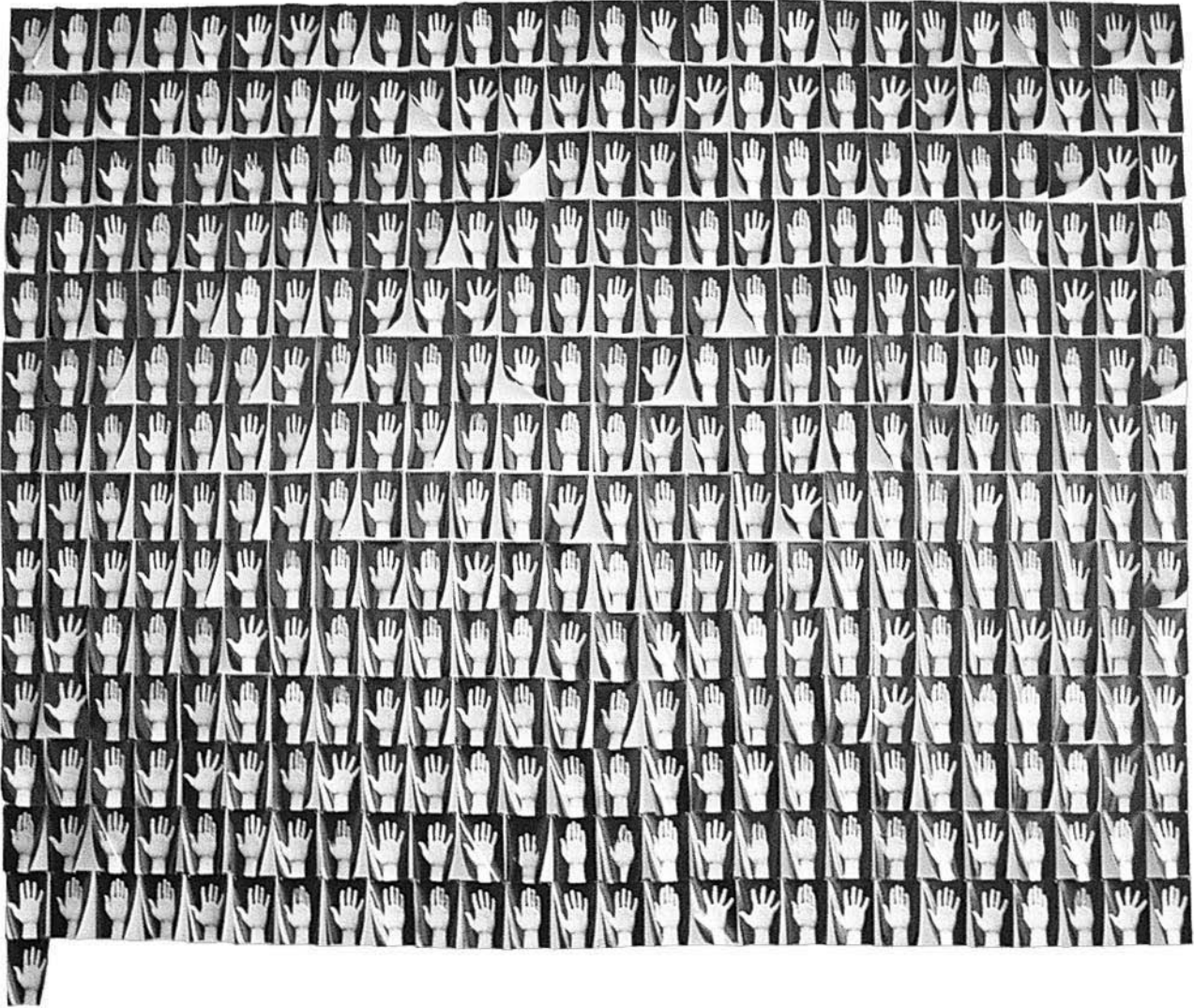
It has always seemed that there is a desire by artists to understand existence and interpret this into a system of signs or signals which can then be recognised by others as having some meaning relevant to existence. The grid offers up a meaningful understanding of the landscape and our position within it. It refers to reality explicitly, and as a simulacrum. The introduction of the Global Positioning System enables one to now locate one's-self so completely within the world so as to become a target under certain conditions found in modern warfare or search and rescue. This ability to "light-up" or to stand out, or to be seen against a generalised background noise also appears as a function of the artist across the landscape of history. The problem here is that it requires that an audience must of course understand what is being perceived, understand the context within which an artist operates, and have the ability to decipher these relationships

I now want to refer to a photographic series by Giovanni Intra entitled *Harsh Seventies Reality*. Giovanni started work on this series in 1993. The title refers to a double album of the same name released by The Dead C in 1992. Giovanni's use of the title was interesting, for it not only referred to sentiments expressed within the album, but curiously critiqued a period in music that for the both of us exemplified

ideas of excess, danger, and discovery. Giovanni is dressed in the photographs as a skinhead. His clothing is a trademark of the period which has mutated into a quasi-goth style still observable in cities and small towns throughout the western world. It appears that he is situated within a graffiti-walled enclosure, a public toilet, or bathroom. Perhaps even a squat in a large city. Images of 1970s London, redolent with hippies, rastafarians, and punks, living in derelict Victorian mansions, indulging in the pleasures of the mind and body seem to permeate this rendition. In all images Giovanni is imitating the crucifixion of Christ. Arms are outstretched and generating a belief that he alone is paying for the sins of the world, the sins of the human. Located and inserted in one arm is a hypodermic syringe. Most, if not all of these images have had a grid scored into them with a razorblade. The razorblade is a quintessential punk artefact, alongside the safety pin, Doc Marten boots, and tartan bondage trousers. The scoring has revealed in the work that Giovanni is attempting a mapping, an explanation for the images.

Giovanni Intra did exhibit widely in New Zealand during the short time he was here. There were some interesting objects, shown at the Elam School of Fine Arts in Auckland during the late 1980s. One can easily recall the shock of the glittery platform shoes inscribed with the legend "Debaser", and then he managed to produce some of the most evocative articles in contemporary New Zealand art history throughout the 1990s. His "Golden Evenings" played with ideas of the NZ landscape as idyll, romantic and shimmering enveloped in a golden baroque splendour, and then there are his photographic works which will remain scary, chilling and spooky. In "365 Days", the hands, ghost-like, are repeated day after day for a year, as though the idea of it can present us with an idea of being saved, at least for once in one's life. Or perhaps it is an attempt at documentary evidence of an anti-stigmata, a non-miraculous incident, the quotidian moment, the ever longing and the forever supporting, the endlessly waiting event.

My fondest memory of Giovanni was an exhibition he gave at Galerie Dessford Vogel in Dunedin in 1995. This being at a point when he had been developing Teststrip, with others, in Auckland. Most of the works were white text on black backgrounds, rendered in acrylic on paper. A few of the sheets were pages ripped from the magazine "The New Zealand Listener", Telecom advertisements in particular were targeted, these were played with by eliminating text and generally poking fun at the subject of the advertisement. The paintings were then attached to the polished wooden panel walls of the gallery. They looked for all the world like piles of coffins stacked across horizontal space, named and sequenced. Catalogued and arranged in some cosmic order. It was like having a bunch of clues appearing which gave some hint to an understanding of how the artist perhaps viewed mortality. This was further compounded by the flicker of recognition



Giovanni Intra, *365 Days* (1991) black and white photographs, collection of Jim and Mary Barr

concerning the paintings themselves. There is a McCahon-esque treatment of the text, and in the very implications of the text in its religious overtones and general demeanour. The works themselves were small, authoritative, dark, brooding, and didactic. The hardest thing to reconcile now is that it was all so fleeting, so impermanent. Giovanni's excursions into painting were not at all extensive, he preferred the traffic of ideas as opposed to the traffic of the painted image. I can only remember the "Text Paintings". There were no other paintings.

I was so wasted.
 I was a hippy, I was burnout, I was a drop-out,
 I was out of my head.
 I was a surfer, I had a skateboard, I was so heavy, man I lived on
 the Strand.
 I was so wasted.
 I was so fucked up, I was so smacked up, I was so screwed up,
 I was outta my head,
 I was so jacked up, I was so drugged up, I was so nebbled out,
 I was outta my head.
 I was so wasted,
 I was wasted.

– Black Flag "Wasted" (K. Morris/G. Ginn) 1978

GILES AUTY FURIOSO

“We have noticed a marked decline in deference.”

— *The Spectator*, 1997

“I think continually of those who were truly great,”
someone said, but I like to think of things like
the *erased de Kooning*, as considered by, say, Giles Auty.

I’m funny that way.
I’m funny like that.
That way I’m funny.
(Etc.)

— Sol Le Witt

I used to find amusing the idea of
Donald Brook greeting Cy Twombly –
like King George. *Scribble, scribble, scribble,*
eh Mr Twombly.
But, as the artist’s funny name
has become more prominent the anecdote
about Gibbon & George

has been forgotten.

I can’t *do* that
any more

Without entering the realm

of the private joke

– sometimes my favourite realm.

Are you with me? There’s no point. I can’t
make sense much longer –

Cochise?

– **Who, me?**

Yes. Take this nail & hit it into my forehead.
Firmly.

– **You crazy, boss!**

When

I feel like this I read the poems of Ron Padgett

– NO OFFENCE! –

I jump down, turn around

pick a bale of cotton

A little wine in the morning,
a little breakfast at night.

Where *is* the great
but absent art of our age, Giles Auty,
huh?

Take your hands out of your pocket when you
talk to me, son!

Crusty old fool
you sketchy cruiser

To the right of the critic – the picture is on the left,
large, smudged – to *the right* the wainscot drifts away
& becomes, after a passage of irresolute drawing,

sand – there stands the figure of Napoleon.
And he is in one helluva mood, as always. His
 function is purely allegorical – as we must point out
 to him. He represents the mood
 of Mr Auty, on a relatively bad day – the tide of history,
 the impoverished taste of most of this century. What
 am I even *doing* in this allegory, he thinks –
 Napoleon is drawn weakly, as if by
 some amateur – say Victor Hugo,
 inspired but easy, an *idea*, not a figure observed.
 Though it's Napoleon alright, & stormy clouds of brushed ink
 loom immediately right of him, ineptly complementing
 the vague grey,
 at left, of *the erased de Kooning*.

Further right –

what is this, a bad dream!? – some vacant fool like
 Larry Rivers is fucking a chair. Must I be
 associated with this? What is this called,
An Allegorical Disparaging of Giles Auty? Yep.

The Raft of the Medusa.

... for me the rot sets in sometime after Delacroix –
 he had colour. Ingres had “the probity of drawing”.
 But look at Chassériau ... & then
 the Symbolists came along & it's been downhill
 ever since. That dill for instance – Puvis de
 Chavannes!

& yet, could we have had Gauguin

without him? I would prefer to.

Just as I would

prefer the late Derain without the earlier –
 though *that is his whole point*. Why couldn't Bonnard
 be stronger – couldn't he see where it led?
 Hard to approve the politics of David,
 or even Caravaggio – a lout probably – I can't see him
 reading *The Spectator*. Was there no one round
 like me to listen to? Or is that the point, not listening?
 The whole thing becomes pretty terminally ill
 with Duchamp. Just look at the deleterious effects
 his permission had on lesser talents – Picabia, Arp –
 though this gives Duchamp credit for talent
he never had.

It leads directly to all this nonsense with
 Sherrie Levine, Daniel Buren – art as
 mere conceptual gesture – in this country John Nixon,
 the idiotic self portraits of Mike Parr (drawn as if
 from a funny angle – what is the point of the
 anamorphosis, somewhere different to stand in the gallery?
 squinting, backing into sculpture?), the grandiosities
 of Imants Tillers. *Young man, the academicians*
were right! Look at Sickert – & go back from there,
 being selective, avoiding the mistakes of Turner, for what
 was good about him, yet not so far as Poussin; Velasquez
 was a high point, if only generous in very small measure.
 Hard men, he & I. Let me introduce myself,
 Giles Auty – my eyes narrowed, my jaw firm – doomed
 to wander, through time, homeless, a brooding figure,
 part Naploeon, part Goofy, caped. I'm right. You
 do know that. I used to write for *The Spectator*.

Johann Winckelmann

Notes

- “A marked decline in deference”. This decline the *Spectator* noted as it became apparent to even its readers that (John Major’s) Tories would be defeated at the next election. *The Spectator* is home to Peregrine Worsthorne, Auberon Waugh & others of Auty’s ilk who’ve been trotted out to the colonies from time to time – to ginger things up with their ebullient views.
- “I think continually of those who were truly great” – a line from Spender, I think.
- Robert Rauschenberg erased a de Kooning drawing – a kind of ‘significant gesture’ ironising the gestural artist’s endeavour, erasing it, doubling it etc.
- Cy Twombly – the odd, but not so odd, monicker of a European-based US artist whose works are often described as pure mark-making, codeless meaning, automatism, & delectable, moody & poignant.
- *Scribble, scribble, scribble* – eh Mr Gibbon! – King George’s response to Gibbon upon publication of the latter’s *Decline & Fall*.
- Donald Brook – cool & mocking doubter of all things expressionistic, transcendent & idealist in art – in fact rather doubtful of art itself. Excepting art-as-properly-so-called.
- Cochise – in this poem the American Indian – *any* American Indian – as traduced by that country’s cowboy-&-injun movies of the 50s, once a staple of daytime TV.
- Ron Padgett – in many ways the leading US poet of his generation.
- from “jump down, turn around” to “hands out of my pocket” are quotes from, respectively, Leadbelly, Lou Reed, Clement Greenberg, Otis Spann.
- “Crusty old fool, sketchy cruiser” – Adelaide teen street argot, circa 1997.
- Victor Hugo – people forget the windbag’s efforts as watercolorist & draughtsperson.
- “fucking a chair” – Larry Rivers, perhaps the leading US artist of his generation: a later work represents (i.e., depicts) this harmless adolescent activity of the artist’s.
- *An Allegorical Disparaging of Giles Auty* – I think this must be the alternative title or job description of the poem – though “Allegorical” aspires to airs.
- *The Wreck of the Medusa* – why do people unfailingly say ‘Raft’? – is a painting by Gericault.
- Delacroix – had colour.
- Ingres – had the probity of drawing. (Or was drawing “the crucible of his style”?)
- Chassériau – tried some of both. (These entries are sourced from *The Dictionary Of Received Ideas*.)
- Puvis (de Chavannes) – solemn, hilarious, he had something though.
- Gauguin – was played by Anthony Quinn in that movie about the life of the other guy.
- Derain – part of the Return to Order.
- David – Jacques-Louis David, hot-head radical.
- Caravaggio – we actually know that Caravaggio subscribed in his Roman years (nothing is known certainly of those following) to *The Lanced Tumour Review*, *We’re Dirt & Easy Chicken*. Caravaggio contributed to the second & third issues of *Modern Painters* – *A letter from Parma & A letter from Venice* (though he is not thought to have visited Venice). He appears never to have been paid.



- “Sculpture? – something you back into while looking at painting.” – Ad Reinhardt’s view. Actually he had backed into the critic, Hilton Kramer.
- Auty “protests too much”? (Shakespeare) I’m not so sure Auty did write for the *Spectator*.

—
Ken Bolton is an Australian critic & poet. He runs the Experimental Art Foundation’s bookshop, Dark Horsey, in Adelaide: eafbooks@eaf.asn.au.

Bring on the beautiful

Nicki Wynnychuk: *Fidelio*, performance and exhibition at Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, October 20 – October 26

The premise: 4 good-looking women were hired by the artist to attend the exhibition opening and behave detached and impassively. They were given two films – *Lost Highway* and *eXistenZ* – as reference points, and they were to initiate no conversation themselves, merely respond to others. A video was made of the project, which was subsequently shown at the gallery as the exhibition. [The following is an email exchange between Emma Bugden and Wellington artist Kaleb Bennett – ed.]

-----Original Message-----

From: Emma Bugden <Emma.Bugden@wcc.govt.nz>

Subject: Hey

Sent: 29 Oct 2003 02:36:38

I keep meaning to ask you about the Nicki Wynnychuk performance at the Enjoy project, and how you felt about ending up in the resulting video. Charlotte from Enjoy said that one of the guys included in the video came along to Nikki's artist talk and was really upset and angry. I guess he felt his privacy had been invaded, so I would love to hear how you felt about it.

I thought myself it was an interesting work... and funny how effective it was. Women will never talk to other women who are aloof and posed, men will be drawn to them like a moth to a flame... this is a binarism but seems to be born out by the performance. Did you feel upset by your inclusion, were you embarrassed? I thought it was great, and nothing to be ashamed of, we all like to perve at beautiful people.

I posted something along those lines on the Enjoy discussion list cos I thought someone might object, but so far no one has.

cheers, Emma

-----Original Message-----

From: Artbruit [mailto:kb@artbruit.com]

Sent: Thursday, 30 October 2003 6:57 a.m.

To: Emma Bugden

Subject: RE: Hey

Yeah, it's been on my mind. Not having seen the final video I'm unsure exactly, but my gut reaction is both favorable and not. Usually I hate being filmed and will avoid it furiously. At the opening I saw Tao with the camera and decided, in the interests of ART, to go along with it. Also, I was recruiting for my Art Box project so wanted to stick around.

I feel somewhat the fool for not picking up that something was going on. Seems obvious now—weird looking people acting strangely, man filming diligently, extended drinking time at huge expense. More than

anything I feel angry that when I was talking to the girl (I think I know the conversation you mean) she was simply acting a role designed to manoeuvre me into a particular (stereotypical, demeaning) position, while I was attempting to communicate an idea with no inkling of this... although, I remember feeling that there was something pretty fucken weird about how she was acting. And on another level, we're all acting all the time anyway; power games, etc. A normal part of life, but usually we don't like to talk about it.

I think the idea is excellent exactly because it is so hard to deal with. Ending up on film acting like an idiot is never cool, but probably an important lesson. No one likes being manipulated, and maybe this is the heart of the problem. A devious exercise planned to expose human fallibility, and as such it worked fine, from what I hear. A learning experience? But I think as a lesson it will lose its strength if it doesn't show sensitivity to people's, er, feelings. (Holy shit! he said that?) If you humiliate someone enough, any point you wished to make will likely be lost. Also, exposing human weaknesses is only effective for me if you are prepared to face up to them yourself. I'm getting self righteous as fuck here, but you see the point. It's a good idea if we can all laugh along together, not if people are randomly strung up, sniper fashion, and pissed all over for the sake of ART, of all wretched things.

The issues of manipulation and guerilla filming during personal moments seem to me the most offensive. Personally I feel like a fool for being taken so easily. Always seems you get fucked when you let your guard down. "Oh, there's a camera, but it's for art purposes, probably innocuous; documentary footage or something..." And then bang, you're on screen in a show in a public gallery, without your permission, acting like a fucken idiot with your dick out in precisely the manner that they hoped you would when they staged the thing. Good and bad. The (recognition of) loss of control over your own image is problematic for many people, including myself, but almost impossible to avoid these days. I like the ruthlessness of it, and the inability to hide from your own bullshit, but perhaps there's a point where that becomes counterproductive.

But some fascinating stuff in there. I liked it and am enraged at the same time. Don't know if it's better to see it or not to see it. Can't say how I'll react if I do.

Also, it makes me think of information manipulation to achieve a predefined goal: selective presentation, propaganda, etc. Did Tao film people during ALL dialogue with each other, or only with the 'beautiful' people? If yes, was the footage of people talking to regular folks presented alongside that of the actors? Can we be sure that the filmed results of the event were not manipulated or formatted to make a particular point, regardless of whether or not the raw, unedited footage (or events of the evening that never made it to film) suggests such a conclusion?

I do find it disturbing that I am supposedly



Above: Nicki Wynnychuk, *Fidelio*, performance shot, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, 20 October 2003. Photo courtesy of Tao Wells.

capable of giving more attention to an expensively dressed actor than to others in the room. But is this even true? Is the resulting anxiety justified? Would you prescribe Prozac or Ritalin?

-----Original Message-----

From: Emma Bugden <Emma.Bugden@wcc.govt.nz>

Subject: RE: Hey

Sent: 32 Oct 2003 10:17:45

Thanks for your email. I hope my email didn't freak you out though, the video's fine, you don't look like a total plonker. I think the thing is; they diddled everyone who was at the opening, even those of us who didn't end up in the video. And they edited it to create an event which wasn't really there, or certainly an event I didn't know about.

I knew there must be a performance going on: the physical work in the gallery was really dull and just couldn't have been the point. And I saw Tao filming and someone said something about a performance coming up later in the night. But I couldn't work out what it was, the whole evening unsettled me but I couldn't work out why.

When you see the video it's weird. Everything has been taken out except the four women, who pose really vampily around the gallery, glowering beautifully at nothing. There is no sound at all, and it's all in close up. Just the women alone by themselves, and then the women standing there silently, while men perform at them, talking away animatedly and closely. One poor man is videoed talking to two of them in quick succession, he obviously thought he was getting lucky that night!!!

It's strange because it is obviously the same opening I was at, but I don't recognize it at all. And that's why it's interesting, cos it gives you the impression (which I'm not saying is right or wrong but it's obviously the impression that the artist was trying to communicate) that men somehow view events differently to women—

predatorily—like wolves stalking prey. It's interesting even if you disagree with it. And I felt just as silly as you might feel, even though I'm not in the video and not male, because the whole event was playing out in front of me and I was oblivious somehow. It made me feel not very savvy and somehow taken advantage of. Which is almost the best aspect of the whole thing, cos he managed to make both men (who were drawn into the performance unawares) and women (who were completely excluded from the performance without knowing it) feel manipulated and made fun of.

- > exposing human weaknesses is only effective for
- > me if you are prepared to face up to them yourself.
- > I'm getting self righteous as fuck, but you see the
- > point. It's a good idea if we can all laugh along
- > together, not if people are randomly strung up,
- > sniper fashion, and pissed all over for the sake of
- > ART, of all wretched things.

yeah I agree. Because the thing is, Nikki gets off scott free and uninvolved, which doesn't seem right. He is complicit within it, but somehow removes himself so that he becomes invisible.

And anyway, what's the lesson we are supposed to learn? That men like beautiful women? That people desire things which seem unobtainable? His work is not only stating this, but also seems to be implying that acting that way is therefore bad. And I don't think it is. It's inevitable anyway; we are all drawn to people who seem beautiful and glamorous and offer us something more than what we have. We all consume beauty, we consume those people around us who are beautiful. Perhaps beautiful people have more power because of this, or perhaps in doing so we render them vacuous and facile. And beauty is also fleeting. Bring on the beauty I say!

cheers, Emma

Emma Bugden is a curator based at the City Gallery Wellington. She is known to frequent Enjoy gallery openings.

Kaleb Bennett is a Wellington-based artist.

Where Angels Fear to Tread

***Nine Lives*, the 2003 Chartwell Exhibition, Auckland Art Gallery, Toi o Tamaki, 13 September – 23 November**

Art openings are a mix of wine, personalities and expectations. The opening night of *Nine Lives* was a rich mix. The show is a collection of eight artists' works from the Chartwell Collection, the ninth artist was Giovanni Intra who died December last year. Most of Giovanni's work had come from private collectors and one installation work was re-made for the show. This work, *How Doctors See* (1995), consisted of thirty cameras smashed into many pieces and strewn around the gallery floor.

Gavin Hipkins, a friend of Giovanni's and photographer, bravely replicated the work for the gallery. The original installation as I remember was a forceful aggressive piece, but in the space it seemed the life had been sucked out of the work.

'It just wasn't right!,' Ava Seymour sensed and did what we all wanted to do – she walked through the middle of the camera pieces scattering them across the floor. The atmosphere was palpable. The spirit of Giovanni had kicked life back into the work. As the evening continued many more of the audience continued the process, kicking and smashing pieces with their feet. I was sure the work would have been swept back into shape for the next morning.

Judy Darragh is an artist living in Auckland.



Ava Seymour adjusting the installation of Giovanni Intra's *How Doctors See* (1995) in *Nine Lives* at the Auckland Art Gallery. Photo: Ann Shelton.

Carla Cescon - Lifeforce

Carla Cescon, *lifeforce*, Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, 15/07 – 02/08 2003

I first encountered Carla Cescon's artwork in a friend's living room. The sculpture perched on a table consisted of two small figures writhing together, indistinguishable as either humans or animals. It looked gothic, like either something from a nightmare, a Halloween costume party or a B-grade horror film.

While her work displays a comical, joke-like quality, Cescon's sculptures constantly investigate the darker side of life. They examine emotions often swept aside as too ugly or too difficult. They embrace attitudes and beliefs on the margins. While the imagery can appear demonic, there is more to her work than the supernatural. There is an empathy with the underdog, the forgotten and the misrepresented.

What attracted you to making art?

Art's liberating because you have all the control and if you let yourself be honest somehow, and let stuff happen it feels good. [But] I never saw it as therapy, more like manifesting things, sounds, pictures that you think may be interesting to see or hear.

Your work suggests an interest in the occult. How did you become interested in this?

I grew up with strange vivid, superstitious stories [about] how my dad's family, the Cescons, were cursed. My aunty was possessed, she underwent a few exorcisms by priests in and out of town. This was 1950s Italy. Inexplicable stuff went on in the 500-year-old house they lived in, mysterious illnesses. My mother has always had prophetic dreams, she gets signs from some relatives when they die, although my dad has had a few odd connections with all that as well. So I've always been drawn to all odd or marginal beliefs.

[I have] always felt like an outsider, tried to have visions, hung out in haunted places, tried to open myself up to gather in the ghosts. I think I'm using that sort of imagery to translate the darker emotional stuff you collect through life experiences. The crap that shouldn't exist but does 'cause people don't really respect life. Trying to make sense of the darker side of the human spirit. Trying to visualise emotions.

Has your work always dealt with similar themes?

I think I've been influenced by sci-fi. Once I made a porn video, [I] only showed photos from it though.

What is the relation of religion to your work?

I think I probably borrow the ugliest iconography and words from religious history but I thought it ended up going somewhere else. I'm always saying that artists

are blind when it comes to explaining the outcome of their work.

Do you have a religious background?

Roman Catholic, but I've never been able to connect with religion, [I] always felt like it was fiction.

I guess I asked about religion because there seems to be a strong sense of good versus evil in your work or at least references to the devil...

Have you seen the artspective.com interview?

Yeah...

I was a bit cranky that day and it was hard to give anything and I think I did say something like everything is [about] Jesus and the Devil. You know it just seems so absurd to think like that, so it's the absurdity that attracts me on one level and the power of belief through years of practice that gets me on another.

Some of the titles of your work express a political awareness or consciousness e.g. Wands for the Proletariat...

I have socialist values, maybe occultist aesthetics. [I am] wanting to support the underdog with other worldly symbols. [The] Wands came about when I was sick of reading sensationalist reports in the paper and current affairs programs targeting average people, highlighting woes and fears, and generally promoting social paranoia. So I tried to make a tool that wasn't too fancy but on mass could look like it could make something happen like stop media pollution.

Stop media pollution?

I went through a stage of hating topical news programs like *60 Minutes*, *Today Tonight* and *A Current Affair*. They just seemed like modern witch-hunts, looking for non-mainstream people, practices and lifestyles and demonising them through sensationalist journalism. I can't read the paper anymore, not Sydney papers anyway. The mass media will never really change. To think to stop misinformation, propaganda and product advertising is not within anybody's grasp. The Wands were like a futile gesture, fictional armament.

I read in an interview with you that politics is an inspiration for your work...

Yes it is. It's not overt in my work but I reckon it provokes my attitude, especially with the Bush administration. I hate violence [and] he's created this whole "axis of evil" map and concept, something that will eventually unravel. [He] tries to be this wrath of god type thing. Good versus evil is an everyday attitude. Its 1950s politics, paranoia, with crusader, Christian, righteous energy. I can't cope hearing if-



Carla Cescon, *Hellbox* (2003)

you're-not-with-me-you're-against-me type speeches. Colin Powell once stated that he saw [the] American military poised globally and at the ready "like the bully on the block" that [it was in the] early 1990s. Most of the people within this administration are ex-CEOs with strong ties to multinational companies. Give them money to become or continue being politicians, then reap rewards via paybacks.

I wish I could work with issues openly. I find it gets mangled, regurgitated and looking darkly spiritual. Maybe I'm stuck trying to visualise the dark underbelly of the human spirit.

Do you feel like imagery from popular culture has effected your work? I am thinking about film etc...

I like films by Werner Herzog , Roman Polanski. I like vampire stuff.

It seems like there is a lot on television these days that relates to the supernatural or at least has an element of science fiction...

Are you thinking of *Buffy* and *Charmed*, *X-Files* and *Millennium*?

Yeah...

I wish I could get into them! They're a bit too American. Although there are some good episodes of the *X-Files* and some out there *Millennium* ones. [I] don't watch that much TV – heaps of movies though.

I know that you work part-time with people who have a mental illness. Has this had an influence on your work?

I don't think it does in a straightforward way. But I think your environment comes into it no matter what or where you're at. That's the beauty or horror of life, people adapt to almost anything.

The materials you use for your work are kind of unusual. Using polyurethane isn't that common. Is there a reason that you chose to use them?

Polyurethane foams are dynamic in that they are unpredictable most of the time, especially when you use different combinations. I like to think I'm being dictated by the material in the final outcome. [I'm] not really in control. It's like working with an animal or something.

How does this affect your work?

It loosens things up conceptually. [It] can make something look pathetic when you wanted powerful. There are a lot of throwaways. Even though I let things be, I do have a critical side that heavily edits.

Louise Poppelwell is a writer living in Auckland.

If Anything.

Gail Hastings, *But is it Art? Sculptural Situations by Gail Hastings, The Cross Art Projects, Sydney, November 2003.*

Local crimes against art journalism. Case scenario: you're a freelance critic moseying around the globe on an east-meets-western world art junket of assorted biennials and major museums. Subsequently you're inclined &/or obliged to file a review or two back home. Possibly you couldn't be bothered. Possibly you've been field-tripping long enough to fail to appreciate that the dearth of arts publishing back home renders most published criticism fairly visible, and thought to write off the same review to two different national publications. As did the former national art critic for *The Australian* newspaper this month. Oh dear. Near word perfect, save for some super-subtle editorial tweaking (alternating 'engaging' for 'compelling' for example). Though the least subtle proves the most revealing. In the newsprint version readers were treated to the comment on a particular artist's work, 'I have no idea what it means, if anything, but as an art installation it is utterly mesmerising'. Fascinatingly the editor of the magazine version saw fit to scrub this dumb & dumber quip from the face of the earth and printed only 'It is an utterly mesmerising installation'. Shame we'd already read it in the paper. A tired refrain, but if anyone gave two hoots about arts journalism around here this writer would cop the same slugging as his fellow skanky-ho (Labor MP Mark Latham's choice of phrase) opinion columnists at *The Australian*. No surprises though when local paper *The Sydney Morning Herald* runs a short grab on this year's Turner Prize nominees together with a truly shock horror impression of the Chapman brothers entry, which the reader might mull over further by going to an online poll titled simply 'But is it Art?' Aye, the media is devilishly, dastardly dire.

Possibly a fact not unnoticed by local artist Gail Hastings, going by the title of her recent exhibition at The Cross Art Projects *But is it Art? Sculptural Situations by Gail Hastings*. This is a relatively recently opened gallery in Kings Cross that subtiles itself 'a space for independent art and curatorial studies'. Housed in the spick front rooms of an old-style house, you arrive to an entranceway of floor to ceiling books (the venue doubling as a 2nd hand book dealer). Match this with an insightful critical essay on the artist commissioned and distributed as the exhibition invite, and the stage is set for some smart art. How exciting! Art for 'adult audiences', that is by grown-ups for grown-ups to think about, a blessed respite from the non-stop Youth gravy-train. And indeed this body of recent works is intriguing, complex and so very finely wrought, it is a pleasure to perceive an artist so fully in their working stride.

Hastings' recurring construct or motif is the detective story, whose various tropes and characters frame the alternating presence, absence or very question of the 'work of art'. Many pieces here take the form of drawn and painted hybrid texts, blueprints or architectural

plans through which the movement of characters and the unfolding narratives surrounding each work are traced. From the 'Primed' series of sculptural situations (2002), three framed watercolours on paper are quietly accompanied by similarly sized primed blank canvases. These vividly coloured and delicately drafted 'plans' speak of an 'Encyclopaedia of a Work of Art Yet to Be', where the blank central space of the design mirrors the blank canvas alongside, from which a maze of departing lines become both corridors for painted script and the locations where, for example 'five secret intelligence officers are presently meeting to finalise what will be painted on the preceding, primed canvas – whereupon it will be painted and the work of art completed'. This layering of image, narrative, concept and pattern (the linear design and central void setting up a kind-of likeness to Arab tile patternings) demands an agreeable combination of looking, reading and thinking from the viewer. From the 'But is it Art?' series of sculptural situations (2003), five smaller watercolour texts declare "But is it art?" asked the Art Judge with a penetrating stare that scrutinised this page', neatly turning the question of the work of art back onto the questionable construct of the art prize. On an end wall hangs 'The Big Cover-Up: white with blue stripe' (2003), a heavy stitched vinyl relief wall panel or cover, spatially deciphered by a painted extract from the 'Encyclopaedia of Invisible Art' which translates the cover's pattern and colouring as various chambers, where one might find 'tins of invisible paint on shelves'. Here the viewer is implored to investigate a 'big cover-up', to 'go disguised as an art viewer and note all suspicious circumstances – such as other art viewers. And remember, nothing is ever nothing'. If anything, that is.

In his accompanying essay George Alexander credits Hastings with achieving 'a new interdependence between the creative and critical spirit... ingrained in the very carpentry and design of the work itself'. And such very fine carpentry too. 'To enter, to leave (no. 2)' (2003) shifts further into the third dimension as a utilitarian sculpture/furniture object in deluxe heavy plywood, intriguingly integrating the forms of desk, bookshelf and seating within its strong modernist design. Likewise it functions as a multi-faceted painting with its richly coloured surfaces and inset panels painted with constructivist motifs, plus the 'walls' on which more small framed watercolour texts hang, as well as a library via its inspired selection of books and catalogues housed in the inbuilt shelf and laid out on the desk tops. With classic titles like Slavoj Žižek's *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!*, *Dot and Circle*, *Grids* by Rosalind Krauss and Lucy Lippard's *Six Years*, with pleasure I could have spent a lot more time than I had putting this piece to its thoughtful purpose.

Though I did find some surprise take-home reading amongst the discrete clutter of invites etc in the entrance, a snappy A5 booklet titled 'HearHere: A discussion paper published by the Kings Cross branch



of the Australian Labor Party'. How interesting! The crisp layout and design has Hastings written all over it, and indeed she is one of a range of contributors of short texts and opinions on local issues such as the injecting centre, city bike plan, crime and conservation concerns together with bigger picture issues of Medicare & Australian commitment to war in Iraq. In all a thoroughly readable and intelligent insight on real people and issues *sans* media spin and Emerald City hype, as the back cover suggests, in a clever twist on the city council motto, 'not a living city, but a much more liveable city'. While personally I'll be batting hard for the Greens next year, an election year already shaping up as a sorry spectacle, it is spurring to come across an artist activating the realities of their surrounding political and community consciousness, an engagement that might only, if anything, promise a more rigorous climate and conversation around and about art in Australia.

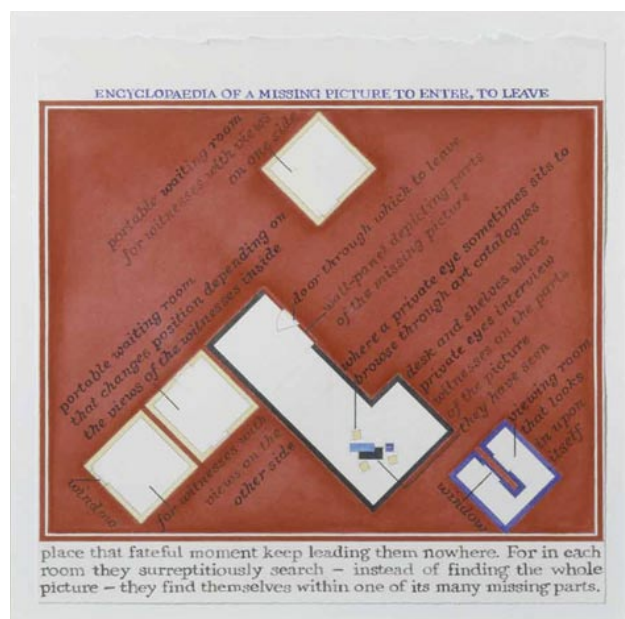
Lisa Kelly is a Sydney-based artist who just discovered Adelaide.

Exhibition view from the entrance with 'to enter, to leave (no.2)', 2003, in the foreground, and the series of sculptural situations 'But is it art?' in the background.

An emailed note concerning an art talk by Gail Hastings

Gail Hastings, *But is it Art? Sculptural Situations by Gail Hastings, The Cross Art Projects, Sydney, November 2003*

I went to a curious event where the artist Gail Hastings spoke to Kings Cross and Paddington branch members of the Australian Labour Party. She made a curious claim about the “theatre of the gaze” and how the more interactive “conceptually” a work becomes, the more political by nature it is. I thought her theory was more an argument about the cognitive nature of objects in space than simply a social or political one. To be both things simultaneously, a work of art would need to be designed as such, and to be understood by a complete audience in a comprehensive way. Hastings gave her long rave artfully and passionately, an argument full of problematics and inaccuracies as a sort of lecture-performance. Now the rhetoric of politics applied to art is an important issue for politics as much as it is for art. I thought that Hastings’ work was overtly academic and in an architectural sense it was conditional of that functional order to be read. There are no natural technicalities here. So from a people’s-art point of view, it would fail being an appropriate political apparatus or an articulate social tool. Agitprop it ain’t, elegant perhaps it is. As a leftist I was not convinced in the slightest. But I was prepared to enjoy something else – I liked the theatre of her proposition. The proposition didn’t matter for me, the rhetoric couldn’t have been better, the body language attractive, her mannerisms unique and almost televisual. As a theatrical monologue, Gail has developed a new voice and position. She looks wonderful standing in her own installation working to convince, that is the local artisans, the hairdresser, the actor and ecologist, ex-academic come bookseller, retired lawyer and rank and file, as well as her fellow artists/travellers. Here, art became the setting and the evidence of her political non-aspirations, her fantasy, as a neo-constructivist engineer of optical historical truths – this damn cognitive interactive thing (and sort of Weinesque sensibility). Strangely, Gail was unaware of the potential to extend the art she makes beyond art as object, audience gaze “the we and the them”, and into a form of communication particular in itself, by rendering ideas into a political sphere. I am reminded a little of the way the Atlas group works or how anthropologist Michael Tausig performs “on stage”, so what I’m suggesting is possible. “But that doesn’t matter”, I kept saying to myself and to people like the historian Craig Judd, “if she fabricated the argument against the historical lineage of ‘this is art.’” I felt inadequate the day I started art school. Having studied music and theory at high school and avoiding the art department and those seriously interesting Gardiner’s books of the western history of art. Art history seemed barbaric compared to music that had theories of history, periodicity, style, genre and judgments in quality. Once at art school I settled around the composer David Ahern who taught in what was then the most obscure department of new media. We were all proto-Futurists, both Cagney and Cardewian Maoists whether we understood it or not



Second of two watercolour pages from ‘to enter, to leave (no.2)’, 2003; the first page having read: ‘They are looking for the whole picture and need to find it fast to solve this one. Unless they do, their client will solve them by hiring some other private eyes. Yet opposing views of what took ...’

– it was just what evolved and got handed down and along the chain of command. The thing which cut the music/sound/noise mustard most apparently was the historic distinction between the avant-garde and experimental camps in early 20th century western music. Gail would be amused if these distinctions were now applied to art in an age of intermedia. In Melbourne where Gail comes from, the anarcho-left makes experimental art, writing and music, and is mostly ignored by the academic avant-garde. Perhaps in Australian art, experimentalism is considered as the perverted, and ignored in favour of an important (and imported) international avant-garde. It is the avant-garde that most locals subscribed to. In writing and in music there have been natural opportunities for developing alternative non-mainstream dialogues and platforms and other hybrid forms of collective documentation. Artists with Gail Hastings’ aesthetic aspirations would naturally find little opportunity to develop meaningful debate and interpretation around her work (overtly intellectual), and to attempt to dramatically argue her self-styled rhetoric seems a logical enough sort of divertimento. But I’m afraid, in the end, as art, it remains fairly quarantined and academic, a sort of colonial outpost for conceptual modernism and the avant-garde, an import substitute with beautiful and formal carpentry.

Ruark Lewis is an artist and writer living in Sydney.

Feudal struggles from the art school front lines

June, message on answering machine, 'James could you come and do a day sessional teaching each week?'. Great! That will be good, to follow up the last few years. August, still no news from school, wondering if it's still happening. I think semester starts up again this week doesn't it? No contract yet. That's normal. Message on voicemail, 'James don't worry, the contract is in the mail. Can you come in on Thursday instead of Tuesday?' Sure. Wednesday afternoon, message on voicemail, 'James, we've just been instructed by the deputy director (a.k.a. head accountant) money is needed from the art school to pay for the new 'industry focused' production school thus we no longer will be employing sessionals this semester'. Shit! I was looking forward to that and less than one day's notice. What's up with that? With my tail between my legs I ask for my hours back at the restaurant. Which is bloody embarrassing and they must be sick of me doing this by now. Back at art school the students have kicked up a major stink about these budget cuts with solidarity from the international student body. Protests, meetings and lists of demands ensue. They hold daily sit-ins in the finance department and demand that finances and funding are made transparent. The international students threaten to withdraw their fees unless demands are met. Thursday the following week, an article is published in *The Australian* and the finance department finds \$35,000 from somewhere and reinstates sessional staff. The following Monday, message on voicemail 'Can you work on Thursday?'.

Cut back to the painting department, everyone is energised, feeling like they have had a victory. I think to myself, the current situation can stay a float for a little while longer. But I'm happy to have some hours none-the-less. Lots of catch-up with students and tracking their progress. I get asked to fill in for another sessional for the rest of the semester. Many tutorials and staffroom lunches follow. Lots of talk about obsequious mismanagement, how this 19-year-old 1st year student just published his own full-colour art and fashion magazine called *Slave*, and grievances about goings on. As we count the eighty dollar kitty we have just raised that morning to pay for catering for the painting department exhibition, we wonder about the government announcement of spending the six billion dollar budget surplus on defense and border protection. Porn, fetish, fashion and celebrity are everywhere in the studios and I kind of feel my general interests are a bit outdated.

News flash! Roving gangs of semi-organised crime are stealing equipment from campuses across town. An honours student gets \$6000 worth of stuff stolen and has to get a small bank loan to repay the school, and two more data projectors go missing from the gallery.

More news from Canberra! Legislation resulting from Brendan Nelson's report (Minister for Education and Training) has been passed in the House of Representatives. Funding to tertiary institutions for

the education of an individual student across all fields of study will be reduced to \$9000. Further bad news! A 30% increase in HECS fees, each university and course will choose what levels of full fee paying students are made available and the introduction of voluntary student unionism and individual contracts for staff (undermining unionised salary agreements). Further nasty threats follow! If this legislation is not passed in Senate and made into law they will become a footnote of the AWA funding agreements. Meaning, thou shall comply or universities will not get any government funding what so ever. Shit! The school is looking at a 35% funding cut next year. Shit, it probably won't be able to operate at all. There are whispers of closure, liquidation or, worse, amalgamation with Melbourne University.

October 16, national day of strike for tertiary education employees. At the union organised picket line I think, I shouldn't really be here considering I'm a non-unionised casual. I feel strongly about the bigger picture so I participate. A great rally attended by two to three thousand tertiary staff, we heard positive reports about union breakthroughs in the sector and we walked to the treasury gardens for a sausage sizzle. The rally was greeted by seven members of the young liberal party who yelled abuse, picked fights, threw punches and screamed about their rights to pay. I couldn't understand why any 20 year old would think this crap. Anyway, some get arrested for assault and are taken away in a divvy van. Despite the fact that this was the first day in Australian history that no classes took place across all universities (even in NSW where it is now illegal to strike) nothing was reported on that evening news. Yesterdays rally gets page four in today's newspaper. There is a big picture of myself and a fellow lecturer listening tentatively at the rally, surrounded by red placards. Later that day at the restaurant, my boss pins the picture up on the board at work and calls me a communist. But I think he is proud.

Next Tuesday morning back at VCA, I read the Melbourne University student magazine *Farrago* because I find out one of the young liberals from the other day is also running the student union. By the looks of things, he is doing a fine job at completely mismanaging things. He has appeared in the Supreme Court for fraudulent use of union funds, non-attendance of council meetings and undermining council procedures and regulations, generally making a mockery of collectivity and organisation. I hope his daddy is proud. I feel incredibly sick and gulp down my coffee. To boot *Farrago* is now filled with institutionalised homophobia, xenophobia, sexism and greeny bashing. At the cafeteria I chat to another sessional, employed three hours a week in the sculpture department who is also acting 1st year coordinator. She says the administrator of the art school has just asked her to assess students work for nothing.



Left: Christopher Hill's installation for the 2003 Victorian College of the Arts graduate exhibition. **Below:** Kain Picken's.



Later that evening, the painting department throws its annual party. Prizes are given out such as best non-use of studio, most minimal and best avoidance of paint awards. It's great fun; some 2nd years do spoken-word performances which are angry and heart-felt, and one very quiet student from Singapore does a routine based on the *Australian Idol* contestant, drag queen Courtney Act. Totally sharp and risky as well as sending up the whole 'I'm untalented but I'm desperate to be famous'. 1st year students rap to Cypress Hill and Le Tigre. Lots of dancing and acceptance and I'm struck by such unbridled levels of creativity and libido. It makes me think I was so uptight in the mid-nineties.

The following Thursday, lunchtime staff meeting. We get a wrap over knuckles from the school counselor about being too critical and judgmental and we all get defensive. We hear that the Director is in Canberra lobbying for more support and the official friends of the school are VIPs at President George Bush's lunch in Canberra. I think, it's a bit of a worry leaving things up to the people who lunch isn't it? There's talk the Liberal Party are paying off the four independent MPs who hold the balance of power in the Senate. Head of school mentions four million has been given to a naval college in Hobart etc... It seems like only a matter of time for access to education to be completely bought and sold by a few individuals just so the hegemony can continue. We also hear that the art school has the full support of a One Nation Senator from Queensland who still thinks education should be free. Later on that afternoon, opposition Senator for Education, Labour MP Jenny Macklin, walks through the painting department promising to make funding and education an election issue.

Later that day, the 1st years show their video projects. There are love scenes between a seagull and a crow, mockumentary boy bands, Hitchcock

chase scenarios, young teenage boys pretending to drive their big brothers' cars, fragmented gossip and slowed down bubble gum chewing. Two more weeks remain of the semester and students are busy finishing things. I felt a bit useless as there is not much time for talk anymore and so much is going on. Assessment follows. On November 11th Melbourne University Council declares it will not assist VCA with funding shortfalls next year. I guess that threw Plan B out the window. Plan A, to shift its funding from the federal Ministry of Education and training to a more independent communications and technology portfolio, will have to do. At the end of semester staff meeting there was a genuine consensus the department is in an advantageous position to employ sessionals next year. Whether or not work is available (as much as I need it) teaching only those who can afford to pay isn't really my idea of utopia. It was alarming to witness how quickly things can change in just twelve short weeks of one semester.

Legislative changes to the higher education sector resulting from Robert Nelson's report will be put to the Australian Senate November 28.

Post script:

During the last sitting of parliament for 2003, recommendations from Robert Nelson's education report were rushed through the Senate around midnight on December 5th. Despite major opposition from Labour, the Greens and the Democrat parties, the four independent MPs passed the proposed bill with few concessions.

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James Lynch is a miserable Scorpio whose daily emotions of cynicism and idealism break the register. In 2003 he was a sessional lecturer at the Victorian College of the Arts.

André Breton's Gun

André Breton's Gun

David Hatcher: *Standard Deviations*, Eichenmüllerhaus Lemgo, Germany, 12 October – 9 November

If you are looking for a single term to expedite purchase on David Hatcher's oeuvre, try fetish. Ubiquitous within a range of discourses providing both a backdrop to, and frequently, primary materials for the artist's practice, its pertinence to the artifacts that result from the philosophical, theoretical, clinical, art historical, political and economic interpolations characterizing his work is patent: elaborate methodologies and motifs condense to totemic forms in a coalescence of the anthropological provenance of the term with its later diagnostic use in psychoanalysis. If today those aspects of the notion seem hackneyed, it possesses further, more precise implications for Hatcher's work: its application by Freud to a pathology of the *individual* vis-à-vis its appropriation by Marx to describe the attribution of value by irrational consensus at a *collective* level sheds light on the charting of subjectivity against the backdrop of contemporary economic phenomena that the artist has been pursuing for some time now. Hatcher's interrogations of market mechanisms explore their politically and socially conditioned structural apparatus, attendant psychologies, art historical correlations and theoretical reception. Couched selectively in this wider context, work on manifestos, gestures and formats at various times considered radical or progressive formed the crux of his solo exhibition with the Lippische Gesellschaft für Kunst in fall 2003.

'Standard Deviations' presented 32 works surveying approaches to the above concerns in work produced over the last several years. From discrete, self-contained statements to excerpts from larger-in-several cases still in progress-sequences and cycles, the works on show oscillated between iconic simplicity and tightly bundled complexity. A strategy they all shared was the formal reduction of vertiginous conceptual assemblages to pithy, deceptively simplistic surfaces and compositions, conceding exponential layers of meaning only upon close inspection. Take for example the ink drawing 'Wow', (2002); a portrait of Milla Jovovich-advertising icon for the cosmetics giant L'Oreal-in a pose sampled from her recent campaigns for that corporation. A figure is sketched with a frantic line-a reproduction of the jittery charted performance of the L'Oreal Corporation as a publicly listed component of global stock markets. If, in the fetishization of the commodity, Marx describes a collective, excessive attribution of value-and the simultaneous displacement of the same-here Hatcher renders a razor sharp depiction of the mechanisms that advertising employs in the service of such fetishization. The drawing's reduction of Jovovich's affective campaign posture is more superficially, however, a cover of Munch's 'The Scream'-this time the model herself apparently horrified by the representational transaction she is a party to, of which her portrait is a hysterical protest. The fetishization of

Wenn es einen Begriff gibt, der dazu angetan ist, das Werk David Hatcher's mit seinen weit reichenden philosophischen, kunsttheoretischen, politischen und ökonomischen Implikationen zu umreißen, so ist es der des Fetisch - ein Begriff, der vielfältige, verschiedenen Disziplinen entstammende Bedeutungen unter sich subsumiert, die ihre visuelle Entsprechung in den Arbeiten Hatcher's finden. Hatcher's Werk untersucht Marktmechanismen ebenso wie politisch und gesellschaftlich bedingte Strukturen, Kunstgeschichte, zeitgenössische Theorie und die Rezeptionsgeschichte einst als radikal verstandener Gesten und Manifestationen. Wobei es zwischen allen diesen Untersuchungskomplexen keine scharfen Abgrenzungen gibt - vielmehr durchdringen sich die einzelnen Themen und verweisen aufeinander. Somit wird hier bei der Verwendung des Konzeptes Fetisch dessen ethnographische Herkunft mit allen inhereenten Missverständnissen ebenso mitgedacht wie seine Verwendung in der Diagnose der Psychoanalyse. Gemeint ist im folgenden aber auch dessen inflationäre Verwendung und Verflachung im zeitgenössischen Diskurs sowie im allgemeinen Sprachgebrauch und besonders die Übernahme des Begriffes durch Marx zur Beschreibung von - im Gegensatz zum individualistischen Ansatz Freuds - auf kollektiven, gesellschaftlichen Konventionen beruhenden Wertzuschreibungen: Diese Vorstellung drängt sich für die Annäherung an Hatcher's Analyse der zeitgenössischen ökonomischen Begebenheiten, verbunden mit einer kritischen Retrospektive einst als radikal oder progressiv angesehener Manifeste, Gesten oder Formensprachen, geradezu auf. Vor diesem Hintergrund entwickelte sich Hatcher's Einzelausstellung in der Lippischen Gesellschaft für Kunst im Herbst 2003.

„Standard Deviations“ präsentierte 32 Skulpturen, Drucke, Zeichnungen und Fotografien aus den letzten Jahren. Allen gemeinsames Grundprinzip ist die Übertragung dieser sehr komplexen Gedanken in eine fast plakativ zu nennende, bewusst einfache Bildsprache, unter deren Oberfläche Schicht um Schicht die verschiedenen Bedeutungsebenen freigelegt werden können. So zeigt die Zeichnung „Wow“ (2002) das Portrait Mila Jovovichs, Werbeikone der Firma L'Oreal, in einer aus Zeitschriftenanzeigen übernommenen Pose. Umrissen ist die Person in einer unruhigen Zick-Zacklinie, welche die wechselhafte Kurve des Aktienkurses jenes Großkonzerns wieder gibt. Wenn Marx in der Fetischisierung der Ware einen Prozess auf kollektiver Konvention beruhender, übertriebener Wertzuschreibung - bei gleichzeitiger Verdrängung dieses Vorgangs - sieht, offenbart Hatcher hier genau jenen Mechanismus der Werbung, der zur Fetischisierung der Ware entscheidend beiträgt. Dass durch die Vereinfachung der Zeichnung Mila Jovovichs affektierte Werbepose mit einem Mal an

woman and her objectification to commodity status appears even more pointedly in 'Willy Rey / Playboy Enterprises Inc.', (2002). Playmate Of The Year in 1971, Willy Rey's shoot for Playboy magazine in January of that year provided the motif that Playboy Enterprises Incorporated printed on its stock when the company went public ten months later—the first time a nude had adorned a share certificate. She too appears as an apparition—a barely discernible figure—outlined in the unsteady market performance curves of the corporation she symbolically fronts. Brimming with economic, theoretical and art historical puns—most obviously on curves, figures, commodities, objectification, representation and value—the schizy line drawing ultimately shakes down as a kind of tongue-in-cheek critique of solemn minimal and conceptual methodologies prevalent in the visual arts during Willy Rey's heyday, replete with formal and ideological accessories. Loaded with hooks for po-faced feminist and Marxist readings, the insolence of Hatcher's reflections on the legacies of these discourses and their efficacy in the visual arts nevertheless prevails.

Marx would of course turn in his grave were he to witness corporations themselves, let alone their brands, as the present day object of market speculation—the dematerialized commodity fetish now an intangible, fleeting phenomenon expressed in abstract numeric terms. The price of such commodities is indeed determined by collective consensus, rather than quantifiable, calculable facts—numinous values expressing themselves in the illogical fluctuations of the market. Vocabulary employed to describe economic conditions on the trading floor also serves in another context to qualify pathological symptoms—where the talk is of fever, nervousness, hysteria, panic, calmness, depression—a relationship that finds concise expression in the work 'Hi Ho', (2002): this seven-part series of drawings transforms the saccharine comic book figures of Disney's Seven Dwarfs into strung-out specters, each outlined by the agitated, zigzagged stock performance of The Walt Disney Company. Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy... The dwarfs' names—dominant emotional attributes—abet Hatcher's semantic maneuver in personifying the moody irrationality of a market supposedly governed by the cold logic of capital.

His disclosure of the animist forces embedded within modern Western business practice continues: in 'Was this the transition?' (2003), he casts the symbolic mascots of the market—the bull and the bear—as animistic deities, totemic figures of a congregation of free marketeers. If a de-deification and de-domestication of animals paralleled their subjugation and domestication as livestock—hand in hand with the development of a Western civilization considered to be enlightened—here they nevertheless remain powerful emblematic symbols and figures of identification. In the context of the cumulative skepticism evident in Hatcher's work on the economic and political agenda driving the process of European unification—a local paradigm of the international deregulation of capital and labor markets popularly known as 'globalization'—bear and bull are metonyms of an 'evil' Russian empire and Europe, respectively—the profane coupling of the figures a puerile caricature of paranoid Western scenarios from the cold war era. Miniature plastic figures coated with correction fluid—originally sourced from a toy shop—feign, as

Munch's „Schrei“ erinnert, ist intendierter, ironischer Nebeneffekt und lässt das Model gewissermaßen selber über die im Bild analysierten Vorgänge erschrecken. Die Fetischisierung der Frau, ihre Verdinglichung zur Ware, erscheint dann noch pointierter in der Arbeit „Willy Rey / Playboy Enterprises Inc.“ (2002). Willy Rey war 1971 Playmate des Jahres, und eine der Fotografien aus der Januarausgabe des Heftes wurde zu dem Motiv, das die Aktie des Konzerns anlässlich des Börsengangs im gleichen Jahr schmückte. Willy Rey avancierte zum ersten Aktmodell, das jemals eine Aktie zierte. Auch sie ist dargestellt als Schemen, kaum greifbare Körperlichkeit, umrissen in der Performance-Kurve des Unternehmens. Formale kunsthistorische, ökonomische sowie theoretische Anspielungen und ironische Querverweise auf mehrdeutige Begriffe wie Kurve, Maß, Ware, Objekt, Abbildung und Wert drängen sich auf, wobei die reduzierte Zeichnung selbst augenzwinkernd auf die Formensprache minimalistischer und konzeptueller Ansätze jener Zeit verweist, in der Willy Rey ihre größten Erfolge feierte. Und obwohl die Arbeit reichlich Ansatzpunkte für knochentrockene feministische oder marxistische Analyse bietet, steht hier doch Hatcher's respektlose Reflektion über das Erbe und die Rezeption des Diskurses jener Tage im Vordergrund.

Marx konnte wohl kaum voraussehen, dass mittlerweile die Konzerne und deren Markennamen selber zu Waren geworden sind, die entsprechend gehandelt werden. Der Fetisch Ware ist entmaterialisiert, ist zu einem nicht greifbaren, flüchtigen Phänomen geworden, das sich in abstrakten Zahlen und Summen ausdrückt, deren jeweiligen Werte auf eben jenem Prozess der sozialen Verabredung beruhen und nicht auf quantifizierbaren, rechnerisch nachvollziehbaren Fakten, deren numinose Werte sich in den irrationalen Bewegungen der Börsenkurse ausdrücken. Das Vokabular, das gemeinhin zur Beschreibung der ökonomischen Vorgänge auf dem Börsenparkett herangezogen wird, dient in seinem anderen Kontext der Qualifizierung pathologischer Symptome: Da ist die Rede von Fieberkurven, Nervosität, Hysterie, Panik, Entspannung, Depression — ein Phänomen, für das Hatcher in der Arbeit „Hi Ho“ (2002) ein prägnantes Bild findet. Die siebenteilige Zeichnungsserie transformiert die niedlichen Comicfiguren Walt Disneys in flüchtige Schemen, umrissen in den unruhig gezackten Kursverläufen der Konzernaktie, wodurch die Namen der Zwerge – ihre jeweiligen emotionalen Attribute wie „Grumpy“, „Happy“, „Sleepy“ – die vollkommene Irrationalität des Marktgeschehens offenbart, die sich in besagter semantischer Übertragung ausdrückt.

Und die Entlarvung jener unberechenbaren Vorgänge im scheinbar so aufgeklärten zeitgenössischen Marktgeschehen geht weiter: So geraten bei Hatcher in „Was this the transition?“ (2003) die Gallions- und Symbolfiguren des Börsengeschehens, der Bulle und der Bär, zu animistischen Gottheiten, zu Totemfiguren der Gemeinde der Börsianer. Die Ent-Göttlichung und Ent-Dämonisierung der Tiere bis hin zu ihrer Unterwerfung und Zähmung zum Nutzvieh geht Hand in Hand mit der als Fortschritt und Aufklärung verstandenen kulturellen Entwicklung, wobei dessen ungeachtet auch heute noch Tiere machtvoll emblematische Symbole und Identifikationsfiguren darstellen. Und vor dem Hintergrund von Hatcher's fortwährender argwöhnischer Analyse der ökonomischen und politischen Verschränkungen im Prozess der Europäischen Vereinigung geraten Bulle



Left: *Wow* (Milla Jovovich / L'Oréal) (2002) ballpoint on somerset book courtesy Galerie Müllerdechiara, Berlin. **Right:** *Was this the transition?* (white) (2003) correcting fluid on found objects courtesy Starkwhite, Auckland.

with many of Hatcher's collected props, a childlike innocence: the Seven Dwarfs, Sylvester Pussycat—they are all victims of the same simple détournement by the artist. The tiny sculpture's placement in an absurdly over-proportioned vitrine comically amplifies the fetishization of Western art objects, their systems of presentation and display, and the inflation of meaning that occurs under these conditions. A similar, disproportionately large vitrine housed 'Prolegomena III', (2003)—a silicon dildo annotated with miniature letters—emphatically manifesting the done to death notion of the phallus in 20th Century theory. Cloaked in a veil of illegibility, the thrashed symbol is an apposite expression of the excesses of the fetish in discourse since its establishment as one of the cornerstones of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis. Not only is legibility abandoned in a dull mess of material linguistic constituents, but the once powerful fetish symbol of non Christian culture is reduced to a bulk retail model from a sexshop discounter.

Continental discourse and its reception are again Hatcher's focus in 'L'acte surréaliste le plus simple (André Breton)' (2003). Here the artist examines the caliber of André Breton's notoriously violent declaration from the second Surrealist Manifesto. Configured as an eye chart—reproduced in the upper case and reducing in font size and line spacing proportionally until Breton's bombastic utterance appears to run out of breath—his vision is reduced to an acuity test. In the process, the citation is set adrift: it appears at first glance that no semantic coherence is to be located in the work—on the contrary it presents itself as a graphic, written image, scrutinizing the attention of the observer. The sense of the piece does however eventually give itself up. In contrast to 'Prolegomena

und Bär zu Sinnbildern des – „bösen“ – Russischen Reiches und Europas, und die obszöne Anordnung der kleinen Figuren karikiert westliche Angstsszenarien aus den Zeiten des Kalten Krieges. Die kleinen, mit Tipp-Ex bemalten Plastikfiguren, die ursprünglich einem Spielwarenladen entstammen, sind – ähnlich wie viele der von Hatcher versammelten Versatzstücke scheinbar unschuldiger Kinderromantik, die Sieben Zwerge, der Kater Sylvester – Opfer der subversiven Entblößungstaktik des Künstlers geworden. Zudem parodiert der Kontrast zwischen den kleinen Skulpturen und der im Verhältnis überdimensionierten Vitrine die Fetischisierung des Kunstobjektes und seiner Bedeutungsaufblähung aufs Schönste.

In einer ebensolch überdimensionierten Vitrine präsentiert Hatcher „Prolegomena III“ (2003), einen mit winzigen Buchstaben überzogenen Kunststoff-Dildo, die Verbildlichung des in der postmodernen Theorie so viel beschworenen Begriff des Phallus, der hier unter seiner Schicht unzähliger unleserlicher Wortketten kollabiert. Die beklagte inflationäre Verwendung und Abnutzung des Begriffes Fetisch im zeitgenössischen Diskurs seit seiner Etablierung als Kernbegriff der Freudschen und Lacanschen Psychoanalyse findet so adäquaten Ausdruck: Denn hier ist nicht nur der Text unter einem Buchstabenbrei verschwunden, hier ist auch der einst machtvolle Fetisch nicht-christlicher Kulturen reduziert auf das Plastikmodell aus einem Sexshop-Discounter.

Abendländischen Diskurs und dessen Rezeption nimmt Hatcher wiederholt unter die Lupe. In „L'Acte Surréaliste le plus simple (André Breton)“ (2003) untersucht er die Durchschlagskraft von André Bretons aggressiver und gewalttätiger Surrealismusdefinition. Hatcher überträgt das berühmte Zitat Bretons aus

III' legibility is not completely forsaken, the ultimate failure of the word not pushed. It seems a distinct possibility, but only one among many. The reification of surrealism goes on—even in Hatcher's doubly coded work, where the efficacy of Breton's position is simultaneously confirmed and called into question.

Formally, this convergence of text into a generic clinical system concerns itself less with the examination of an individual position and more with an analysis of positionality, or in this case, radicality as such. After repeated postmodern declarations of capitulation in the face of the alleged failure of modernism's revolutionary pretensions—and their subsequent inescapable recuperation (in Debord's sense of the word)—Hatcher collects evidence in art, philosophy and politics of uninterrupted traces of adherence to the radical gesture and an unbroken retrospective reception of such beliefs. While his succinct set piece itself consciously participates in the commodification of such discourse, Hatcher seems content to accept the commercial success of the edition as a proof of the critical strategies at play in the work.

Harmless delinquency seems to be to Hatcher's taste, or perhaps its currency in the contemporary art market is the real object of his attention. His panel of text, after all, neglects most of the rules of grammar but remains—albeit with moderate difficulty—clearly legible: an approach that Breton as one of the popularizers of *écriture automatique* might reluctantly be forced to endorse. While the exhibition's title already contains a deadpan swipe at a standardization of the notion of deviance, in this work Hatcher dispassionately dissects an historic instance of professed departure from societal norms—Breton's famous provocation to run amok—and concludes, it seems, that today if not at the moment of its invocation, André Breton's gun is shooting blanks.

Astrid Mania is a Berlin-based independent writer and curator.

dem zweiten surrealistischen Manifest in die Struktur von Sehtafeln, schreibt es in Großbuchstaben, die in immer gleichen Abständen voneinander getrennt zeilenweise kleiner werden, bis das Bretonsche Wortgetöse schließlich zu einem linguistischen Bächlein verrinnt, bis die Vision zu einem Sehtest wird.

Das Zitat wird hierbei in einem Schwebezustand gehalten: Zwar scheint beim ersten Blick auf die Tafel die Folge von Buchstaben keinen semantischen Sinn zu ergeben, sondern präsentiert sich zunächst als grafisches –geschriebenes– Bild, das die Aufmerksamkeit des Betrachters auf die Probe stellt, doch stellt sich der Sinn bei längerer Betrachtung ein. Anders als in „Prolegomena III“ ist die Lesbarkeit nicht vollständig aufgeben, so dass hier nicht das endgültige Scheitern des Wortes behauptet, sondern nur als eine Möglichkeit von vielen befragt wird. Die Rezeption des Surrealismus hält unvermindert an – eben auch in jenem doppelt codierten Werk Hatchers, das gleichzeitig Beleg und Befragung jener Wirkungsgeschichte darstellt.

Doch geht es bei dieser Übertragung von Text in ein optisches Bildsystem nicht ausschließlich um eine Untersuchung der jeweiligen Positionen, sondern um eine Untersuchung des radikalen Habitus als solchem, der zur Disposition gestellt wird. Denn trotz aller Kapitulationserklärungen der Postmoderne angesichts des – behaupteten – Scheiterns aller revolutionären Gesten der Moderne und der Unausweichlichkeit ihrer Vermarktung, an der sich Hatcher mit seinen Sehtafeln bewusst beteiligt und diese so wiederum auch kommentiert, konstatiert er aber auch in Kunst, Philosophie und Politik den ungebrochenen Glauben an die radikale Geste und die fortdauernde Retrospektion und Rezeption eben solcher Credi.

Dabei scheint der Regelverstoß durchaus auch im Sinne Hatchers zu sein. Gleichzeitig aber erregt die momentan zu beobachtende Wertsteigerung solcher „delinquenten“ Gesten im Kunstmarkt seine Aufmerksamkeit, und wie in vielen Fällen betreibt er auch hier ein doppeltes Spiel, in dem er als Mittäter und Untersuchungsrichter zugleich auftritt. Schließlich missachtet seine Texttafel alle Gesetzmäßigkeiten unserer Grammatik und bleibt dennoch lesbar— eine Vorgehensweise, an der Breton als Vertreter der *écriture automatique* sicherlich klammheimlich seine Freude gehabt hätte. Und während bereits der Ausstellungstitel trocken das Paradox der Standardisierung von Normabweichungen andeutet, führt Hatcher hier einen historischen Fall manifesten Abwendens von gesellschaftlicher Norm vor Augen: Doch ist die Radikalität, mit der Breton einst provozierend zum Amoklauf aufforderte, längst verpufft – Andre Bretons Waffe ist heute – und vielleicht war sie auch nie etwas Anderes – nur mehr eine Schreckschusspistole.

Astrid Mania lebt als freie Kuratorin und Autorin in Berlin.

**Kym Paton: *Time Will Break the World*
Enjoy Gallery, Wellington, 4 – 21 December**



Taking its title from an eerie song by the US alt-country band the Silver Jews, the latest exhibition at Enjoy is disturbing and absurd in equal parts. Wellington artist Kym Paton has carefully constructed a room within a room, or a gallery within the gallery.

White walls, extending from floor to ceiling, mimic the dimensions and conventions – right down to the scotia and skirting – of Enjoy’s L-shaped gallery space. They fill the room until there is almost no room left, just a 600mm corridor between the artwork and the gallery’s “real” walls, only wide enough for one person to walk down, or two to shuffle sideways past each other – at the exhibition opening most of the patrons escaped through a window and partied outside on the balcony.

Creating a situation where the spectator is forced into a special relationship with the artwork is one of many Minimalist strategies the artist plays with. Paton has created a space of which she says “You can’t get an overview, you can’t stand back” – the work forces you to be involved. It gave me the feeling of being a rat in a maze, or a character in one of those sci-fi movies where everyone is out of scale with their surroundings.

The use of monumental scale, everyday non-art materials, and the activation of negative and positive spaces are further references to a minimalist tradition where the emphasis shifts from the visual (elicited by ornamental surfaces, or smaller-than-human scale objects) to the experiential, from contemplation to situation. The site-specific nature of this work, its faithful mimicry of the host gallery speaks of a concern to address the institutional and social context of the work. For instance, the distance between the installation walls and the gallery wall is equal to the distance that separates the traditional public gallery visitor from the art works. In this artist run space, the implication is, art is made accessible, unavoidable – “You know you’re soaking in it.”

Kym Paton, *Time Will Break the World*, Enjoy PAG, 2003

A further site specific reference, although not as immediate, and perhaps not intended by the artist, is one that echoes British artist Rachel Whiteread’s *House* (1992), a concrete cast of the interior of a condemned council house. Whiteread’s public protest at the destructive impact of contemporary urban planning gained a high profile after the sculpture was in its turn demolished, the anti-monument lasting just a few weeks beyond the destruction of the surrounding neighbourhood. Enjoy itself resides in a neighbourhood of diverse and historical houses and shops that are threatened with demolition by the local city council and Transit New Zealand to make way for a motorway, a pollution-making, resource-wasting, ostensibly time-saving civic project.

Paton, in her turn, insists that she wanted to make something “ridiculous and Big”, to disturb as well as amuse. The unexpected humour of her work tugs it away from a pure (re)staging of minimalist theatre, and/or social and artworld critique. Squeezing along her cramped corridors is an experience both claustrophobic and oddly hilarious, as strangers are forced into close encounters of an absurd kind.

The artist seems to have erected this dysfunctional architecture to mimic the heavy pressure time places on us, our lives and our communities. At the same time, we sense the artificiality and pointlessness of that pressure. It is a liberating form of confinement. I am glad I have had the chance to experience the installation before it is dismantled, perhaps to be recycled in the inventive way this artist has recycled minimalist forms and ideas.

Readymade Museums

Imaginary Museum and Practice

Adam Art Gallery Te Pataka Toi, Victoria University, Wellington,
31 May – 29 June 2003

'Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them.'

– Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*

'Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view – created a new thought for that object.'

– Marcel Duchamp, *The Blind Man*

The two exhibitions occupying Wellington's Adam Art Gallery through June 2003 were a welcome and brave event, made up as they were of work which did not immediately provide much purchase for the viewer. It was the relationships forged between physical, visual and psychological spaces that left lasting impressions, and rewarded the time spent in the gallery.

This review documents my experience of walking through the shows during their installation. Readers can visit Clegg's work on line at <http://www.imaginariumuseum.com> and the Practice catalogue, with reproductions of the artists' work and a curatorial essay, is available from the Adam Art Gallery (contact Kate.Griffin@vuw.ac.nz).

Imaginary Museum David Clegg

David Clegg's ethereal audio-visual installation, *Imaginary Museum*, colonises the top floor of the Adam Art Gallery while *Practice*, a group show curated by Charlotte Huddleston of Enjoy Gallery (the first in the Adam's *Re:refresh* series of shows by emerging curators), fills the rest of the space with quirky (re)collected artefacts which slouch around the walls and floor. Passing through the two in succession feels like moving from a formal lecture theatre to a boys' high school classroom.

Rushing in from finding a car park, by the time I have taken ten paces into the cavernous gallery I am hushed and slowed by the quiet, Spartan space. I look around for the art, which is not immediately apparent. My attention is caught by a wire emerging from a rectangular hole in a steel plate on the black tiled floor. The wire leads from the hole to a CD player and headset, sitting mutely on a black and chrome gallery chair. I look up to the row of white sheets of A4 paper, stapled to the wall just below eye level. A series of digital photographs bisect the paper in horizontal bands, in the same neutral colour scheme as the floors, walls and wires of the Adam Gallery. The images depict lots of metal and glass and floor tiles. They could represent the gallery we are in, except for

the German signage on the windows and entrances.

Another wire snakes out from behind the gallery's front desk and down into another (man)hole, which also accepts computer cords. More digital printouts hang above the wire, showing neutral blank walls, doorways. Initially the images look whole, depicting continuous walls, logical joins. On closer examination a doubling becomes apparent and you can see that all the images are split down the middle – some images are exact doubles of each other, some are taken from different points of view.

Turning away from the front desk I face the row of images stapled to the opposite wall. The floor abutting the wall is actually a metal grille platform, which you need to stand on in order to look closely at the work. One of the images in the series shows a ceiling/floor architectural feature similar to the one I am standing on. It is the image within the series which stands out, with its starkly contrasting black reinforcing grid. The picture has us looking up through the grid at ghostly shadowy shapes, silhouettes of people standing on their floor, our ceiling.

There is an uncanny moment when I look down through the grid I am standing on, catching a glimpse of the ground floor 10 metres below me, and realise my position mimics that of the ghosts in the image. I experience an 'I AM' encounter, relating to the image in the photograph before looking up at the vast empty space above Clegg's work where McCahon's big *I AM* once hung.

That vertiginous moment, standing on the grille, ushers in the Real, the flip side of the Imaginary, in the form of a memory of a visit to an architect friend's house. Baby in arms, investigating a mezzanine feature, I stepped out onto a net, into nothingness. I screamed as I felt I was going to plunge with my baby two floors down. For a moment I am split between the remembered scream and the present contemplative calm.

Some images evoke a 'film noir' sense of imminent or embedded threat, particularly the hall/corridor shots – a confined, prescribed, possibly inescapable passageway, sandwiched between more open-ended spaces. Other images are pale, over exposed – ethereal and 'heavenly'.

In its quiet, unassuming way this installation implicates or draws in *everything* about its surroundings. The public art institution's architectural austerity and conventions are activated, and become part of the work – as interesting as the artist-placed objects themselves. (Which bit is the 'work?' This installation presents the possibility that the gallery is the work as much as the photographic images, the stylish CD players. Separating one from the other would be like trying to separate the back of a piece of paper from the front.)



Finally I get to the last CD station and feel the (guilty? dutiful?) compulsion to listen – the CD players sit so passively on the chairs, and do not necessarily look related to the work on display. The tape is filled with people discussing the furniture in the (depicted) museum/s. The disembodied voices discuss the practicalities of experiencing the space while consuming or viewing art, and the way the furniture relates to the art. ...‘designer materials, valued for their comfort for visitors, to have a rest ... neutral design’. They identify themselves in relation to other (Imaginary?) museums: ‘used in other museums’... ‘becoming a museum chair’... ‘don’t want to *pronounce* the furniture’... ‘not like the Tate Modern with its funky furniture.’

Voices corresponding to the series of images installed down the stairs at the Adam Gallery caution that it is ‘better to have a ground plan, or map with you to always know where you are, in which part of the building’ because ‘people can be confused, even as a professional it’s annoying not to know your way around.’

The labyrinthine character of the imagined spaces constructed by the audio-visual installation reminds me of a gothic fairy tale, but staged in a clean, white ‘rational’ space. The labyrinthine design of (modernist) museums has been identified as a reconstruction of the path to enlightenment – nirvana being the autonomous state achieved in the presence of Great Art in a white room – transcending the complexity and wilfulness of the everyday world. The (modernist) trajectory is derailed in this instance as the voices often drift off, as if in confusion at the inability of words to explain the spaces to the interviewer. There

David Clegg, *Imaginary Museum* (2003) detail, Adam Art Gallery, Wellington.

is a sense that although they are trying (or someone has tried) to present a cohesive explanation and experience of the space, in fact the fragmentary is the more apparent.

The title of this show, ‘The Imaginary Museum’, indicates that it could be read as an imaginary place in the sense of Sleeping Beauty’s castle, and indeed in his artist’s statement Clegg presents the museum as a dematerialised, subjective space, ‘the museum you have constructed inside your head’. However, it also began to feel to me like I was moving around in some life-sized Lacanian Imaginary – that part of the three registers of subjectivity (the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real) that make up our behaviour and sense of identity; who we think we are. The Imaginary is the order of visual, spatial and bodily experience and communication. At the heart of the Imaginary is the body ego – our sense of bodily reliability and unity. Buildings can act as ‘surrogate bodies for us to identify with in order to fortify our sense of self’ in the face of otherness (Bracher). Inhabiting physical, visual and spatial environments ‘literally or imaginatively’, we take a position in relation to others: either ‘you are me’ or ‘either you or me’ (Wright). Wandering through the environment Clegg’s installation (re)creates in a New Zealand gallery, there is an illusion of unity, of sameness (is it an illusion?). I almost feel like a European in camouflage – and wonder, do I feel in competition with this (reflected) space, or strangely at home?

At some point in your walk through the work, the similarities between the photographs of foreign spaces and the space in which you stand trigger a sense of déjà vu. Characterised by an uncanny sense of familiarity, déjà vu exists in the mind of the viewer only, normally an intensely and even disconcertingly individual experience, where one's own sense of wonder and 'recognition' ('Oh, I've been here before! This has happened before!') cannot be shared with others. In this installation déjà vu becomes a shared experience, a communal one (or it could be, although often you are the only one in the museum). The possibility of intimacy within this impersonal space is forged at the level of subjective memory 'lapses', provoked through the visual register in this work.

At the heart of Clegg's project, it seems to me, lies a challenge to the projection of the museum as a house of knowledge – just as we cannot know our selves with concrete certainty, formed as we are through a series of illusory relationships between ourselves and our image (reflected) in others.

If the top storey houses the Imaginary museum, the other floors are home to a series of *imaginary objects* – objects which seemed at one time to be part of oneself.

Practice

Tao Wells, Patrick Pound, John Abbate, David Simpkin, Richard Lewer. Curated by Charlotte Huddleston

Found photographs, hastily drafted posters and documents, shonky plinths, surrealist sculptures and a huge wall drawing are some of the artworks that reach up the walls, or crawl along the lower floors of the gallery. For once I love that the artists are all male while the ones providing the Symbolic order, the conceptual and administrative framework, are female – the museum director and the curator (and, in this case at least, the reviewer). It seems consistent with the flipping and teasing of orders happening in this building at this time.

There is a game of perception where two images are embedded in one – either two profiles facing each other, or a vase. The trick is, you can not see both images at once, and also, once you have seen an image in the shape, you can no longer read it as an abstract shape – it has content and meaning. When I read 'Practice' for instance, the name of the group show curated by Charlotte Huddleston, I can see it as either: '... makes perfect', or as referring to the artists' professional activity. It implies either a process towards perfection or an overview, a looking back. I cannot read it as both things at once.

This continues in the work. There is a doubling which is activated by the place the art is housed, so that a collection of familiar, often overlooked objects transmogrifies into Art Object, whoops, and back. The dynamic play between signifiers cannot be held still and you are drawn into a game of tag – and these guys are tag-teaming. Through the readymade, The artist becomes a manipulator of signs, more than a producer of art objects, the viewer an active reader of messages...' (Foster).

While it has been argued that Assisted Readymades (is any readymade ever unassisted?) take the object

into the aesthetic realm, shifting it away from its 'meta-argument about the role of the museum in determining what art is' (Butler) I think they do more than the backing-off that Butler's argument implies. I think they work more in the uncanny register than the aesthetic – they become Surrealist, and rather than engaging in Dada's tug of war with what art is, or isn't, they enter the even more contested territory of 'what is' or 'isn't'.

Right from the start, and perhaps most obviously, ontological and perceptual questions are posed. But is this the most engaging aspect of the show? What else is going on?

Tao Wells' 2 *Class hours* take place in a cold, darkened space, humming with air conditioning – like a fridge. A spine of objects lie on the floor down the central axis of the gallery – at the far end wall, large digital clock figures count backwards in real time from 2:00:00:00. A list of rules is taped to the wall opposite the entrance: 'List titles of what I'd like to see make it exist (in 2 hours), Present all together, Add new names to list'. This instruction appears to have been carried out.

The first object along the prone axis is a piece of A3 white paper with 5/30/03, maybe the date the artist installed the work. The American way of writing the date displaces me to '9/11', which I always misread as 9th September (I know it's September, so I ignore '11th', and read '9th' as the day's date), and pass from there to further associations of 'otherness' and misunderstanding, 'us' and 'them'.

More 'teaching resources' include: *Driftwood*, a roughly made child's chair, like an old-fashioned school room chair, a transparent sandwich-board with sheets of A2 newsprint 'I'll push your trolley for \$10'. Another sign: 'HER PANTS COST \$110'.

Hand-written posters perpetrate urban art myths: 'A FRIEND OF ROB CHERRY'S STOPPED A TRAIN FOR A PISS', and, 'P. ROBINSON AND J. FRASER HAD TO BUNK UP, WHILE TRADE EXECS SPENT UP'. A hint of Chinese whispers and Freudian slips emerge in the lost letters: 'I SAW TONY DE LA TOUR BEING PICKED UP IN A HUGE LACK MER ED S'.

These fanzine moments are offset by the artist's 'real world' artefacts (no Mercedes for this dole bludger) and woven in with his fantasy moment: 'Mr Avant-garde NZ 2003'. Recognition! Affirmation! Wells' 'photocopy of Michael Parekowhai's 'I AM HE' references a male lineage of the Word, from McCahon, to Michael P, to his own plaintive: "I AM WHO?" Wells has compiled, like a mission statement, master signifiers of the art world and collapsed them in a heap on the floor.

The anti-aesthetic or 'slacker' aesthetic, as well as the didactic diatribe which operates as the axis (or collapsed axle) of his practice installation, situates Wells' work in a tradition of museum critique, from Duchamp to Daniel Buren and so on. The question always arises: why critique the museum from within its embrace? Are you not caught in a compromised position? Douglas Crimp takes up the question in defending Buren against this charge. He argues that

'if Buren's work had not appeared in the museum, if it had not taken the museum as its point of



Tao Wells, *2 Class Hours* (2003), Adam Art Gallery, Wellington.

departure and as its referent, the ... issues [of the political nature of the radicalism of Minimal and conceptual art and its aim to discredit the forms and institutions of dominant bourgeois culture] would not have arisen. It is fundamental to Buren's work that it function in complicity with those very institutions it seeks to make visible as the necessary conditions of the artwork's intelligibility.' (Crimp)

Hmmm. That might be true in Buren's case, where his Situationist group were consistently and avowedly Marxist in their critique of what museum institutions represent and support. But what are we to make of Wells' vow to be held liable for 'all of the world's problems'? A legal document (is it?) asserts that 'I Tao Wells solemnly declare that I take unlimited liability for all of the world's problems'. It is such an empty gesture – a posture. And that, I think, is the point. He presents Knowledge as Imaginary (as Clegg does his/our museum). Knowledge becomes an illusory object of desire which teases us with its (unfulfilled) promise to stem the floods of anxiety about separation and loss. Paradoxically, his work is tightly wedded to the site via a strategy of disavowal – a sort of love-hate relationship.

Leaving Well's dark room for developing artists, I walk out to the balcony where John Abbate's presentation unravels in a different way. It begins with a set of beautifully rendered, realistic charcoal drawings (fragments of a filing cabinet), and moves on to six wastepaper baskets each containing a manila folder, binned tidily. However the 'office' gradually becomes undone or disordered as two gallery chairs, mounted on the wall almost within arm's reach of the mezzanine balcony but dauntingly high off the floor, present a vertiginous place, impossible to occupy. Is

this a comment on the difficulty of conceptual art to get 'bums on seats', or maybe a critique of conformist approaches to art making, presenting, and viewing?

Looking past the empty chairs my attention is caught by Richard Lewer's wall drawing taking up the far wall of the long narrow gallery stretching out below the balcony. Enticed down the stairs, I first have to negotiate David Simpkin's sign posts with odd words: 'All day Grit your grammar and mingle' and sometimes times and dates: 10am – 1pm Fri, sitting on strange objects. These pieces had me thinking of the Surrealist game, *Exquisite Corpse*. It is as if the artist has made these objects through some random process of selection, and they sort of come together in the end. They resonated again for me, on stepping out of the gallery, when street signs suddenly hummed with surrealist potential.

Around the corner from Simpkin's sign posts, I came across Patrick Pound's range of found (or refound) objects. The act of collection and recollection in Pound's work struck me as a more creepy type of taxonomy, or categorising – plundering strangers' lives, lifting intimate moments and (re)placing them in a seamless collision with others'. 'Girlfriends' for example showed old snapshots of young women in a variety of settings, some of whom reappear in 'The Photographers', faded shots of people holding cameras (reminiscent of old knitting pattern books, populated with Brady bunch families). These once innocuous snapshots become like missing persons' records – the absence of identity is eerie.

Eerie in a different way is 'The Names': a flock of

badges in shapes of girl's names, pinned to the wall like a butterfly collection, casting shadows. They remind me of the chewed gum sculptures/objects of Hannah Wilke, which she moulded with her mouth into vulva-like badges which she stuck to her body.

Of all the artists' work, the rubric of the fetish is most apparent in Pound's. According to Freud, the male fetish is an object which stands for something else: the woman's body, specifically the genitals, gateway to the First Home. Lost and found, collecting and (re)collecting – this work leaks longing from every pore. (In the absence of any women artists' practice in the gallery at this time, I'm tempted to (mis)read the missing figure as that of Woman, haunting the gallery as a disembodied voice, a trophy-like nametag, a fashion magazine cut-out, a nameless, bikini clad object in a found photograph.)

This compulsion to revisit, to return to the scene of the crime also infiltrates Richard Lewer's work. His wall drawing, 'You can't always get what you want' represents the gallery wall from floor to ceiling as a perforated peg board, on which is inscribed a 1960s suburban house, a child's face, splattered with graphite marks, and a graphite ghost dog, rubbed out, looking over the house. Shadows, cracks and cavities are drawn around periphery of the scene as if edges are eroding. A real rifle is tucked away in an adjacent corner, discreetly tethered to the wall (by the gallery? just in case?).

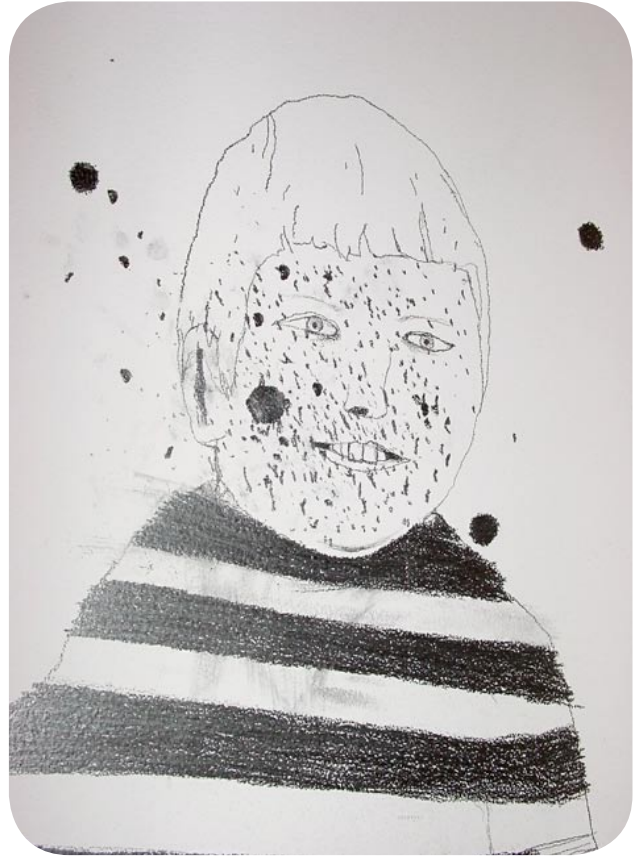
The drawing slips between *trompe l'oeil* and mimetic perspectival space. But not a fixed space – we seem to be looking down at a scene also, a park bench with two people sitting on it, and adjacent chair blacked out – another vertiginous viewpoint. Are we now the ghost dog? Actually, this image becomes more disturbing the longer you look at it. At first, I just enjoyed the fact that there was some drawing in the gallery, before reading the story. But the unease mounts as the signs all point to something quite yukky taking place out of frame.

In some ways it is this domestic disturbance which binds the show/s. Carol Duncan characterises the (modernist) museum as a ritualistic space, the building as a labyrinthine female body through which (male) supplicants wend their way to eventual transcendental enlightenment. Reading this work through the mode of fetish and collection/recollection, and the dynamic of repetition compulsion that haunts the Surrealist uncanny, the sense of Lost Boys is inescapable to me.

The trip to the Adam Art Gallery was like being a sightseer wandering down Memory Lane. I found myself constructing maps of other people's intimate spaces. The map became the thing I took away with me – fleshed out, the way maps are, by my own engagement with the territory.

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Pippa Sanderson is a Wellington-based artist and writer. She has just completed an MFA at Massey University (Wellington) where she teaches part-time.

Chant Down Babylon System!

Cultural Provocation: Art, Activism and Social Change, a marae-based hui and conference, Auckland, 29-31 August, 2003

I was fairly consumed with anticipation for Cultural Provocation – for a start, I knew the organisers, and I had heard many tales of the arduous birth of the project (matched only by the 37 hour epic labour which organiser Joyce Campbell underwent a month prior). Secondly, I was teaching a course on “Indigenous Issues” at the Manukau School of Visual Arts (I know, I know, a Little White Squibba like myself, the irony is not lost on me) and this conference was tailor-made to my needs. Thirdly, I hadn’t stayed on a marae for a very long time, and I’d been out of the country just long enough (three years) to really appreciate and miss what it is that makes Aotearoa so unique – our continuing and dogged attempt to grow with our indigenous culture when most of the rest of the world seems to have given up (or else they simply didn’t care in the first place).

The conference was the brain child of Jon Bywater, Joyce Campbell, Ann Shelton, and US academic John Welchman, with Natalie Robertson initially acting in an advisory capacity. Originally, *Cultural Provocation* was conceived as an Artspace¹ project, and was designed primarily to bring overseas academics to a New Zealand audience. But as some top-billing names fell out of circulation (Ken Lum and Adrian Piper among them) the emphasis started to shift. The bait to lure the international speakers was, of course, indigenous – the thought of giving presentations alongside Maori radicals in a traditional tribal setting is hard for the global activist-intelligentsia to resist. Pretty soon the organisers realised that for the conference to work, it had to shift its focus to become more localised, otherwise the Maori element would be relegated to mere tokenism. With this in mind, the relationship with Robertson (of Te Ara Poutama at AUT) was formalised, and Robertson garnered the support and guidance of Te Miringa Hohaia, kaitiaki of Parihaka Marae.

The organisers felt pretty positive about having followed tikanga, having obtained support from the mana whenua of Nga Kete Wananga and from Arnold Wilson, kaumatua of MVSA, but they were in for a surprise. Despite their best efforts, an anonymous angry email accused them of overlooking the tangata whenua of Tamaki Makaurau – a reminder that Maori are not “one race”, and the connection of location to iwi cannot be underestimated. But by the time this missive came through, it was too late to change anything – the organisers forged ahead with baited breath.²

As it happens, no protest over this issue was ever made public, and most of the three days passed without even a whiff of controversy, although the third day saw some factions emerge. What follows is a chronology of thoughts and feelings relating to various

speakers and events. It is not a complete record of the conference, but I have tried to be thorough without needlessly exhausting a patient reader.

Friday 29th August

The powhiri was short and sweet, and it was wonderful to be welcomed into such a beautiful house – the first time I had seen the Nga Kete Wananga marae, despite teaching at MSVA. The role of the marae itself cannot be underestimated in terms of the success of the hui, and the difference to the third day of proceedings, when we shifted to the School of Architecture conference suite, was marked (some viewers even speculated that the bad blood that surfaced wouldn’t have seen the light of day on the marae). To be sitting comfortably, on your choice of mattresses or chairs, inside a house whose every inch is covered in details that are both beautiful and meaningful, to be bathed in colour and form and sound, is, for want of a better word, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or “total work of art” that is always eluding Western practitioners. I cannot understand why we don’t use the hui mode more often – because it makes learning a pleasure. Instead, we seem wedded to the sick-building syndrome (MSVA’s classrooms look more and more like an L Budd installation every day).

So, there I was, lying on my mattress, letting the speakers ebb and flow around me, giving my students a good laugh when I fell asleep (well, I’ve seen them fall asleep enough times). Throughout proceedings, I could not help a sense of overwhelming beatitude. I asked Rakai Gul, an adult student from MSVA, how similar or different this felt from a regular iwi get-together. She said it was exactly the same, that wharenui had the same effect on all people, that they were designed that way.

I felt something similar when I attended a sweatlodge ceremony in the US. Namely, that this piece of tribal wisdom, this ancient ritual, had been perfected over centuries, probably millennia, and it was so simple, but so perfect; church, a trip, group therapy, and a health spa all rolled into one. I couldn’t understand why this model isn’t practiced everywhere, simply because it MAKES SENSE. Likewise, how are there any “conferences” any more in this sad world of ours? Why aren’t they all hui?

Cultural Provocation was, I think, the most successfully “bi-cultural” event I have ever been to. I’ve been to so many conferences, art openings, and launches, in which protocol has been tokenistically followed out of a sense of duty, to the point when “dial-a-powhiri” became a joke in art world circles. For the first time, I felt that the combination of speakers and issues was pretty much an even combination of Pakeha and Maori (of course it went beyond this and there was other cultural representation, but the two treaty partners were for once given approximately equal weight). I never once felt marginalised as Pakeha on the marae



– hell, there was even vegetarian food and espresso – bi-culturalism at its finest! Likewise it was gratifying to see so many more brown faces in attendance than at business-as-usual art events.

After the hongi, registration, milling around, and a fine dinner, we adjourned to the wharenui to watch **Merata Mita's** new documentary *The Dread* about Maori Rastafarians in Ruatoria.

I had seen many of these Rastas in the book *Moko: Maori Tattoos* by the photographer Hans Neleman, where they appeared aggressive and out-of-it; lost souls. Mita's film, by contrast, showed a thriving rural community that farmed nearly all its own organic produce, made intricate carvings, cooked, prayed and played music together. I asked Mita what she saw as being the differences between her movie and Neleman's book. Mita said that she'd heard Neleman interviewed and had been extremely angry, because he was quite open about the fact that he was making this book for personal profit. The book sold well and the Rasta community never saw any royalties (this despite a note in the book that said royalties would go towards the return of mokomokai – the tattooed ancestral heads held in museum collections around the world.) Mita said that in all her work, she tries to empower the community that she is documenting, or else the documenter becomes just another exploiter.³

One gaffe I kick myself over, is the fact that **Tame Iti** was sitting right next to Mita when I asked her about the book *Moko*. I had forgotten that not only was Iti portrayed in the book, he even wrote one of the essays. It was very uncool that I didn't acknowledge his involvement when I was questioning Mita. She didn't mention it, and he didn't speak up. But now I can't help wondering what he would have said on the issue.

Cultural Provocation panel featuring, from left, Natalie Robertson, Grant Kester, Luc Tutugoro, Peter Robinson, Tame Iti, Ngahiraka Mason. Video still: Nova Paul.

As we were getting ready for bed we were treated to classical Maori instruments, taonga puoro, played by Te Miringa Hohaia, Chaz Doherty, and dance by Terri Ripeka Crawford from the School of Performing Arts at Waikato University; a haunting way to be lulled into sleep.⁴

Saturday 30th August

Saturday morning kicked off with **Te Miringa Hohaia** talking about his work as caretaker at Parihaka Marae and also the exhibition *Parihaka* which he had been instrumental in organising at the City Gallery Wellington.

Hohaia mentioned the recent visit of a foreign delegation from Soka Gakkai, a Japanese Buddhist Peace group, Gandhi's grandson and the Dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel. This kind of international recognition of the important role of Parihaka prophets Te Whiti and Tohu, whom even Gandhi had heard of and was inspired by, cannot be underestimated.

Hohaia shared with us his vision for the future – that the villains of the past like Chief Justice James Prendergast and others responsible for needless slaughter, wrongful arrest and subsequent enslavement of the people of Parihaka, should be condemned in Parliament (interestingly Hohaia referred to these Pakeha powermongers from bygone days in the present tense – these wounds were obviously still very raw). Meanwhile, Hohaia felt that Te Whiti and Tohu should be acknowledged on a national level, and the Soka Gakkai/King/Gandhi

delegation was a positive start because they awarded the Parihaka leaders a medal and presented this honour at the Beehive.

Rangihiroa Panoho pointed to the original 'cultural provocation' of Hone Heke cutting the flagpole and much more recently, Ben Nathan, the America's Cup smasher. Nathan had noted that as history had vindicated Heke, so too he would be vindicated for his "crime." What I didn't realise was that Nathan had left an installation behind him, including a speech by Theodore Roosevelt screwed up and stained with blood in the smashed case. A real artist/activist, then? Looking up Ben Nathan on-line it seems he's writing and acting these days in Dargaville; just last year he staged a solo show that was commended by both Dean Parker and Don Selwyn.

Panoho went into a detailed discussion of works by Para Matchitt and Emily Karaka, which I realised on reflection, were reiterations of his famous "Maori, at the Centre, On the Margins" essay from the *Headlands* catalogue back in 1992. I know that Panoho, "the first Maori with a PhD in Art History" has done a great deal of work in the intervening eleven years, but his korero had me wondering what he thought of Michael Parekowhai, Shane Cotton, Peter Robinson, Lisa Reihana, and other important artists that had come into prominence since his seminal essay?

Panoho did mention Maureen Lander's *This is not a kete* and said that it referred to the divide between the western art world and the Maori world of taonga. After he spoke, Tina Barton got up and said that she had been the curator of the show where Maureen had first presented the work, and that she thought there were other valid readings of the work. Panoho had a peculiar attitude to questions from the audience – he seemed to want to dodge them altogether.

After Panoho there followed a number of different panels. While it was great to see such a variety of people engaged, the amount of time each individual was given to talk was negligible, allowing for only brief glimpses of ideas, some of which I've picked out below.

Peter Robinson presented slides of his work and my favourite was the piece that involved constructing a Real Estate billboard "For Sale" outside an Austrian Kunsthalle. Robinson said that he had stopped making political work because he had become disillusioned with his own status on the national and international "circuit." However, his apolitical works started to bore him also, and he felt it was impossible to ignore politics post 9-11, so his recent work looks at issues of race, terrorism, etc... I thought it was great that the typically reticent Robinson was so open about his MO, although he did make a fuss about having the video camera turned off. He is, after all, an indigenous artist, and you know what they say about stealing souls...

Davina, who was very softly spoken, mentioned that one of her projects is protesting the plans to build a prison on tapu geothermal land up north in Ngawha. A prison on waahi tapu – sounds like Woomera in Australia, which was used to confine illegal immigrants, and look what happened (such a furor was made over the appalling conditions that the whole place was scrapped and a new urban prison was

built with public scrutiny). It also reminds me of the movie *The Kingdom* in which the victims of Victorian scientific experiments were buried in a marsh where years later a giant hospital was built. The haunted hospital was literally coming apart at the seams. Well, I sent a letter of protest to the Minister of Corrections and he assured me that all the correct avenues had been followed⁵ so now I don't know who to believe.

Sean Cubitt gave a hyperactive presentation on the idea that art might have reached the end of its use value. Cubitt was playing devil's advocate – he knew his livelihood depended on the institutionalisation of art but he thought it was time to barbecue the sacred cow and see if art wasn't over-rated or even antithetical to social change. He even went as far as saying that art, which normalises theft, was no different from the insidious forces of globalisation which cannibalise indigenous cultures.

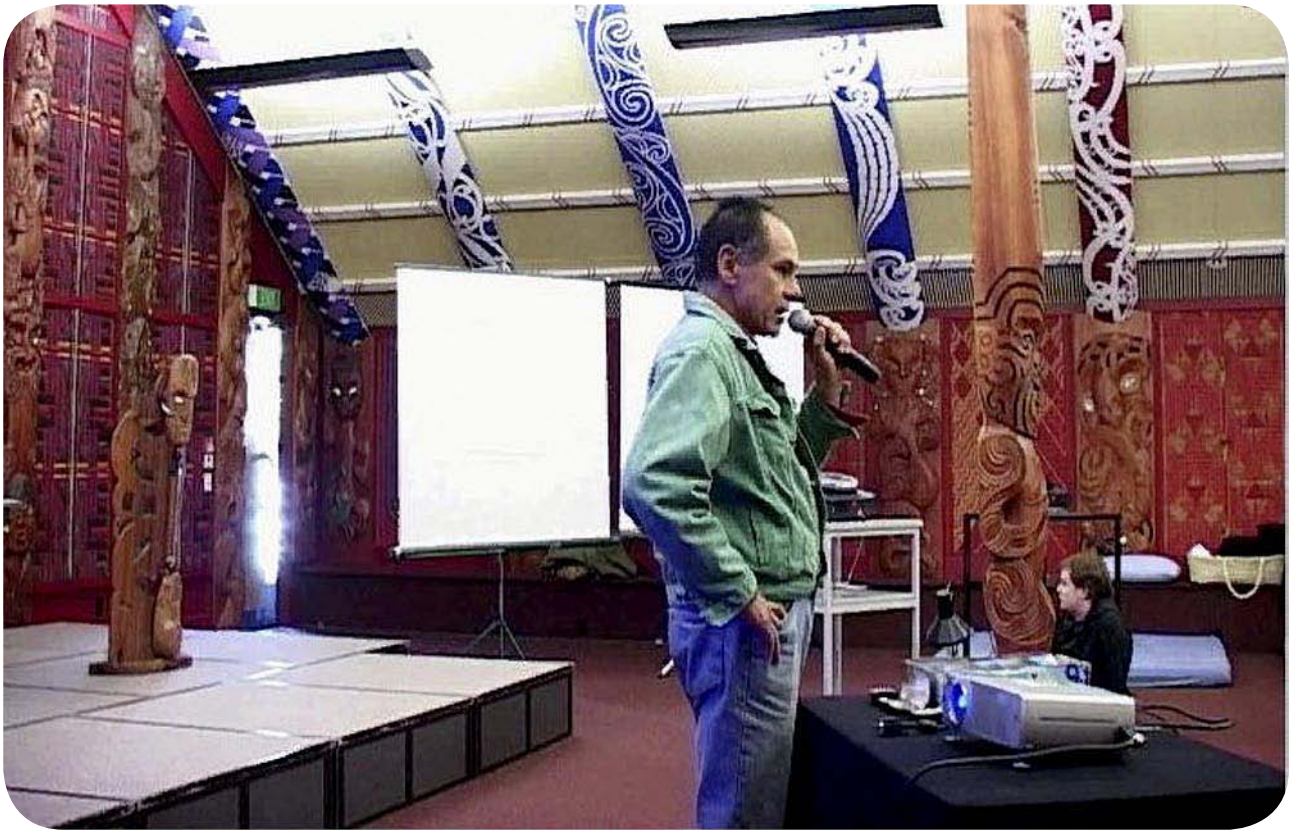
Sadly enough for me, coming from MSVA's Contextual Studies department, the people who were most excited about Cubitt's talk were MSVA students who thought they detected a "theory is dead" theme, when 1) he was being facetious and 2) he was talking about the death of art as a whole, not just the death of theory. Loloma Andrews piped up from the audience that she found the compulsory theory quotient at school very difficult, saying "us indigenous artists work intuitively," as if there was only one kind of indigenous artist working in one way. This rampant essentialism went unchecked which is troubling since I heard "essentialism" listed as the main reason why three people I knew weren't interested in attending the hui. They had decided, in advance, that it would all be about blanket statements, feel-good platitudes for the brown folk and compulsory guilt-mongering for the whites. I don't think they were right, but neither do I think that the academic standard of the presentations was particularly high (which to be honest was probably one of the reasons I enjoyed it so much). On the other hand, at dinnertime Hohaia admitted to me that he'd been finding the level of discourse difficult to follow, proving that you can't please everyone. He singled out Cubitt for praise, and I think it's to Cubitt's merit that although he's widely published, he can read his audience, and adjust his tone accordingly.

Dean Hapeta AKA Te Kupu dominated the afternoon. I started thinking that maybe the man is a genius. He said the whole reason to rhyme was to "Chant Down Babylon System" which I think would make a great t-shirt (or a good title for an article). He taught himself Te Reo – he wasn't born speaking it. In fact, he let us in to a little secret – his white mother had him singing in the choir and taking violin lessons!⁶

Hapeta left us with a DVD for after-dinner viewing of his travels to places as diverse as Australia, Colombia, Hawaii, Jamaica and Cuba. Called *Ngatahi – Know the Links*, we saw the first part of a four part 'rapumentary' focusing on indigenous hip-hop. This was low-key filmmaking with a very DIY aesthetic, but it worked. I really admire Hapeta, he's the kind of person who makes things happen. He gets out there, he meets people, he makes connections.

Sunday 31st August

The final day was held at the University of Auckland School of Architecture – it was a big shame to leave



the Marae!

Te Miringa Hohaia. Video still: Nova Paul.

Unfortunately, **Merata Mita** couldn't show us clips of Alanis Obomsawin (Native Canadian filmmaker) as advertised, because the tapes hadn't arrived in time, but she did show us some segments of the wonderful Australian Aboriginal feature *Beneath Clouds*. Again I was struck by what I can only describe as Mita's "wisdom" – a devastating combination of beauty (at 60 plus!) calm and anger, like Mother Kali; emanating warmth and warnings at the same time.

I had been looking forward to **John Welchman** because he has a reputation as a first class academic, but his presentation seemed to be very much a traditional Eurocentric⁷ art history lecture. He talked about the "overprivileged couplet" of *Cultural Provocation*, and used the title as a springboard; having entered it into a Google search engine he proceeded to list all the random ephemera that he'd pulled up, an "absurd scrambling" and "carnival of metaphors" that was supposed to reflect the zeitgeist, I guess.

Welchman quoted Peter Burger who said that the problem with art based on provocation is that after a while it no longer provokes. Shock becomes a ritual, it becomes outmoded. However, I was thinking that "ritual" is exactly what is missing in the Western world. Why do we shy away from repetition, why are we forever craving the shock of the new? Welchman's presentation had meant to reexamine the efficacy of some of the canonical "provocative" art of the 20th Century, and he conceded that Sean Cubitt's presentation the day before had covered some of the same ground, albeit in a more "pantomimic" fashion – an insult whichever way you slice it, but softened with the proviso "and maybe more effective." Well, maybe it was. For, oddly enough, Welchman the seasoned lecturer only got a quarter of the way

through his paper. "I shouldn't have written a four hour paper, I don't know what I was thinking." We got up to Freud and Stalin. Who knows where the paper was supposed to go?

Panoho got up and after a cursory thank you started saying how sick he was of everyone in Art History being hung up on the West and Europe as the centre of all discourse. He said that in his own work, he manages to be a "bridge" between cultures, and asked Welchman why he couldn't be. Welchman said that he thought that was Panoho's job, and a large chunk of the audience started clapping (lead by Jenny Harper with a very jolly old girl "hear hear!") Panoho left hurriedly – everyone assumed he was in a huff, but apparently he had an appointment to keep and hadn't taken offence at all. Nevertheless, I couldn't help feeling as though a pall had been cast over proceedings.

The wonderful **Andy Bichelbaum** of The Yes Men managed to lighten things up again with his incredible videos of his even more incredible stunts as a WTO impostor (check out www.yesmen.org and look out for a feature documentary on this group on film festival circuits). This is the funniest and most liberating stuff I have seen for a long time – but seeing is believing so I'm not going to go into it here.

Grant Kester from the University of California in San Diego strode about like a mad professor as he pontificated on Empire and art and architecture from Tibet to New Caledonia. I think what set apart these two presentations from Welchman's in the minds of the audience was that although none of them mentioned local politics, all of them hailed from the US, and all of

them were white males, Kester and Bichelbaum were clearly engaged in some kind of counter-hegemonic struggle, while Welchman seemed to be situated in the very locus of Eurocentric power. (Ironically, it was Welchman's kudos and nouse that had secured the participation of Bichelbaum and Kester, yet these superb choices only made Welchman appear the more dry and pompous by comparison.) Perhaps Welchman's brand of provocation was too subtle to register on our activists' richter scale, or perhaps he had, with devilish smarts, orchestrated the whole thing to get us incensed?

Jenny Harper, director of Art History at Victoria University talked about the continuing controversy over her displaying the Peter Robinson painting *Untitled (Pakeha Have Rights Too)* in her office. The painting features a swastika and has been found offensive by both Maori and Jewish students and staff. Harper says that the painting "stood for the way we teach Art History" which I guess was supposed to mean "we defend controversial works" but could just have easily meant "we teach from a fascist, Eurocentric perspective".

Harper claims she was only alerted to the offence the work might cause a Jewish person in 2001! This seems plain ignorant, as I was involved in a panel on the TV programme *Backch@t* in 1998 which included a Rabbi who said many Jews would be offended by such a work. She now has a Jewish colleague who has been asking her to remove the work for the past two years. I think that if Harper were in the US, where there are so many Jewish intellectuals in seats of power, she would never be allowed to get away with this. Even the way she pronounced the word holocaust – "hollycost" – sounded glib – as if she was discussing the price of Christmas wreaths, not the murder of millions.

Harper mentioned all the controversy surrounding the exhibition *Mirroring Evil* at the Jewish Museum in New York last year which is the first time the institution really looked at artists' fascination with the propaganda of the Nazi Party. Of course many people thought this show was in poor taste while others thought it was a valuable window into the human psyche and of a specific historical moment. However, I think it is less than genuine of Harper to make this comparison given that the Jewish Museum is dedicated to issues of Jewish experience, run by and for Jewish people, while Harper's office has never and will never be a site dedicated to the cultural experience of a minority group, it is a seat of academic power in which Harper is used to exercising her birthright to total control, and she always acts surprised when anyone else gets offended by this.

Many people in the audience let Harper know that they were offended by the painting and by her continuing to hang it in her office. Hohaia, however, said that he would be delighted to hang the work at Parihaka. I think, though, that this was just his polite way of segueing into a story about the menfolk from his area who fought in World War II. I could see him getting angry as he said that Pakeha treated the Maori Battalion so badly, and that the reason the Maori Battalion were such good fighters, is that they were letting out all their aggression from accumulated frustration at their lowly place in New Zealand society. The passion in his speech underlined by its very

omission exactly what Harper was lacking: respect.⁸

One concession Harper made at the close of the day, was that irony has its own cultural relativity – and that maybe it doesn't travel well across cultures. This was a brave admission, and it's something we all need to be reminded of.

Annie Goldson talked about the Counterterror documentaries she made in the 1980s in New York. These works are more relevant than ever, as they trace instances in which so called "terrorists" have been brought to justice, and give some of the background on why they resorted to acts of violence in order to have their voices heard. Goldson's clear-headed contribution to just causes cannot be underestimated. Her work is not about having a "signature" or personal fame, it is simply about telling stories that no one else is.

Leonie Pihama showed a video she made called *Not Negotiable*. It was an "anti-colonial" video as opposed to "post-colonial" which Pihama said was a misnomer, since as Bobbie Sykes (Australia's first Aboriginal woman PhD) said, "I didn't see anyone leave, so how can we be "post-colonial"?" I thought the sentiments of the video were important, but the production values undermined the message. There was blood dripping down a book (a bible?) and it was too fake, then to make matters worse, a little plastic water-pistol masquerading as a gun! Usually, I love lo-fi, but the serious intentions of this video required something more convincing.

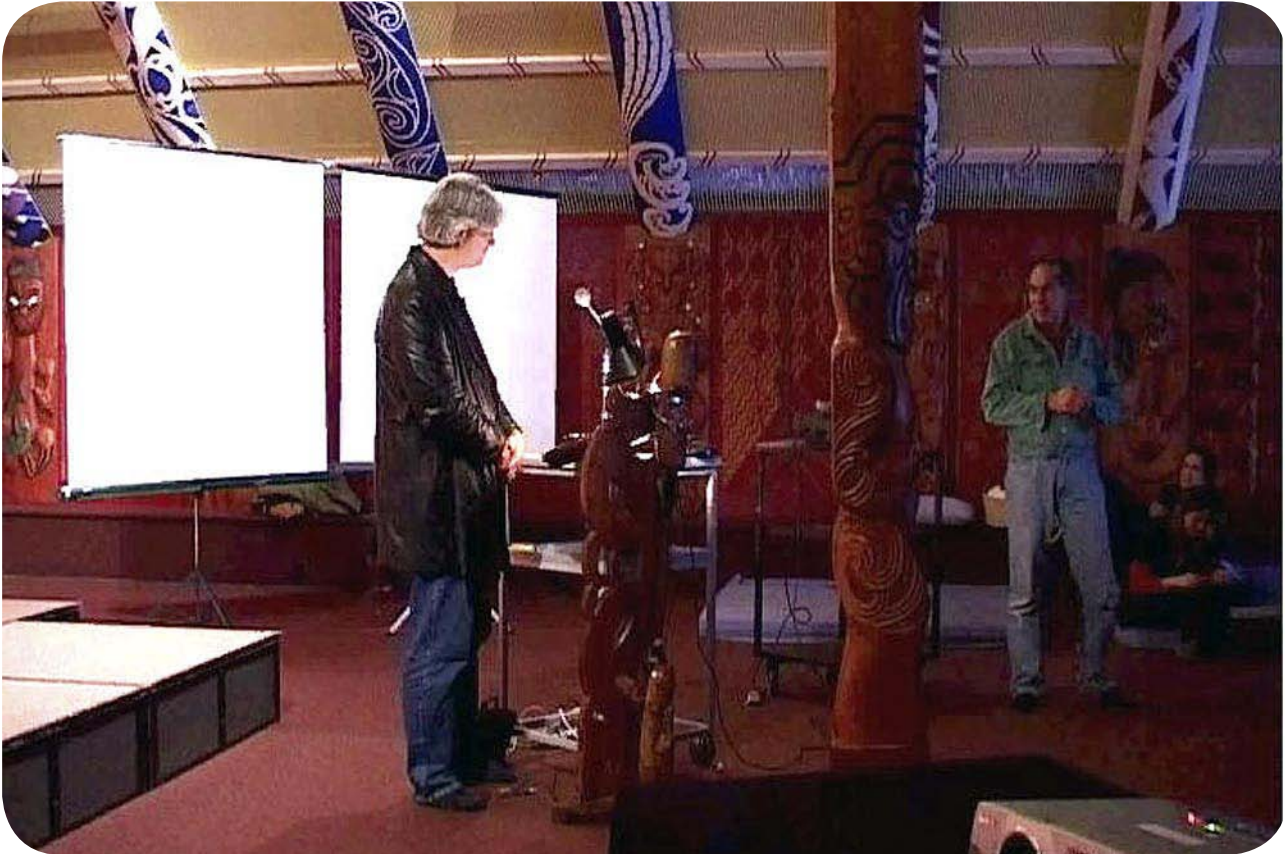
Last of all, there was a final panel of the day's speakers. A few questions were asked and then I heard Danny Butt ask Welchman the question I was too afraid to ask, which was why he had sidestepped Panoho's question. Butt also asked why everyone had clapped when Welchman had said to Panoho "That's your job." Harper admitted (proudly, of course) to being the one that lead the clapping, because she thought that it was an admirable sentiment (let the Maoris look after themselves?) Pihama said that people clapped because they'd been "let off the hook."

Mita wasn't going to let Welchman off the hook, she said, "When I go overseas I do my homework." Welchman said that he HAD done his homework, he'd just chosen not to talk about local issues. This is his right, I guess, but I still couldn't fathom why someone who had been so integral to the genesis of the conference had ended up seeming so antithetical to its spirit.

The debate could have gone on longer, but Joyce Campbell suddenly jumped up at five minutes to 7pm and said that the doors were going to automatically lock so we'd better get out. Hohaia did a hurried but beautiful closing prayer and we all left in a hurry. But we continued to discuss these issues in the weeks and months that followed...

Notes

1. Strangely, both Robert Leonard and Tobias Berger, former and current directors of Artspace, were conspicuous by their absence from the entire conference proceedings, despite Artspace contributing significant funds to the project.
2. To be fair, Hohaia had for some time been stressing the



importance of local support, and in his closing speech said that if another conference was to be held, it would be under the supervision of tangata whenua.

Rangihiroa Panoho. Video still: Nova Paul.

3. Interestingly, Hans Neleman's latest photobook is called *Night Chicas* and consists of portraits of Guatemalan prostitutes. The paperback retails at US\$50. I wonder if any of the profits went back to the women who are its subject?
4. "Sleep" of course is a euphemism for having one's head drilled to bits by ungodly choruses of snores – which makes the option of listening to the next days proceedings on your mattress a matter of necessity rather than choice.
5. "The decision of the Environment Court, which was subsequently upheld by the High Court and the Court of Appeal, was that there was no evidence that the site was waahi tapu. The latter decision was also supported by Ngati Rangi, who are the hapu acknowledged as kaitiaki (guardians) of the land on which the facility is being built." Paul Swain, letter dated 5 November, 2003
6. This reminded me of the scene in the awful 8 Mile where Eminem outs his adversary in the MC battle for being a mummy's boy from a well-off part of town. Eminem may be the only whiteboy in the room, but he figures if he doesn't lie, he can't be dissed. So he lists all the embarrassing things that could be said about him; yes, he IS white trash, he DOES live in a trailer with his Mom. Hapeta was kind of doing the same by letting us know his shamefully middle-class roots before any whities could out him. But he didn't need to worry, co-panelist Daniel Malone was too in awe of Hapeta to say much at all...for a change!
7. I know I started out this article lauding the traditions of Native American sweatlodges and Maori hui, and now here I am dissing the traditions of the European academy. The difference, I suppose, is hegemonic powerplay. When something becomes the norm, it deserves to be questioned. Maybe if art history

lectures became clandestine events in danger of being shut down by the ruling elite, as sweatlodges had to be for many years, the inherent mana of the slide-show-and-pompous-drawl will overwhelm me with its arcane mystery.

8. Gwyn Porter was rolling her eyes at the earnest debate and said to me "I'll give you \$50 if you mention Manwoman." Manwoman is a crazy Canadian who has dedicated his life to redeeming the swastika. I have a copy of his book *The Gentle Swastika* which talks about the history of the symbol, which was alive and well millennia before its Nazi appropriation. Personally, this is far more interesting to me than Peter Robinson's painting, and a far more genuine crusade than the one Harper is involved in. I mentioned Manwoman but I told Porter to keep her \$50. She said she'd give it to an animal charity.

Tessa Laird is an artist and writer living in Auckland.

M.A.P.i. (Method Abstract Plastic interview)

M.A.P. (Method Abstract Plastic)

Masato Takasaka and Justin Andrews

Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne

21.11.03 – 13.12.03

MA.P. (Method Abstract Plastic) was exhibited in Studio 12 at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Melbourne folk Masato and Justin work within the vocabulary of geometric abstraction and were interested in developing a collaborative process for the exhibition. They wanted to see whether this method would open up new possibilities in the way they approach their own individual art-making. One of the aspects of this exhibition that I liked was the way in which you could immediately get involved with the work. As there was no single product, you didn't need to decipher the intent. The process, which was the product, was directly revealed to the audience.

M.A.P. (Method Abstract Plastic) has developed through a collaborative process, even though you were both making work individually. Viewing the objects separately, they seem to become increasingly affected by the other person's output. What processes had you initially established to produce the work?

JA (Justin Andrews): The main idea of this project was to produce a string of work which pointed towards its own collaborative process... just as much as any one object which was made out of it. M.A.P. started out quite algorithmically – constraints and conditions were set for each stage of the project.

A series of alternatively fabricated works were to be made – four from Masato and four from myself, so that each work was informed by, and derived from a new and unpredicted study. This way, the direction of the project was to remain unknown until the end. A level of analysis was always required... each work had to operate as a drawing of something not entirely known. This way, the project was in a constant state of change, but the process was to remain consistent. This closeness that you refer to comes from the evolution of two variations upon the language of geometric abstraction... both from separate studio environments. This progressive level of affect comes from an increasing familiarity of the other artist's mark, or from a growing inclination of how (in my case) Masato may interpret a set of elements within one of my own paintings.

However, having said all this, one of the aims was to push this process as much as possible. As Masato and I have found out, the furthest one can push something is until its own laws are broken, or until pre-set conditions are deconstructed. But this is another matter from what you're asking here.

MT (Masato Takasaka): For me, the focus of this project was on the translation of a two-dimensional image (Justin's painting) into one of my sculptures...

and it was interesting to see how Justin would interpret my translation back into a painting again... We both work in a vocabulary of geometric abstraction. We are able to work with 'speaking' the same language... although our approaches and methodologies are quite different. For instance, Justin takes a very technical approach to the making of his paintings and the masking of each area... a painstakingly time-consuming approach... but in the end you get these hard edges and the way he uses paint ends up looking like computer-cut vinyl or something...

My approach to things is to try and keep as much of the visible hand-made 'dodginess' as possible... by cutting the foamcore the wrong way you end up getting these really burred edges... I guess I like the look of this anti-technical way of making. I can't be bothered doing it properly anyway. I tend to make my sculptures very quickly because they rely on an improvised process of making...

In the end, both Justin's approach and mine are quite different, yet the value in the 'making' of the work is still really high. Having the chance to study the planes and forms that make up each composition in Justin's paintings is challenging to try and build on sculpturally. Curious as it may be, the work is starting to look like models of contemporary art museums... maybe I'm looking at too many glossy architecture mags...

You both mentioned different elements involved in the translation from painting to sculpture and back again. One of the elements I liked a lot is where opportunities seem to open up between the different mediums you both work in. There's a sculpture where a white void in the previous painting is represented as a white plane in the sculpture, when it literally could have been left as a void. In one of the paintings the surfaces seem to take on the thickness of the foamcore. Do you both feel that responding to a different medium has been an important part of the process in breaking down your individual approaches and allowing an exploration of your work in different ways?

JA: M.A.P. has shown me that the interpretation, and then the offering of results are equally important parts to the process of collaboration. Different rules apply to the logic of objects when they occupy changing kinds of space. I would suggest that my paintings operate within a perceived space. Masato's work, whilst originating from a sense of constructed illusionism, must adhere to the laws of the physical. This is where the M.A.P. project succeeds – it allows for rules to be made and redefined within each successive stage. The white spaces being transformed into built white planes is a perfect example of this.

The development of my own 3D to 2D translation would have to be the most intuitive facet of M.A.P – the area of it that I have been the most interested in. Making highly deliberate paintings from relatively visceral situations has been very challenging. It has



Masato Takasaka/Justin Andrews, *M.A.P. 4* (2003), foamcore/acrylic on board

been interesting to see how the apparently organic direction of the project has worked through some of the more deliberate continuations such as colour formulae and scale, which we tried to use as constants to link the project together.

The most interesting thing is how people read space. Masato uses elements of anamorphosis to point towards some of the perspectival distortion within my paintings. He does this through the use of foreshortened/extended sculptural planes. My works for this project were derived from manipulated digital photographs. Some side-sections of Masato's foamcore are carried through to the next painting due to decisions involving colour and composition.

For me, M.A.P. has been an exploration more into the process of collaboration, rather than into my own system of abstraction. This project has definitely developed some of my ideas on the specific properties of sculpture. There is a literal presence to three-dimensional work that two-dimensional paintings (of three-dimensional structures) can only allude to... but in another sense, sculpture can never simultaneously redefine itself in the way that abstract painting can.

MT: The project has evolved with each painting/sculpture set. We have learnt to adapt each other's visual characteristics. Even though we are working on this project in a collaborative sense, there is the freedom of working independently in our own individual studios. In this sense, I have found that working in collaboration can be about the exchange of ideas and about points of similarity, whilst negotiating a level of autonomy within the project.

I have been thinking a lot about the sense of time and memory... about how this has been translated/interpreted into paintings and sculptures, and then back again... how there is a sense of transformation going on... the starting image that Justin painted being some kind of 'generic' signifier of a architectural structure... then gradually the image has been cut, exploded, expanded, compressed, and flattened out to produce a more complex and specifically multi-layered diagram.

I'm interested in the conceptual strategies behind paper architecture and the relationship between 'virtual models' of architecture and the making of models of abstract sculpture. I am interested in

collapsing the two forms to produce something that is neither an architectural model nor an abstract sculpture... but something somewhere in between. It's interesting to see people's reaction when they come to the studio to see the work in progress, for them to see the fabrication differences between the paintings and the sculptures. If I wanted my work to be perfect I would have got an architectural model maker to produce them. Exposing the materiality of the foamcore adds some kind of life or character to the material and the to sculpture... This is a very important point.

Someone who is unfamiliar with your work buys a piece. Is the work, for example, one of Justin's paintings, signed Justin Andrews and Masato Takasaka, Justin Andrews with Masato Takasaka, or do you maintain individual authorship? The work is produced individually, with the other person seeing the work when it is completed, yet it is reliant on that person's previous piece, along with the various discussions you have both had? What do you think about the idea of authorship in this situation?

JA: Authorship can become confusing if importance is mainly placed upon the situation that a work may reference or be created within, rather than in the actual artwork itself. The works from M.A.P. are derived from a mixture of both my own and Masato's observations (in every work), and so individual lines became increasingly blurred as the project went on – I think that's a sign of success in a project like this.

Selling work is a complex process; one that partly depends upon what the collector is wanting to buy – a single object, or a series altogether (the latter obviously being preferable here, in terms of keeping the project complete). I would say that the four M.A.P. stages from Masato and myself would be the lowest divisible states of this project. Each half of any one state is made in response to the other. Reasonings for one half of any stage will always lie within the other. It is for this reason that each pair must be presented as a single work, created by, from, and through the studios of both artists.

I am very interested in looking through artworks to find the concepts behind them. Collaborations most often involve aims, goals, or other kinds of hypotheses that may or may not be realised. These kinds of motives, and what happens in the interim are some of the most interesting aspects of a project like M.A.P. Because all of the works form points within this kind of pursuit, they all hold equal levels of importance. (Needless to say that they are all critical to the presentation of what actually happened in the M.A.P. process.)

Overall, Masato has described all this very articulately by suggesting that all works aim to point towards a moving (and at times enigmatic) idea of trying to document an entropic process of change via a number of works which act as contextual brackets, or as process markers.

MT: That's a really good question Dave... it's a challenging question to answer. My individual practice tends to question notions of 'value' in terms of X amount of labor = X amount of money. I would say that the project calls into question the formal dollar values associated with painting and sculpture. I suppose it could be interesting to see what would be worth more – the painting or my sculpture. But having said that, I'm not really interested in the outright commercial



Masato Takasaka/Justin Andrews, *M.A.P. 4* (2003), foamcore/acrylic on board.

side of the art equation which states that making + selling = value.

So what I'm trying to say is that this project aims to work beyond the idea of making the saleable item. The prospect of someone buying the work as a set (all paintings and sculptures) would be ideal because any one of the paintings or sculptures would not exist if it were not for all the other works. Meanings are best collected/presented completely. If you were interested in a painting and not the sculpture, it would be like buying a car without the engine...

You have both talked about an interest in the relationship between art and architecture. Masato mentioned generic contemporary art museum architecture and the final sculpture made me think of what Federation Square would look like if it collapsed! A lot of recent architectural projects, primarily because of the computer, have been driven by time-based processes like animation and parametric design. While these processes provide almost endless variation, I sometimes feel that the end product is highly controlled. The M.A.P. process is the 'product' and so in that way the question of when to stop, and therefore take control of a final product, doesn't really seem that important. How do you view this relationship with this kind of architecture?

JA: 'Architecture' is such a broad word. This project may appear architectural due to pre-existing meanings that connect our work with buildings and city forms. Throughout the research that I have conducted into geometric abstraction, I have found that this specific form of art and the urban environment (as a context or subject) are intrinsically related. Without getting too specific, I believe that geometric abstraction (that employs urban architecture) is a literal and direct means for the visual interpretation of the city. Whilst my work definitely falls in line with this, I would say that a much more interesting (and less tangible) form of architecture is at play here. Architectures of time, of duration, of occurrence and variation – these are the exact kinds of space you have mentioned, and may be visible within M.A.P.

Static works themselves reference a punctuated or singular occurrence. A number of static works can record a changing situation. This is how each M.A.P. work functions – both singularly, and as component

parts within the overall project. Within these kinds of heady and indefinite ideas is where M.A.P. really starts to pull away from the concrete notion of architecture. This is because it can succeed if it hints, or alludes, or even fails – all of which are indefinable outcomes in a strict, commercial, client/brief sense.

By stating that a work begins a sequence of events and another concludes it, a bracket is produced for all intermediary works to exist within – a kind of passage. The events that the transitional objects document are an intersection between the works and the process within this continuum. There is a notion of time in my own work, and there is a relationship between the paintings and animations that I make. I have been fortunate within this project in that I have been able to partly transfer my own processes into a collaborative setting, where an even broader range of media has been used. For this work to be seen as architectural is a definite success. Seeing the city and architectural abstraction as one (and attempting make this kind of work), is a view that this M.A.P. upholds, and one that I maintain at all times.

MT: The more I look at architecture, the more I realise the differences between what architects and what (like-minded) artists do – their practice is related to architecture but at the same time not... it seems that architects have to rely on measurements, requirements, engineering, plans and all this other complex stuff that is required for concepts to become built environments. I am interested in reading about paper architecture and projects about 'imagined' and 'fictional' space because I guess they're closer to what Justin and I are doing in this project. Even looking through architecture magazines... the photos presenting built work, e.g. museums, houses, etc., still have the look of being virtual, simply because of the hyper-real quality of the reproductions. This interpretation occurs when I look at buildings in magazines... it seems funny to think that these large buildings get condensed down to magazine size. What's stranger still is when you see people in the interiors or around the exteriors of the buildings, in the installation photos. They end up looking like props or something...

The comment I have made about 'generic museum architecture' is a comment made by people when they talk about what see in my sculptures. It's interesting that you think that my final sculpture looks like Federation Square collapsed... I think that it may be because everything in it balances precariously, on top of each other – I haven't glued any of it down... I hope it doesn't collapse during the exhibition!

Dave Morison is a graduate architect and undertakes projects with *IF THIS, THEN..... a collaborative studio based in Melbourne.

The artists wish to acknowledge the support of Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces & Deacons.

New Zealand's Pre-Raphaelite fetish: Sarah Ormsby at the High Street Project, Christchurch, 21 Oct – 08 November



and as we wind down the road
our shadows taller than our soul
there walks a lady we all know
who shines white light and wants to show
how everything [still] turns to gold

I can't actually confess to being this closeted Led Zeppelin fan. In fact I don't know the lyrics to this song, I doubt even if I've ever really heard the whole song out. I do though remember reading somewhere about Stevie Nicks and how her dress sense inspired the kiwi-sheila-bogan to spring to life. I think they quoted some of the sales numbers, but it didn't take long before I started to recognise that the tie-dyed tees and bogan-black, skintight and denim washes of erstwhile jeans mix-matched with sandals, cheap white sneakers, and mystic medallions, all owed a considerable appeal to the romance and nostalgia of what we could call, the b-list mysticism of Americana. These creped and fetid narratives of fortune-lost are probably at their most visible in that Led Zeppelin song "stairway to heaven". Now it's not that I'm even for one moment suggesting that Sarah Ormsby's paintings are anything like this. I don't think they are part of that same narrative, but I think it's worth pursuing, not for a line of descent or anything, but just because I think it could be amusing.

Borderline consists of two walls of paintings. One vertical series and another horizontal. We've recently just seen works by Ormsby at the *Fresh* gallery and I got really, really, excited at the ideas and notions of seriality that she was deploying at the time. Taking a simple rod like structure, Ormsby, laid out patterned narratives akin to a piano's key-board. It was possibly to count out structures of ascent, division or multiplication amongst her patterning of white, black, and green textures. Such mind games were kept so easily a toss by the beauty of the object's skein, their heavily imbued surfaces easily reflecting their environment, capturing and isolating our attention. Thus the surfaces were quickly drafted into narcissism's mirror, catching our curiosity in a



Left: Sarah Ormsby, *Borderline*, High Street Project, Christchurch.
Right: Stevie Nicks: "In this web that is my own, I begin again..."

moment of mesmerisation. This space became both one of inquisition and yet also became that solipsistic trap of detachment. As we puzzled the causes and notions of the serial that Ormsby had so patterned, their very surfaces encased our desire of knowledge. I think though if you're to follow such a line then its not so far off to that whole mystic line generated earlier. I mean how close can we get to something like this without becoming that mystically tie-died hippie and forget where we started - which if you remember was in a white gallery full of luscious high-end art objects. The painting this is all making me think of is that pre-Raphaelite icon of the kid looking into the water, even perhaps the one where the nymphs are about to drag the kid head over heels into those ever persistent lilies. I think its no surprise then that if Stevie Nicks sells so well in NZ then it's really obvious that the pre-Raphaelite show at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery will do exceptional sales as well.

—
jasperjhons lives in Christchurch and works at the cheeseshop.

Pataphysics Holiday Resort issue

Since its formation *Pataphysics* has often displayed dislocated images, not for any truly banal purposes, but rather to weight differently their symbolic dimension. Thus the attention an image gets is questioned. Magazines using found material – the detritus of an era – that’s nothing new. The published look of an eroded letter gives authenticity in a laser-writer reality. But when that ‘found material’ happens to be something you’ve written, a kind of private diary, as it were, and lost completely, not knowing where it went, and then to my complete shock it turns up in a magazine titled *Pataphysics*, then the argument at least for infringement of copyright emerges. The magazine itself seems almost scientific in layout, but at no time was there any attempt to contact me regarding the publication of my text (my telephone # in Amsterdam was on the back of the text reproduced). It’s called the Holiday Resort issue and initially it confounds with its large and varied range of contributions from artists, writers and theorists around the world. I recently visited their website at www.pataphysicsmagazine.com, and apparently the magazine was founded over a decade ago. There’s a wide field of archival material online, and the new issue includes photographs by and an in-depth interview with *Ken Park* director Larry Clark (*Pataphysics* first published Clark’s work in 1991), and artist Leon Golub talks of his *Mercenaries* paintings of the 1980s. There are stories by Joyce Carol Oates, *Semiotext(e)* magazine founder Sylvère Lotringer, Michal Govrin and the British sci-fi novelist, Brian Aldiss. Bruce LaBruce contributes an incisive text on one of Fassbinder’s lesser-known films, *Whity*, and there’re some poems and tarot punchlines by Tony Towle (whose poetry John Ashbery called ‘one of the New York School’s best kept secrets’). Italian writer Paolo Virno

discusses with great timeliness the concept of the ‘multitude’ along with the bad sentiments of cynicism and opportunism. Also in this issue Chris Kraus talks about the mystic and philosopher Simone Weil, and Weil’s influence on her. A pataphysical holiday resort then perhaps? But within this compendium of ideas, leisure becomes more a zone for thinking, and in the process the concept of ‘holiday resort’ blooms into an hallucinatory space: the cover displays a startling color photograph of what’s possibly a jungle retreat (constructed Schwitters-like from old pieces of wood). Flipping the magazine over you are given another version of this shanty, but with solarized film making large swathes of intense red and yellow – it’s like some other reality being illuminated by a light beam (or is it emerging from this recycled detritus house?). The photographs that introduce the issue evoke the initially haunted idea of this holiday resort: a barren building with a menacing portal – following this are various images – desert-like hills, a girl looking uneasy at a café, an elegiac image of a romantic treed vista and, perhaps equally saddened, a cliché island beach scene with leaning palm trees and fake-looking waves. Later on in this issue an editorial photo-essay of the West Gate Bridge in Melbourne accompanies Sylvère Lotringer’s interview with French theorist Alain Joxe – a tragic and formally beautiful structure, housing only movement, here comes to symbolize the scale, swoop and brutality of the new global Empire. The editors of *Pataphysics* seem to be suggesting – with both awkwardness and seamlessness – that conjunctions like Larry Clark’s kids and Simone Weil’s religious visions accompanied by images from baroque business parks and the delirium of German artist Albert Oehlen’s rhythms, might be the unlikely setting for a holiday resort that isn’t a last resort.

Mia van der Rohe, biographer of percussionist and theologian/educator Ranald White (dec.), alien resident of Amsterdam, the Netherlands, is identified as the sole holder of copyright pertaining to the previous text entitled ‘Re: Pataphysics Holiday Resort’, 9 copies of which have been forwarded without prejudice at the pre-court hearing (The Hague), Mia van der Rohe vs. Pataphysics magazine. <http://www.pataphysicsmagazine.com>

The Grammar of Discourse

Die Buchstaben des Diskurses



The Sky's The Limit: Fiona Banner, Daniela Brahm, Tobias and Raphael Danke, David Hatcher, Andrew McLeod, Peter Robinson, Yvonne Todd; curated by Astrid Mania, Kunstverein Langenhagen, 20 September – 7 November 2003

Installation view *The Sky's The Limit*, Kunstverein Langenhagen – Yvonne Todd, *Quaalude Eyes*; Peter Robinson, *Inflation Theory I*.

At the exhibition's entrance sits an oversized dot: one of the double-coded sculptures by Fiona Banner that inflate the basic elements of writing into abstract forms, stripping objectivity from all that enter their sphere of influence. With this gesture, curator Astrid Mania makes it clear from the outset that her group exhibition *The Sky's The Limit* explores tensions between aesthetic presentation and conceptual representation: the art works gathered are knowing signifiers in the semiotic fabric of a self-reflexive exhibition that acknowledges and scrutinizes the limits of artworks and exhibiting formats themselves.

It is easy to forget the degree to which the written word determines our culture—in the industrialized West, the ability to read and write is so second nature it seems virtually innate. As this exhibition proceeds with an investigation of the limits of knowledge and perception, doing so with the aid of contemporary visual work—that is, non-linguistic media—the thesis that our abstract thinking is thoroughly shaped by literacy is nevertheless being put to the test. From its origins occidental philosophy has always been determined by writing. The most pronounced feature of the much-discussed transition from the archaic myth to the philosophical logos is the emergence and dominance of prose. Once the Greek alphabet was able to materially fix the spoken word mnemonic techniques were no longer necessary, at which point the argumentative text of the philosophical logos displaced that of the myth that merely linked a number of narratives. Plato was the most important early

Am Anfang der Ausstellung steht ein überdimensionaler Punkt, eine jener doppeldeutigen Skulpturen von Fiona Banner, welche die Basis-Elemente der Schrift in rein abstrakte Formen verwandeln, wodurch jegliches Andere, das in den Sogkreis dieser Arbeiten gerät, gleichzeitig seiner bisherigen Selbstverständlichkeit beraubt wird. Dadurch macht die Kuratorin Astrid Mania gleich zu Beginn deutlich, dass es in der Gruppenausstellung „The Sky's The Limit“ um genau jene Spannung zwischen ästhetischer Präsentation und konzeptueller Repräsentation geht, dass die hier vereinten Kunstwerke jenseits aller formalen Kriterien als semiotische Signifikanten anzusehen sind, die bewusst ihre eigenen Grenzen aufzeigen und befragen.

Wie sehr die Schriftlichkeit unsere Kultur prägt, ist wohl nur den Wenigsten bewusst, schließlich gilt es uns als geradezu natürlich, lesen und schreiben zu können. Eine Ausstellung aber, die anhand zeitgenössischer Bildwerke – also nicht-schriftlicher Medien – die Grenzen von Erkenntnis befragt, belegt eindrucksvoll genau jene These, dass unser abstraktes Denken ganz und gar von der Literalität geprägt ist. Ist die abendländische Philosophie doch von ihren Anfängen an eine schriftbedingte. Das auffälligste äußere Merkmal des viel diskutierten Überganges vom archaischen Mythos zum philosophischen Logos bildet ja das Auftreten und Vorherrschen der Prosa: Da die griechische Alphabetschrift die gesprochene Rede material fixieren konnte, fiel die Notwendigkeit mnemotechnischer Hilfsmittel weg, und erst somit



Installation view of *The Sky's The Limit* at Kunstverein Langenhagen – works by (from left to right): Peter Robinson, Andrew McLeod, Fiona Banner, David Hatcher, Tobias and Raphael Danke, Daniela Brahm.

thinker to speculate on the theoretical implications of the alphabet for philosophy. In his dialogue “Philebos”, written at the relatively speaking–beginnings of occidental philosophy and science, Plato outlined functional attributes of the alphabet as the basic model for his metaphysics and by extension any form of scientific research. Just as the continuum of spoken language is reducible to a finite number of discrete characters in its written form, he argued, the diversity of the phenomenal world could be condensed to a comprehensible number of individual entities: the Platonic Ideas. Using analogies to grammar, where links between distinct phonemic and written signs constitute linguistic sense, Plato postulated the existence of a normative logic that preceded ontology.

The artists of the exhibition show a great deal of concern for this model of an eschatological science: right in the center of the Kunstverein is Tobias and Raphael Danke’s “Endless Cave”, recurring to Plato and the central aspect of his ontology: his elaboration of the Ideas in the famous Allegory of the Cave. Appropriately located at the heart of an exhibition that assumes the impossibility of secure knowledge and favors temporary and pragmatic solutions, this work is a touchstone for the show’s investigation of physical and conceptual spaces and their function in limiting perception: their muddy installation bears false witness to an ongoing interest in Plato’s model to explain the world. In close proximity to the earthy cave of the artist duo is a cool and clean computer print by Andrew McLeod (“Cave Complex II”), an underwater cave world, which—at a closer look—turns out to be an erotic fantasy. The juxtaposition of these works is a subtle comment on the erotic and maternal implications of Plato’s Cave—particularly as treated in feminist discourse—commentary that is echoed in Daniela Brahm’s “Re-Entry Capsules”: a design-originating in male-dominated sciences—now occupied by women.

Hawking’s model of the universe, transformed into a suspended sculpture by Peter Robinson, also seems to draw—with closer analysis—on ancient concepts and myths. Hawking’s theory of multiple parallel universes at various stages of inflation and deflation so obviously draws from Christian and pre-Christian creation myths, ancient concepts of a cyclic history, and elements of Aristotle’s entelechy, that here recent

konnte an die Stelle des narrativ Erzählungen aneinander reihenden Mythos der argumentierende Text des philosophischen Logos treten. Kronzeuge für die philosophische Relevanz des Alphabets ist nun niemand anders als Platon, der – relativ – am Anfang der westlich-europäischen Philosophie bzw. Wissenschaft in seiner Schrift „Philebos“ die besondere Funktionsweise des Alphabets als Grundmodell seiner Ideen-Metaphysik und damit jeder wissenschaftlichen Forschung ausgezeichnet hat. So wie sich das Kontinuum des Gesprochenen in seiner alphabetisch-verschrifteten Form auf eine finite Anzahl diskreter Buchstabentypen reduzieren lässt, sollte sich auch die Mannigfaltigkeit der phänomenalen Welt letztlich auf eine überschaubare Anzahl einzelner Formen zurückführen lassen: die platonischen Ideen; und analog zur Grammatik, die nach Platons Meinung die vorgegebenen Verbindungsmöglichkeiten der einzelnen Laut- bzw. Buchstabentypen zu sprachlichem Sinn lehrt, postulierte er die Existenz einer der Ontologie logisch und normativ vorhergehenden Logik.

Die Auseinandersetzung mit diesem Modell einer letztbegründeten Wissenschaft wird nun von den Künstlern der Ausstellung gesucht – steht doch in deren Zentrum die Installation „Die Unendliche Höhle“ von Tobias und Raphael Danke, die auf Platon und das angesprochene Hauptstück seiner Ontologie, seine Ausarbeitung der Ideenlehre im berühmten „Höhlengleichnis“, kritisch rekurriert. In einer Ausstellung, die in ihrer Kernthese die Unmöglichkeit absolut gesicherten Wissens zugunsten temporärer und pragmatischer Lösungsvorschläge behauptet, indem der physikalische wie auch der konzeptuelle Raum in seiner Funktion als Erkenntnisgrenze be- und hinterfragt wird, sicherlich ein adäquates Werk und ein weiterer Beleg für die ungebrochene Rezeption des Weiterklärungsmodells Platons. - In direkter Nachbarschaft zur erdig-lehmigen Höhle des Künstlerduos hängt ein eher kühler Computerdruck Andrew McLeods („Cave Complex II“), der eine Unterwasserhöhlenwelt darstellt, die sich bei näherem Hinsehen als erotische Phantasie entpuppt. In der von der Kuratorin inszenierten Kombination gerät sie zu einem subtilen Kommentar über die besonders im feministischen Diskurs stark betonten erotischen und maternalen Implikationen der Platonischen Höhle, ein Kommentar, der aufgenommen wird in Daniela Brahm’s „Wiedereintrittskapseln“ – einem ursprünglich aus männlich dominierter Wissenschaft entstammenden Entwurf, der nunmehr von Frauen besetzt ist.

Auch das von Peter Robinson in eine schwebende Skulptur übertragene Hawkingsche Modell des Universums bedient sich bei näherer Analyse durchaus antiker Vorstellungen und Mythen. Hawkings Theorie mehrerer paralleler Universen, die sich in verschiedenen Stadien der Inflation und Deflation befinden, speist sich derart offensichtlich aus christlichen und vorchristlichen Schöpfungsmythen, antiken Vorstellungen eines zyklischen Geschichtsverlaufs sowie aus Elementen der aristotelischen Entelechie, dass sich hier modernste Astrophysik scholastischer Spekulation anzunähern scheint. Durch die Übertragung einer wissenschaftlichen Illustration aus dem Diskurs der Physik in den der Ästhetik treibt Robinson nun seinerseits ein Spiel mit den Erkenntnismöglichkeiten des Betrachters und hält seine Skulptur in einem Zustand der Oszillation zwischen reiner Abstraktion

astrophysics seem to approach scholastic speculation. By transferring the scientific motif out of the discourse of physics into that of aesthetics Robinson himself plays a game with the cognitive capacities of the viewer. He keeps the sculpture in a state of oscillation between pure abstraction and conceptual readability. In the aesthetic context, in which the positivist-scientific chain of proof-postulating, testing and, in the best case, verifying a thesis-is irrelevant, Robinson's sculpture riffs on the basic insight that today explanatory attempts with limited validity can simply be stated, even under strictly scientific conditions. It is impossible to overlook how deeply Hawking's approach-and by extension all attempts to establish a 'unified theory of everything'-is rooted in occidental metaphysics. Since Plato, two enterprises have been linked: a scientific project seeking to understand and explain within individual disciplines, and an over-arching metaphysical program seeking general foundations which might then legitimate everything else. Robinson's sculpture dangles in the exhibition space as an ironic memorial to the failure of this enterprise.

The end of the exhibition presents a written recollection of a hallucinatory episode: David Hatcher's wall installation "Dimensions Variable (Albert Hofmann)" quotes an entry from the chemist's diary that notes his perceptions and experiences during his first accidental self-experiment with the drug LSD. Hatcher visualizes the text in the form of the film credits from the Star Wars saga and through this optical device he both closes off the exhibition space while expanding it into infinity. Yvonne Todd's ambiguous photograph "Quaalude Eyes" uses a pictorial formula that can only be called romantic to visualize a drug-induced experience, or rather refers to the drug as a parallel to describe romantic experience. In Hatcher's work, however, scientific experiment sinks into delirium, discourse itself is transformed into a trip.

The publication issued in conjunction with the exhibition extends its concept into printed form. In it, Mania eschews an explanatory essay, instead offering selected text fragments and quotes from a variety of sources that touch on aspects of the exhibition, while reproductions document its conceptual and actual development. Visually drawing on cheap science fiction novels, the publication presents itself not as a catalogue, but as a sketch or log book, in which, as in the exhibition itself, more questions are asked than definite answers are provided.

Dr. habil. Jürgen Villers works as an assistant professor for media and language philosophy at RWTH Aachen University.

und inhaltlicher Lesbarkeit. Im ästhetischen Kontext, in dem die positivistisch-scientifische Beweiskette Behauptung – Überprüfung – und, im günstigsten Fall, Verifizierung einer These hinfällig wird, gemahnt Robinsons Skulptur an die grundlegende Einsicht, dass selbst unter streng wissenschaftlichen Bedingungen nur noch Erklärungsversuche mit begrenzter Gültigkeitsdauer aufgestellt werden können. Es ist bemerkenswert, wie sehr der Hawkingsche Ansatz- und mit ihm alle Versuche zur Etablierung einer Alles erklärenden, übergreifenden Theorie – in der abendländischen Metaphysik verankert sind. Spätestens seit Platon sind hier zwei Unternehmungen miteinander gekoppelt: Das Projekt der Wissenschaften, das auf Erklären und Verstehen der Gründe und Ursachen einzelner Sachgebiete abzielt, sowie das ersterem übergeordnete metaphysische Programm eines vollständigen Wissens der allgemeinsten, ersten und letzten Gründe, aus denen sich dann alles Andere erklären und verstehen lassen sollte. Robinsons Skulptur pendelt im Ausstellungsraum wie ein ironisches Mahnmal des Scheiterns dieses Unternehmens.

Am Ende der Ausstellung steht die Alphabetisierung eines Drogentrips: David Hatcher's Wandinstallation „Dimensions Variable (Albert Hofmann)“ zitiert einen Tagebucheintrag des Chemikers, der über dessen Wahrnehmungen und Erfahrungen während seiner – unbeabsichtigten – Erfindung der Droge LSD und dem ersten unwissentlichen Selbstversuch berichtet. Hatcher gibt diesem Text die Form eines Filmabspans im Stile der Star Wars-Saga und schließt so den Raum des Kunstvereins gleichzeitig ab und führt ihn doch ins Unendliche fort. Bezeichnenderweise trägt die Droge Hofmanns selbst einen aus drei Lettern gebildeten Namen und wird – als wären es der Analogien nicht schon genug – auch noch auf Papier vertrieben. Während sich Yvonne Todds ambivalente Fotografie „Quaalude Eyes“ einer romantisch zu nennenden Bildformel für die Visualisierung der Drogenerfahrung bedient oder aber die Droge als Analogie für die Umschreibung einer romantischen Erfahrung heranzieht, versinkt bei Hatcher das wissenschaftliche Experiment im Delirium, gerät der Diskurs selbst zur Halluzination.

Die im Anschluss an die Ausstellung erschienene Publikation „The Sky's The Limit“ führt deren Konzept konsequent fort. Die Kuratorin verweigert den erläuternden Text. Stattdessen bietet sie ausgewählte Textfragmente und Zitate verschiedenster Provenienz an, die wesentliche Aspekte der Ausstellung berühren, wobei die Abbildungen dem konzeptuellen wie tatsäclichen Entstehen der Ausstellung folgen. Vom Erscheinen her an billigen Science-Fiction-Romanen orientiert gibt sich die Publikation eher als Fragen stellendes Skizzenbuch denn als (letzte) Antworten gebender Katalog. Ausstellung und Publikation machen so anschaulich deutlich: Nicht der Himmel ist die Grenze der Erkenntnis, das menschliche Erkenntnisvermögen an sich ist die Grenze.

Privatdozent Dr. Jürgen Villers lehrt Medien- und Sprachphilosophie an der RWTH Aachen.

The Hand that Feeds

“Discussion Island”, MCA Sydney

Recently I was invited to participate in a forum, part of a series of so-called ‘Discussion Islands’ at Sydney’s Museum of Contemporary Art. This particular event focused on the relationship between artists and curators as well as the current role of that supposedly freakish organism, the artist/curator. A lot of fodder here one would have thought for a juicy argument, perhaps a fistfight or two or just some mutual name-calling. Somehow the charged promise of these occurrences never arose. Each of the six participants, five of whom were artists and one a curator (a timely redressal of the usual power imbalance) took turns to give their perspective on the issue and all in all it was a remarkably polite affair.

Why is this? It was easy to write it off simply from the perspective of the ineptitude of the speakers (although, of course, as one of them it is not something I could ever admit to). Alternatively this apparent lack of engagement could be regarded as somehow emanating from the institution itself. Perhaps it was a management problem that transformed the defined topic into a convenient issue to be solved by those less equipped to do so (i.e. ‘mere’ practitioners). But of course the very notion of discussion demands openness and a fairly liberal smattering of irresolution and conflict. Traditionally these characteristics are antithetical to the operations of large institutions that are repeatedly required by governments and sponsors to account for their every move.

In any case this particular ‘Discussion Island’ had an ulterior motif as it was firmly cemented to the latest instalment of the MCA’s ‘Unpacked’ exhibition series. These shows occur intermittently under the auspices of artists nominated by the MCA. The artists chosen are asked to make a selection from the gallery’s permanent collection. In most instances the artists are also invited to do a little floor talk about the work they have selected. To her credit, Joan Grounds decided to utilise this opportunity to propose the aforementioned debate about artists and curators. It was a good move from a long practising contemporary artist: to share her opportunity by opening it up to potential interrogation, a role few curators would dare enact. So the intentions of this event were positively political as were Grounds’ thorough video interviews with all the artists in her ‘Unpacked’ selection. So what went wrong?

It’s easiest to begin with physical discomfort. Staging this panel discussion in the actual ‘Unpacked’ gallery space sounded like a decent idea. However being completely surrounded by artworks we were effectively expected to ignore was a little strange as well as a little oppressive. At times I couldn’t help imagining that I was sitting in some corporate foyer. Furthermore and after no more than half an hour, the gallery felt very cold. In fact it was decidedly and ever increasingly over air-conditioned. In addition, the glass and a

half of free pre-discussion white wine that initially promised to serve as intellectual lubricant proved instead, for me at least, an exceedingly efficient after-work muscle relaxant. Its effects were so thorough that they swiftly worked their way around my body from my brain and to my mouth. It was not nerves then but a mild torpor that exercised the greatest challenge for me this particular night. Thus when it came my turn to ‘perform’ I was a little stunned and had to muster every ounce of Nietzschean will in order to present my particular point of view.

In fact I had been summoned to participate in this discussion primarily as a result of my activities as co-founder, and co-director (with Lisa Kelly) of ‘Blaugrau’. During the thirteen months of that galleries existence I curated two shows (asides from co-curating the inevitable end of year fundraisers et al.). The first, ‘Vinyl’ was dedicated to artists working with recorded music and the second ‘Arkitekt’, investigated the work of practitioners who frequently cite architectural references. I decided to speak a bit about these or rather how these curatorial excursions actually held some political import especially in their self-generated openness. I complained about the gravy train of exhibitions in which the emphasis fell heavily on the side of the curator over and above an emphasis on the contemporary role of artists. In line with this I also criticised the often acritical dependence of artists themselves who wait to be curated, the waiting bit being symptomatic of genuine denial of any notion of independent creative agency. More criticisms were offered (by me) about the predictability of many contemporary exhibitions in which (and it appears to be a global trend) the same artists appear ad nauseum. Lack of risk-taking I think it’s called and it often results, once again, from excesses of institutional, populist and corporate pressure. Exciting exhibitions, I argued, framed work in such ways that even potentially conflicting meanings were magnified rather than levelled (i.e. such shows represented, at best, strategies and not mere ‘choice’ collections). In these instances the conceptual demands and idiosyncrasies of the artists were similarly respected. Other exciting approaches, I went on, were those in which curatorial method was ignored or undermined by deliberately celebrating complexity sometimes to the point of incoherence. There was little room here for anything more specific and soon the microphone (gladly) left my hands.

Ah, the microphone, that dowser of spontaneous disagreement, that encourager of earnest, isolated sound bites! Actually it is amazing what happens to an audience faced with someone with a microphone. And no matter how softly spoken that person is the technology always lends itself an authoritarian edge that is also vaguely ridiculous. In this case the microphone served more as a documentary tool anyway as the audience was so small that electronic amplification was unnecessary. So now there exists somewhere within the labyrinth of the MCA, records of

that night's discussion captured for who knows what future purpose, what future recriminations? That is not to say that no one else had anything pertinent to offer either. My Le Thi, one of the other artists involved in the discussion spoke from the perspective of her Vietnamese background. She suggested that many curators were actually completely uninterested in 'minority' art unless it could be framed precisely in that way. Artists from such backgrounds were also less appealing because they often inhabited tight communities based some distance from Sydney's more fashionable inner city. Here it was easy to be reminded also of the way in which Aboriginal art is regularly treated as an isolated genre separate from mainstream contemporary art.

Jacky Redgate, another artist on the panel, a highly accomplished, high-profile practitioner hailing originally from Adelaide had yet another take on the matter. She spoke of the generative era of her practice during the nineteen eighties and how that time shaped many of the practices and attitudes of today's contemporary art scene. At this point an audience member proffered a few nostalgic diversions. The gist of these offerings was basically this: the olden days were radical thanks to artists of the previous generation while today's artists were 'squares' who should be very grateful to their older peers. Yeah well, in effect much of this may be true however it also evinced a certain arrogance as well as an ignorance of the more politicised attitudes of some younger artists and their networks. Plus it is always easy to speak as a 'radical' from the safety of commercial and institutional recognition. Anyway the previously mentioned panellist continued to quote information she'd garnered from Internet searches on curators and curating. Some spicy info here! There was even a suggestion that many international biennales of contemporary art actually provided critical nourishment on par with the sort of actual (profoundly absent) nourishment served up via global fast food chains! Pull out the stops I say!

Finally the only curator on the panel, Blair French, spoke pithily of his free-lance activities. Indeed it was illuminating to hear him speak and it made me aware of how infrequently artists have the opportunity to hear, from their own mouths, the underlying *raison d'être* behind a curator's practice. Of course many highly visible curators are prepared to go on at length about how they 'staged' this show, how they 'discovered' that artist, as though the artist in question had previously been some kind of shapeless cloud looking for the right container. Refreshingly this particular curator's attitude was very unlike this. Instead he spoke of the generational changes that have occurred in curatorial practice over the past two decades. He mentioned how the institution of curatorial studies has only fairly recently emerged as a distinct profession one only needed to study to be any good at. The filter down effect of this, it was proposed, divided, rather than collaboratively conjoined, the

activities of artists and curators. Furthermore, the point was also made that successful curating actually required passion, can you believe it, advocating something as wasteful as passion in age of 'rational' economics and vocational education!? Aligned with this suggestion was another, this being that in order to curate successfully the curator actually had to pay heed to their other life experiences and remain open to the way in which these might pollinate the area of their chosen 'professional expertise'. Through such words I even thought it might be possible for artists to rekindle faith in the attitudes of curators without just necessarily succumbing to misplaced utopian fantasies about the nature of their positions.

OK, I have to admit that all in all it was not simply a waste of time, despite the institutional claustrophobia, the air-conditioned freeze, the dearth of audience, the clumsy microphone handling, the usual audience questions going nowhere etc. etc. In fact possibly the most astute question raised during the night came from an audience member, an MCA gallery attendant, an older man with an American accent who piped up asking, 'aren't you artists all just being a little too soft on the role of curators and institutions when they undeniably hold hierarchical privilege over your work and force you into particularly questionable power relations with them?' (not his exact words but close nonetheless). Fantastic! An old lefty I thought, in no patronising sense. Here at last was a chance to get it all out there, shift the audience/panel dynamic around, break through some all too tightly controlled institutional barriers. Alas, the microphone thing again and an overall sense of a disinterest in politics despite all the especially dire crap we've all been subjected to recently by various 'democratically' elected governments. Also from own viewpoint I was still amazed at the soporific effects humble white wine can have on the tired mind and body. So the night came to an end, no dramas, no breakthroughs, just lots of words delivered with the absolute minimum of frisson. Afterwards it was suggested everyone meet in the pub across the road where really I thought this whole caper should have begun. Not that such a feeling came from any longing for 'pure' bohemianism but rather because outside the institution of the MCA the potential potency of this debate might have developed along some fine and organic tangents. These in turn might have actually engendered creative possibilities and tensions among the various participants. That is despite the danger that by visiting any pub in The Rocks questions of art or politics are liable to be replaced altogether by deep discussions about ones love of Riverdance.

Alex Gawronski is an artist and writer living in Sydney. He was co-founder and co-director of the artist-run gallery Blaugrau (2000-2001).

Material #1 “destruction of the non-point”

1. I want to be a door: *Come In* and *Entropy in Reverse* at the Govett-Brewster, New Plymouth, July – September 2003

The first thing I would like to note is that I have just realised, astonished, that my bath is built into my flat in a way that means it hangs out over space, out over the back path; and so is every other bath in the twenty places in this block. Which is doubly odd given that I used to image that the deep green of my Radox bath salts already made the bath many times deeper than it was. Spooky.

Last weekend during a Krazy Karavan holiday in Raglan, I visited *Come In* at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. This was a touring show provided by the Goethe Institut, and I have to say it was lovely to see so much sculpture in a public gallery. The Govett-Brewster needs to be congratulated for its ongoing commitment to contemporary practice, it really does. I just wish I did not have to drive so far to see it though. (Why oh why is there not more properly-funded major contemporary art projects in Auckland? Sure, there has been some good work at the dealer galleries, but otherwise it's all been so bitsy, seemingly oriented away from projects and towards small/existing/cheap work.)

To make the drive easier I get talking books out of the public library, and somehow the time flies by and I arrive in much better shape, and much less ocularly-nauseated by the scrolling countryside, miraculously. This time we had the pleasure, the surprisingly great pleasure, of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* – a full 14-tape unabridged extravaganza of vampirism. There was an interesting passage in this story where a protagonist marveled at the unflinching no-tears resolve of his American counter-vampire fighter. He called him a “moral Viking,” and posited that if America continues to breed these sort of men, they will be a force to be reckoned with on the world stage.

The show-stealer for me at *Come In* was work by Peter Rösel which entailed very realistic rubber plants that had been fashioned out of police uniforms. The premise of the show was “interior design as a contemporary art medium in Germany” and these Rösel works were there, it seemed, to raise the subject of how institutions of power try to make their oppressive interior spaces seem more cosy. Chilling. And more evidence that the police always make such great material. (On this subject, one of my very favourite New Zealand TV shows of all time, *Police 10-7*, is airing at the moment. The last one I watched featured an amazing policeman who spoke almost entirely in mixed metaphors, unchecked – “count your losses”, “you hit the button on the head” etc.)

These trompe-l'oeuil (well, at a few feet away) works got me thinking about a Rosalind Krauss quote that I had read in the excellent essay by Wystan Curnow in the publication produced with the 1998 post-object

show put on by Artspace and the Govett-Brewster. She said, in 1986, that the “logic [operative in a great deal of the work of the 1970s] involves the reduction of the conventional sign to a trace, which then produces the need for a supplemental discourse.” Did seeing a work that was such a conventional sign in this day and age displace the need for discourse? No, I really don't think so. As Curnow implied in his text, discourse starts with the making of the work itself.

I think many are settled with the idea that language cannot be factored out of the creative process, but the idea was taken a little further for me by something I recently heard on National Radio. The Reith Lectures were presented this year as a five-part series featuring the ebullient Professor Ramachandran, an Indian neuro-psychiatrist based in California. He said that recent brain function research has shown that language in fact developed out of the vision function in the brain. He gave the example that when we say “large,” our mouths are making a large open shape, and small, the opposite. Fascinating.

But back to the Govett-Brewster. I am not sure how the show could have been improved on other than extending the gallery spaces so that there is more ideal room for the proper display of sculpture and installation. The work in the back first-floor enclosed gallery, where Sam Durant's wonderful work, *Entropy in Reverse*, had been shown earlier in the year, worked really well, but the other more open galleries and traffic areas prevented the work establishing their own space, as sculpture is wont to do. (The strangest instance of this was in the *Break* show this time last year in which an enlarged Yoda Lego figure by Matt Elwood was placed on the stair landing on a plinth. It looked for all the world like a donations box without a slit.)

I have to say, as an aside, that the Sam Durant residency project work was completely great. One of the components was a 1999 video work projected that showed the Rolling Stones documentary film *Gimme Shelter* in reverse. This film recorded their 1969 concert at the Altamont Speedway in California, an event that has gone down in popular history as marking the end of the flower power era and heralding in a much darker time, one which would see heavy metal flower, thank god. The effect of turning this happening backwards was a surprisingly visceral one. Already with heightened awareness of how eyes connect to the rest of the body following car-sickness, I felt my eyes throw a line straight to my seat. Watching the Hells Angels forcing their way through the earth's atmosphere, backwards in time, modern Vikings, inciting riot – troubled presentient trippers parting like the red sea – made them more mythological than they already were in my own myth and legend system. The greatest looking men's fashion of all time coupled with their archetypal brutality and fearless destructive power AS TIME TRAVELLERS gave me a weird proxy sensation which can only really be compared to having



a string of pearls pulled from one's ass by someone one has wanted to run away with for years but were too afraid to. Incredibly sexy in other words. I venture that entropy itself is a vastly sexy concept, and one which no doubt contributed to Robert Smithson's charisma, and still makes blood flow to erectile areas of the fleshy vehicles of his fans.

Spatial concerns were behind Billy Apple's alteration of the gallery's stairs to good effect in 1979, a work that Callum Morton took a step further in his *Billyput*, a parallel project to *Come In*. He added a small door underneath the stairs of a scale to make it (squeals of joy) "little people" sized t' be shure. From it emanated sounds of house cleaning and socialising chimps. "I want to be a door" jokes ensued, and from the handout I learned that Morton tilts to the Ken Russell Film *Altered States*, made in the same year as Apple's aforementioned *Altered Staircase*. This film features a scientist that experiments with isolation tanks and hallucinogens to achieve other levels of consciousness. Perfect for New Plymouth, the mushroom capital of our fair land. Indeed, driving back to Auckland, at one point in the Taranaki farmland, I sensed the hills were covered with electric dottings of these native fungi. I also saw a trip (what a typo! I meant trio) of Hells Angels going in the opposite direction. (I often see them too out mu work-room window as my street is the short-cut from Mt Eden – where their clubrooms are – to the northern motorway system.)

Another parallel project was material from David Clegg's body of work *The Imaginary Museum*. Towards this Clegg toured Europe photo-documenting museum spaces and interviewing staff about these interiors, these symphonies in generic design. The work is presented as gridded photos and sound recordings. I thought that this was curious and telling work, and disarmingly slight, which seems to be Clegg's style. It almost looked like he had put up the work behind the staff's back. I know I am projecting, but its slightness made me think again how I am more than a little disappointed by the way in which public galleries in New Zealand are generally, with a few notable exceptions, unwilling to spend much money on projects by contemporary New Zealand artists. Despite the "we have no money" appeals emanating from institutions, they seem to be able to find the cash for artists from "overseas" when they require it.

Sam Durant, *Entropy in Reverse*, installation view, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

2. Civilization and its discontents: the Elam open day, University of Auckland, November 2003

Apart from good old cultural cringe, there does seem to be something squeezing out artists here in an unspoken way, something affected by the stealing of time maybe? Maybe this economic malaise was behind the latent violence that imbued a handful of stand-out students' works at the Elam School of Fine Arts open day last month. (Or maybe not. Who can say?) In particular, that of Peter Madden and Eddie Clemens, both completing their MFAs; some years, I might add, after completing their respective undergraduate studies – something which made their work seem a whole lot less studenty.

Eddie Clemens' barbershop striped tape and foil-backed packaged razor-blades and bubble-gum made my stomach lurch with the implied slicing of flesh. Apparently the gum and blade component was related to a Christchurch legend about people fixing razorblades inside the hydroslide at QEII Park. Before I was told this I thought they looked like ready-to-go whizz accessories. Barbershops we always to me more about tobacco and smoking paraphernalia too come to think of it. Higher than the rows and rows of shonkily stuck up tape was the black cutout figure of a cat like one might find for sale in a roadside tearooms. The piece of wood this was cut out of was stuck behind several rows of stripes, like a prisoner taped to a chair.

The cat itself was sort of outside the space established by his work, almost as if it was creeping into the area occupied by Peter Madden's. His practice has involved, singularly, for a number of years now, collaging things sliced from National Geographic magazines. Rather than confining himself to the two-dimensional, he has been making element-defying sculptural works and installations out of the glossy paper animals and people and scenes he has retrieved with his scalpel. The cloud of associations characteristic of Clemens' work, in combination with the mania and dense pile-up (with none of the schmalz of *Baraka*, or arty microscopic nature films, don't worry about that) in

Madden's really cheered my hysteric soul way up.

I also enjoyed the coincidence they presented to me – I had the day before written a semi Nietzsche-ish haiku about my new cat: <The kitten sure seems to represent to me the will to papercut>. Mainly, I think, I was digging how there was something vaguely out of control about both these works, an attribute sadly lacking in a lot of the work in Auckland lately. There's almost a tacit neo-conservatism and fear of chaos going on that I don't think is helping matters much. So much of Auckland art has been so well-behaved lately to the point of grateful, and virtually autistically untroubled commodities and/or group show components that claim no space of their own. On the subject of not doing anything about one's disadvantageous situation, I earnestly penned an economics haiku: <The thing about shit is that if you hold your nose it's nice and warm and soft>.

However, the most aggressive submission of the whole open day was, for me, that of painting student Fiona Connor. In a dingy back room of the rickety mansions that house a goodly portion of the department she presented a grotty old Pacific Motel sign so huge I found it hard to understand the logistics of how it was introduced into the space. It looked like it had been ripped straight from the ground, as evidenced by the concrete plugs at the base of its tubular metal supports. I was impressed and loved the violence and the destructive giant that the work implied. (I was raised on children's books about giants and still love the effect of people drinking from miniature spirits bottles.) I thought that this was a triumph of youthful found object art. Later I found out that she had made the whole thing as an elaborate factice. What an excellent reversal of expectation! Normally people want to be admired for their model-making skills and make things obviously models rather than aiming for the effect of a found object. Or am I just being dense? So doubly confusing to leave me doubting the veracity of her having made it herself. So passive aggressive and fantastic.

3. People are saying "zeitgeist" again: Hany Armanious and Louise Weaver at the Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, September – October, and November 2003 respectively

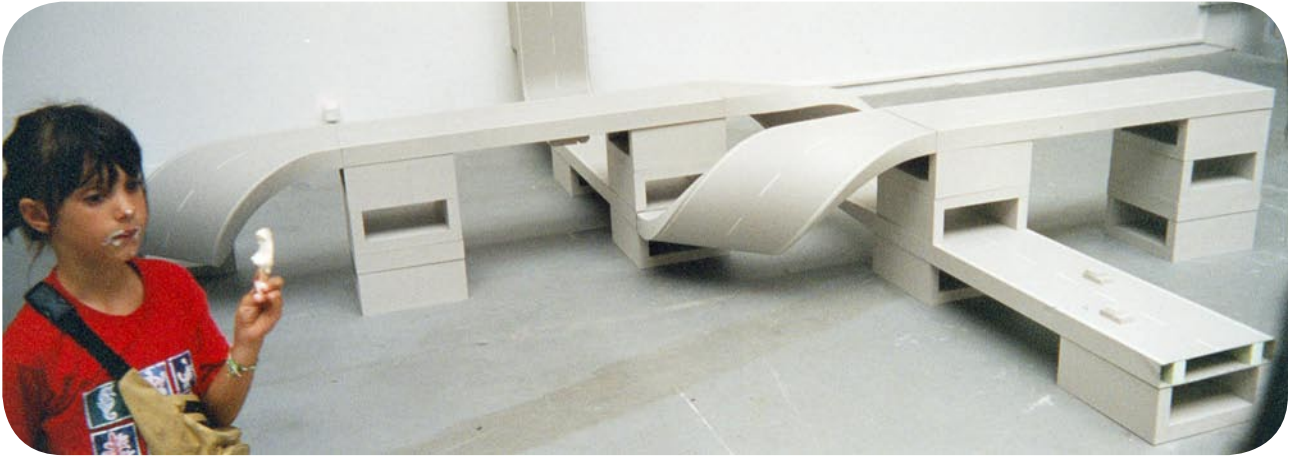
To make a return to spatial issues, I especially enjoyed the two showings of slow-release works by the genial Hany Armanious at the lovely new Michael Lett Gallery this year. The first of these featured lengths of ordinary pastel-coloured PVC piping leaning against the long wall. Each had been cut at an acute angle which resulted in lending them a solid hypodermic effect. (Again, the giants.) The second showing featured a plinth covered with cheap, odd, stemmed glasses, the recesses of which had been filled with a luxury modelling compound in a variety of very nice decorator colours. Some even had a fine cosmetic or car-paint-like sparkle. The "plugs" were then inverted and stood on top of the glasses to make curious sculptural "outies". Both works made the gallery over into a space for receiving impressions, molded ones to be specific. The colour range of both was, to me, reminiscent of Ancient Egyptian things like scarabs – the effigies of the little mythic beetle that rolls the dung sun across the sky. Such simple and affective interventions are wrought by Armanious upon found

objects.

More from the cargo cult of imported Australian art, I made some notes following an interesting conversation at the opening of Louise Weaver's show at the Michael Lett's. The gallery was filled with large fake rock outcrops on top of which perched little sparkly fox-like animals. I was standing by one of the works by the door with my friend and a guy from a band came up and started talking to us. I thought he was my friend's friend, and my friend thought he was a friend of mine, and neither of us caught his name. We were all poking at the rocks trying to work out what they were made of. Spray on resin from the vast Australian resin industry no doubt, my friend said, and I agreed. The guy said really, and we said no we were making it up. He asked us if we thought the rocks were part of the work. He thought they might be although Peter Madden swore they couldn't be. My friend suggested looking at the list of works to see what was for sale, and that that would provide the info needed, and surely they were just plinths. I thought that was a shame as I liked the rocks best. By this point my friend had walked away for another drink. Stranger asked me why, and I said that it had something to do with an article I had read written by Siegfried Kracauer called "Mass Ornament" written in Germany in the 1920s. I had originally interpreted this as a justification for making plaster rocks: "In other words, the unchecked development of the capitalist system fosters the unchecked growth of abstract thinking (or forces it to become bogged down in a *false concreteness*)." (In reality I muttered something about "fake rocks" I think.) I was aware that I was dragging literature into my reading of art again, but I can't seem to help it. It just automatically repeats on me. He asked me if I did not like the animals and I said I did, especially the one with the AC/DC-esque neck band, but that they ultimately didn't do anything to my brain. Like Australian music, said the clever stranger. Except the Dirty Three, and the obvious, we agreed, whose music is an intense emoto-bodily experience. I told him that the Dirty Three's drummer bit me once and this was pretty much the end of the conversation. I am not sure what all this means, but I guess there is an interesting spatial issue for art in there. It is more than the dichotomy between discrete object art, and art in the expanded field sense; I think it might have something to do with the depth of the surface? Or maybe the shallowness of the day? Daylight savings shortens the night, and diminishes its wintry depths, giving with one hand, and taking away with the other...

4. Venice, the first Panama: Zenomap: a presentation of new work from Scotland for the Venice Biennale 2003, June – November 2003

Luckily I avoided the worst of the winter as I went to see the Venice Biennial etc. I hadn't realised how I had really ended up feeling about Venice until I saw it in the background in an underwear ad on TV. And then in a shampoo ad. "Stupid old Venice," said my brain. Yes, buildings only come in old in Venice, and the incessant Baroque and neo-classical and ecclesiastical and sopping-with-history buildings end up wearing one out. Like along the Loire where chateaux start becoming banal. (My co-editor thinks that Venice is like a 500-year-old version of Disneyland but with art instead of rides. Myself, I remember being told that



Thomas Bayrle's work and fan

Venice was thought of as the juncture between East and West in ancient times.) I feel like I am sounding like a brat when I am saying this but maybe it has something to do with the actual hard-to-pin-down effect of Venice in a heatwave (or touristic/scenic Europe generally?). Trying to make sense of my adverse reaction I read *Death in Venice*, which was on the bookshelf in a friend's apartment in mercifully temperate Berlin after going to Basel after Venice. I had swum in the brackish Mediterranean outside the hotel on the Lido with some very genial Scandinavians where the film version of this marvelous Thomas Mann book was filmed.

(As an aside, I think we can really learn from the Scandinavians at Venice. The way their arts council has played it is by presenting with utmost style and grace and humility, slowly learning and networking internationally – this requires people who are thoroughly involved in art in their home country and abroad, and know how to talk to strangers with politesse – over a number of years with the goal of starting to be included in the international art world sort of organically. Aside from their national pavilion they also do small independent shows at Venice such as the excellent ReShape! project put on by IASPI, an artist-in-residence programme based in Stockholm, and an institution supporting Swedish artists exhibiting abroad. They chose an old school gym close to the Giardini – the work was great, “focusing on reconstruction, recycling, collaboration and customization as strategies of creation” and refreshingly low-fi, the budget off-set catalogue great, and they also set up deckchairs in a cool leafy courtyard with fizzy mineral water.)

In *Death in Venice* (1912) I found two passages that seemed to shed light on my weird experiences in Venice:

“He had been snatched away now to the Elysian land. To the ends of the earth, where the lightest of living is granted to mortals... and the days flow last in blessed idleness, with no labour and strife, for the sun alone and its feast they are all given over.” (p232)

Was this why it felt so silly to be expected to tear around looking at art in this indolent heat?

“Had he not read that the sun turns our attention from spiritual things to the things of the senses? Had he not read that it so numbs and bewitches our intelligence and memory that the soul, in its joy, quite

forgets its proper state and clings with astonished admiration to the most beautiful of all things the sun shines upon.” (p234)

Was this why I was so entranced with Tobias Rehberger's hanging pendants of glass piece in the Italian pavilion? Ah, beauty which is form leads me to intoxication and lust and back to the abyss... It made me think that the perfect shop to find would be a Murano glass underground store that specialised in Venini-style crack pipes and bongs. What objets d'art they would be.

“This was Venice, the flattering and suspect beauty – this city, half fairy-tale and half tourist trap, in whose insalubrious air the arts rankly and voluptuously blossomed, where composers have been inspired to lulling times of somniferous eroticism.” (p245)

Was this why I could not think? Had I fallen thoroughly into my body and had become too helpless to be that far from home? Is this why there are three channels of free-to-air softcore porn at night on Italian TV?

One thing I did think about, albeit in a dreamy sort of a way, was imagining not a New Zealand pavilion in the Giardini, but an Aotearoa at Venice contingent. Perhaps involving a summerhouse fale in the Giardini under the shady trees, perhaps “manned” by the Pacific Sisters? – unruly, fabulous, craft and performance and entrapment of the straying crowd... The reason I think I was imagining this was that it was clear from the main curated part of the Biennale that the Pacific, even Australia, was absolutely invisible. The sort of thinking that lead to nuclear testing? The naming of the bikini?

As far as the New Zealand “pav” went, I really enjoyed Michael Stevenson's work, and thought the catalogue was excellent, but was baffled by Creative New Zealand's choice of venue. A deconsecrated church “ages” away from the Giardini where the national pavilions were and the Arsenale “next door” where the curated shows were displayed, or any other satellite shows for that matter. Given the way in which many people only go to Venice for the vernissage, or opening days, and given the oppressive and psychoactive heat, it is crazy to not situate such a heavily invested-in show closer to the action. I mean when it is 40 degrees it is all anyone can do to stagger to the nearest oasis.



Simon Starling, *Island for Weeds (Prototype)* (2003) in *Zenomap: a presentation of new work from Scotland for the Venice Biennale 2003*.

Furthermore, Stevenson looked like he had tried very hard to cover up as much of the church as was possible in his installation to stop it being an element in the work – a pretty affronting situation for an artist to deal with.

On the whole, I really enjoyed the national pavilions as they were much less curated, more artist project oriented. The highlight of the Biennale was for me the Scottish pavilion, or more correctly *Zenomap: a presentation of new work from Scotland for the Venice Biennale 2003*. This was one of the off-Broadway presentations, but unlike New Zealand's it was on the Grand Canal, and therefore right on the public transport – there are nothing but boats in Venice – and among half-a-dozen or so other country shows, which added incentive to visit it. From memory, I think the award-winning Luxembourg pavilion was nearby. (It might be interesting to note at this point for future contenders that they seemed to win the prize for having the best airconditioning. In 2005 the prize may well go the pavilion with the nicest drapes.) It was held in an unmolested 18th century palazzo dammit that was beautifully distressed in the way only Mediterranean peoples can handle ("whatever" being a time-honoured response to gardening, panel-beating, smoking, cholesterol and siestas, smoking while installing work, etc.). It had wonderful original brocade curtains that were in tatters, baroque oil paintings, Murano chandeliers, tapestry-clad walls, marble floors, gilt mirrors and it was ALL THAT.

It was not just the fantasy architecture that enamoured me to this showing – I kept thinking about Byron as I had just learned that in the six months or so he lived in Venice he kept a menagerie of foxes and peacocks and liked to make a spectacle of himself swimming in the canal just down the "road" from here – the work was outstanding. It was a gift in its site-specificity, a massive relief from the autistically discrete offerings

that had been curated into the flagship group shows at the Arsenale, a complex of stripped out 17th century ship-building yards. This Scottish work seemed to personally speak to me in the space I was in, and this affability was swelled by how the space was staffed with actual weirdo artist kids, just like there should be. I felt really at home and stayed there for ages soaking up the work and the atmosphere and the cool breeze coming off the canal through the flung-open doors....

A key thing here is that the Scottish Council have actually allowed artists to create spaces with their work. The motto of their arts council is "championing the arts in Scotland", and they are indeed going about that in a way that actually allows artists to make the sort of work they want to make, rather than allowing curators the shrink control. (Which reminds me, one of the weirdest things about the Biennale, which should not have surprised me really, was a wide glossy terracotta backgrounded postcard that had silhouettes of the principal Biennale curators posed as if the figures on an ancient Roman pediment relief sculpture as if they were the most important people there. Crazy daddy.) Here, however, there seemed to be here a genuine reflection of an important aspect of new work in Scotland, first hand.

Zenomap featured the work of Simon Starling, Jim Lambie and Claire Barclay, all presently riding fame waves that decrease in size respectively. (Why call it *Zenomap*? The organisers are referring to a 14th century collaboration between a Scottish explorer and two Venetian brothers who specialised in cartography and navigation to discover the new world.) Simon Starling occupied the first room one entered into,

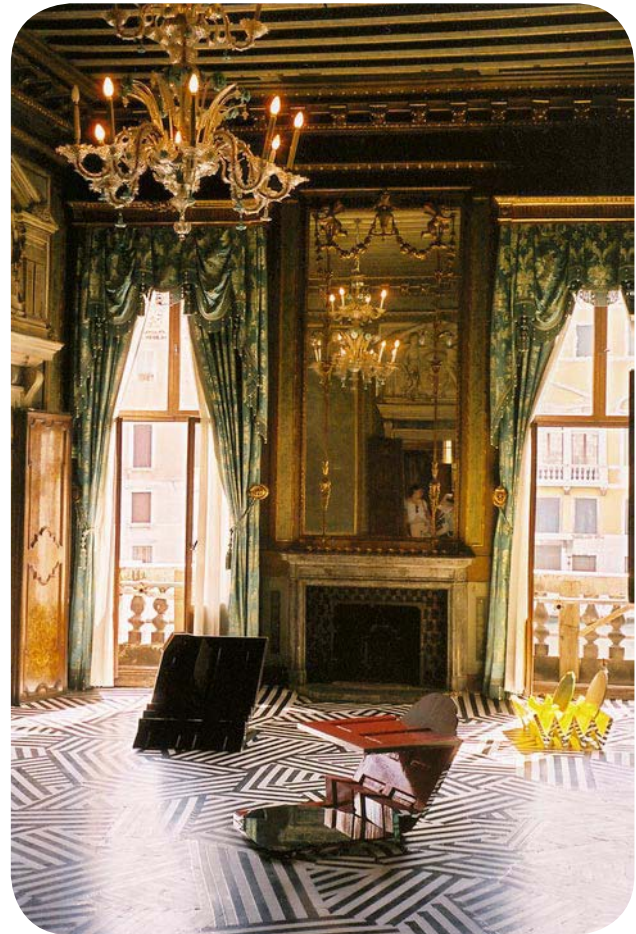
the massive main room that looked like it was built for dancers with big dresses. His work, *Island for Weeds* (prototype), is a raft/island floating on barrels covered in rhododendrons and other straggly unwanted plants – there has been a movement in Scotland to exterminate the rhododendron and other plants deemed to be threats to the native ecosystem. Originally proposed for Loch Lomond in Scotland, this work works with eerie site-specificity in Venice. As a raft, replete with mooring chains, it worked as triumphantly (as only a great idea can) with the way the inner ear continues to rock for hours after the incessant vaporetto rides. The ground keeps moving under one's feet making even the architecture feel like it is floating and bobbing.

Stepping over the phat but not gold anchor chains of Simon Starling's floating 'isle flotante' I found myself gravitating to a floor covered in white and black strips of gaffer tape, a Jim Lambie floor, a floor that would have produced a stripey an op-art zing had the effect not been somewhat diminished by the dusty footprints of all the too-hot art butlers and butleresses. Domestic doors and bedroom mirror had taken the hint from the zany floor and contorted into zigzags edged in mirrors and painted in hot '80s block colours. Here we have domestic disco, ordinary glamour, contrast-communing with the floor-to-ceiling mirrors and chandeliers in the space.

Claire Barclay's work was a very slight architectural intervention making me wonder whether it was a Scottish economy of means at play, i.e. "look after your pennies and the poonds will look after themselves". Or was it a matter of letting the boys show off? Probably neither, just an interest, according to a handout, "in suggesting a potentially spiritual role for the hand-made object in contemporary society". She had made a screen-printed fabric screen that melded with the existing brocade patterns in the room, that suggested a place to undress, amplifying the baroque sexual promise of the exotic space. There were a couple of rod-like objects in the room – glass encased in leather and metal sheathed in fine pink crochet that further played up some mysterious atmosphere, like a minimalist plot structure.

After Venice we went to the Basel art fair, but I remember little of the art there. The day I visited the fair, my father was side-stepping my questions about whether my dog I had left with them was still alive or not, and I think my body knew the answer. That night I remember looking at a beer coaster in a Mexi-Swiss bar that had a picture on it of a young man with two broken arms about to try to pick up a glass of beer. My traveling companion translated the text on the coaster above the picture and it said "what is this?". I identified with him strongly.

The only other thing I remember right now (other than a beautiful orchid-covered log suspended in space and producing thin streams of white cloud by Henrik Håkansson) is a conversation about a Matthew Barney work we saw at the fair. It was a movie still of a scene that features a woman that had both her legs amputated below the knee. It made me feel ill, like Barney had maybe paid her to have her legs cut off. Like he had found an expensive hooker-looking suicidal woman who agreed to have her legs cut off if he would keep her smacked to the eyeballs until the film was over at which point she could



Jim Lambie, *Paradise Garage* (2003) in *Zenomap: a presentation of new work from Scotland for the Venice Biennale 2003*.

self-euthanase... I shocked myself by this hideously depressing response to the work. My friend suggested I write it down and turn it into a play. I said I didn't want to as you just can't talk to people about suicide like that. It repels them.

It's a shame I don't have better recall of the work at Basel because I was told on very good authority that it was better on the whole there than in Venice. Curatorially too, I reflected, in that what I was presented with in Basel was a trade show showing art-as-commodity openly and freely – something that was unspeakable in Venice – and as such represented an interesting study resource of the collision and collusion between art and capital. Oddly I think I remember better the clothes of the amazingly preened ladies of leisure in their wonderfully impractical shoes. Strange how, in my overloaded, the superficial slips in, first in line, taking advantage of my work-tired brain. Or maybe these beautiful women were just far more profound than the art in their affluence and ease. Ah, Europa...

Gwynneth Porter is a writer living in Auckland. She is a member of the organising committee of Cuckoo, and itinerant artist-run space project. When she was proofing this she had a dream that she was working on a magazine called "destruction of the non-point".

Fluoro is something so eye-offensive and eye-attracting.



I own a jumper that is of a particular turn of orange, a woven neon, that it makes my skin fall away. Makes me pallid. I'm desperately jealous of that monitor-glow hue.

Just the other day I read in the paper some lines by Richard Larter, one of the old Australian Pop guys. He said:

"I dreamt I walked into a gallery with a friend and I said, 'Who did these paintings?' and she replied, 'You did!'

I'd never seen them before, but I was just canny enough to remember what they looked like when I woke up!"

Usually, I hate dreams, but this one sounded good. The dream sparked probably the best paintings in Larter's most recent Melbourne show. It was a process where a subconscious gift (like an alien birth) was placed back on the gallery wall. I'm pretty sure the pictures he referred to were the sort of psychedelic ones. I just kept looking at them. I work at his Melbourne gallery, so I've seen them, miraculously, still not enough.

The paintings had lots of fluoro, then some blue. The blue, rather than taking away the offensive sheen, seemed to exacerbate the troubles. It was so very very good, very very epileptic.

I find fluoro a little problematic.

I love John Armleder's work, but at the same time I thoroughly distrust it. I'm sure it's because of the charismatic fluoros. They always capture my wayward

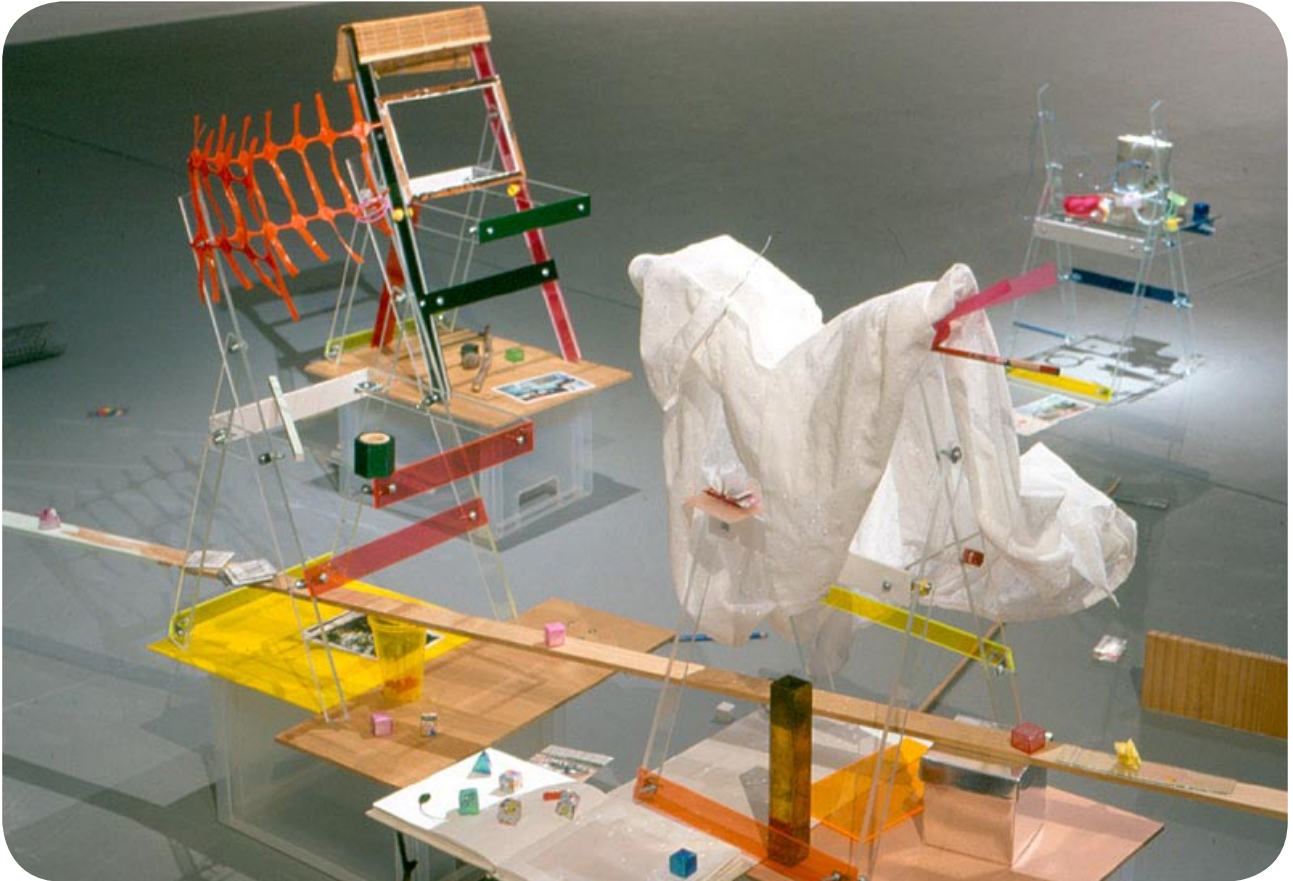


Left: Richard Larter, *Tweet tweet* (2003). **Right:** Peter Upward, "Shared Time" (1970) courtesy of Peter Upward Estate & Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

art lust. Shiny surfaces, translucent impossible yellow and pink. Easy, so desperately easy, that I can't believe it. Perhaps I am bitter that I have fallen for it, yet can't find anything there. I think John Armleder's art is the same as Ashton Kutcher's good looks. Yeah.

Katherine Huang had a show at RMIT Project Space a little while ago. There was a beautiful orange, more sweet than my jumper but with a similar strength. It was focused in a small monochrome, synthetic fibres stretched over timber bars. Placed sorta funny on the wall, a bit up and a bit to the left, it kind of floated by itself. I really wanted it, so I could just look at it as it bored away at my retina.

Katherine's work was very serious. Even with the naïve texta scribbles, there was a casing of dense ideas. I didn't really understand what was going on. I



dunno, but I think it was damn good.

Image courtesy of Katherine Huang.

I often go to the Charles Nodrum Gallery in Richmond. There are always fantastic examples of 60's and 70s chi-chi abstraction. The sort of thing that was made for a 60s International Style Harry Seidler apartment. My favourite works are by Peter Upward. He had read about action painting in the 1950's and it was all about gesture and body movement. The early work was thoroughly oriental. Then he went to England in the 60's, took acid and found epoxy resin. And with this epoxy resin came fluorescent colours and circular grounds and the razor edge balance between profundity, vacuity and wall candy. I ended up getting my dad to buy one.

Fluoro might be a good thing, or it might not be. I have no idea. I think its attraction is based on an empty lust. As much as I love it, I still haven't embraced it. My paintbrush remains devoid of fluorescent paint. Perhaps I just haven't been brave enough to take the plunge.

Notes

1. Richard Larter quoted in Ashley Crawford, "Artistic differences," *The Age*, 17 December, 2003

Rob McKenzie was born and bred in Melbourne, works at Niagara Galleries, is responsible for the morphous publishing project SLAVE and tries to make good art.

BIG BROTHER



New Zealand and Australia at the 50th Biennale of Venice

It's become all too normal now for people to write about how boring the Venice Biennale was this year. How quickly they tired of the contemporary art and rediscovered Venetian glass and Renaissance painting. I agree that this (my first) Biennale did seem lack lustre. The general (largely un-stated) theme was an attempt to re-engage with the "political" but everywhere this seemed impossible. As if the Western (can I say Northern Hemisphere?) mainstream art world had forgotten the last time it was actually "sort of" political (1968, the Vietnam War) and seemed genuinely perplexed at how this had happened. The general feeling of furrowed brows was real and on one level endearing.

One also got the feeling many of the big political hitters remain sceptical of these big, supposedly globalised events and decline to be involved (or maybe they just weren't asked). Considering all this I think the prize should probably have gone to Santiago Sierra's off-limits-to-all-except-Spanish-passport-holders Spanish Pavilion: slightly obvious and perhaps not his finest work, but then, after the Tampa events

Michael Stevenson, *This is the Trekka*, installation view, New Zealand pavillion. Photo: David Hatcher.

in Australia, this obviousness seemed appropriate. Instead the prize went to Luxemburg for a classically standard (and exceedingly dull) piece of international art.

As for my country's pavilion, I'll just say that it doesn't pay one to voice a counter position in the current climate in Ozworld. I am an admirer of much of what Patricia Piccinini's practice involves. However, instead of choosing an artist who would analyse or touch on Australia's place in the New Globalism we get a faintly quaint anachronism, caught somewhere between Jeffrey Deitch's 1992 *Post Human* exhibition and out-takes from *Lord Of The Rings*. However, it must be said that in an event devoted to the visual arts but strangely light on things photogenic Piccinini's work stood out. (For a considered and insightful piece on Piccinini's pavilion see "The Piccinini Effect at the 50th Venice Biennale" by Astrid Mania in *Broadsheet* Volume 32 No.3 Sept/ Nov 2003 p.16-17.)

I am also ashamed to say I missed Mike Stevenson at the New Zealand pavilion as I (a Venice novice) took the long way round the canal to AND from the rather disappointing Latin American show. But I made sure I was thoroughly informed of what I missed and as I am a sworn fan of the ANZAC David Koresh I found myself holding forth on it to a few bemused Northern hemisphere types.

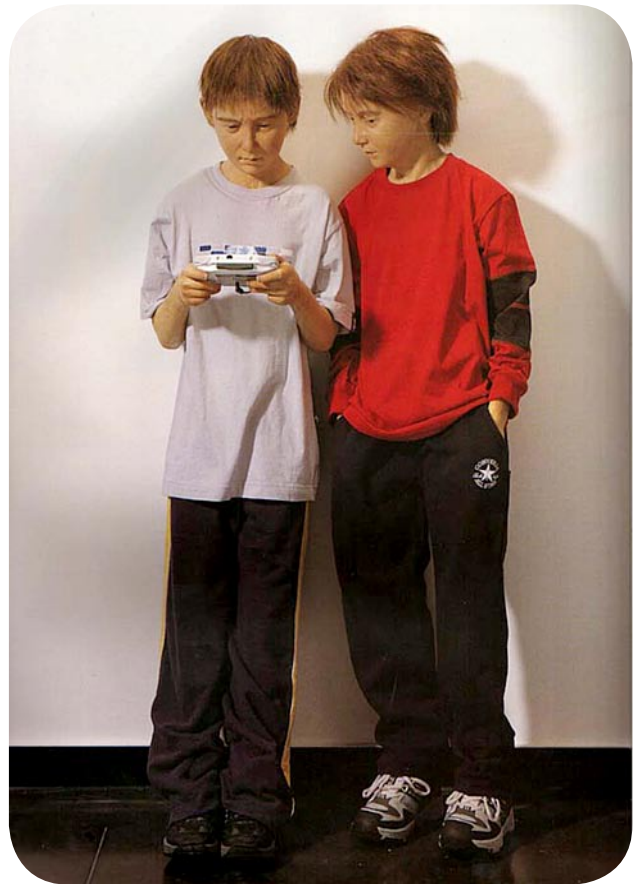
Actually it was Mike's stance on how to present NZ culture that was probably the most personally involving idea I took away from Venice. Instead of presenting the Antipodes as the exotic other, Stevenson set forth to tell the tale of NZ as Western Cold War outpost. Thereby giving the Americans and Europeans a way into New Zealand that didn't exactly dispense with freak value (butter boxes equivalent to the weight of the Trekka!). Instead Stevenson made NZ's outsider status a quality rather to be savoured and enjoyed. Few actually made the journey to the NZ pavilion (why so far away? like NZ itself?) but those that did were impressed it seemed.

What Stevenson shows us Antipodeans is that we need to rethink the way we present our cultures at such international events. For too long Australia, for instance, has trafficked in the outback, snakes, sharks and big spiders. Australia and New Zealand actually do present far-flung, strange hybrids of Western European culture that should have a lot to offer. But as I write this a number of alarm bells go off in my brain. Apart from the Australian and NZ pavilions, the two countries were absent from the other supposedly global exhibitions at Venice. Not even the very real and pressing dilemmas of the Aboriginal and Maori populations made a dent on the international curators of the Arsenale etc, let alone any white Antipodean artists. In the recent "Globalism" issue of New York's *Artforum* (November 2003), Australia and New Zealand don't rate a mention. In fact only Africa does outside the cosy triangle of the US, middle Europe and Japan. In this "round table", someone who should know better, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist lets the cat out of the bag:

"One can't emphasis enough the importance of the "peripheral" biennials in the 90s, which helped a generation of artists from different cultures become internationally visible."

So here we have the concept of the periphery as talent scout for mainstream international art. Much like soccer talent in Latin America! More and more my thoughts on Venice move towards what could be done to make my country's presence there actually meaningful to the general Australian public rather than trying to woo an inward looking and increasingly irrelevant "international" art world. An episode of *Big Brother* where the smallish Phillip Cox designed pavilion is home to a bunch of Aussie surfies who spend their time attempting to pick Venice kids. All filmed on camera and broadcast back to Australia. Lots of fun and at least the Australian public would feel it was getting its money worth.

—
Scott Redford is a Brisbane-based artist who recently spent a year in Berlin at the Australia Council Residency at the Kunstlerhaus Bethanien.



Above: Patricia Piccinini, *Game Boys Advanced* (2002) silicone, acrylic, human hair, clothing, hand-held video game. **Below:** Michael Stevenson, *This is the Trekka*, installation view, New Zealand pavillion. Photo: David Hatcher.



Speak

"I think what I want to", said Headlum, "do, is become...

It's too dark to hear

One antenna to antenna
'point! point!'

from antennae thread spins (east) So and so fights with
football until all air let out and windows broken.

Every day he will try a new sentence on her. One he
has just learned (in shared other language) - from her
answer can he tell its meaning? He sells her sparkling
mineral water and has lived in Paris (spitefully the
former, proudly the recollection of the latter).

he buys the sandwiches she makes. They are so hot
they turn your stomach inside out and your piss
burns (in her, shared, other, language). Another
accent every day. She will never be impressed.

Word is shell that gesture fills so a hundred versions
of each combination of words must be acted out at
any one moment of speech.
Concept pulls at kicks against skin of the word.
Remains intact (in non-10-languages. alive.)

all day sitting behind wooden bar on brown stool
pouring tea (rum) in the merciless winter. Pamphlet-
reading economy of brothers, every word's ambiguity
lavished and tenderly devoured IN time/history.

Pigeon on antenna

one pigeon to pigeon
'refer! Refer!'

Blake. *Want Matches?*
Yes! Yes! Yes!
Want Matches?

Visitor. *No!*

The non-commanders' gestures fill skin of the word to
explosion. pushing pushing against membrane

[insert illustration: very large woman wearing a tiny
t-shirt with national flag on it, her body threatening
to burst the image]

*they work so fast! You see them, then you see them
away from you!*

*now is one, then is two, then is two thirty...wait wait
yes...now is one then is two then is two thirty...*

Accent absorbs another over time. Intonation cannot
be 'un-learned'

Speaks carving of word (between teeth) the lived (on
tongue)

[the end of the phrase fills me with fear - quieter
and quieter must I speak so that last word almost
inaudible. Intonation monotonous as possible
(words persist)]

*I hesitate which word to take, as I can take but few
and each must be the chieftest, but recall the Earth's
most graphic transaction is placed within a syllable,
nay, even a gaze -*

Defeat is unimportant. Defeat is not unimportant.

Speaking is possible as shared moment accounts
for (the) untranslatable of the Now. I cannot speak
because an accumulation of shared moments over
time creates/makes possible translations. Each word
laden with this past.
I can hear (you) as formation made up of past choice
of word. I cannot hear (you) as the voice chosen by
the word.

*i trap time to exist openings obstruct and the memory
passes to legend*

When talking becomes exchange of information -
information as make-up - in form it erases distance
- utterance already commonplace.

speech 'about' self becomes impossible, when I realise
that (assuming one place from which I speak) [it] only
increases distance to the other. 'Those' ears must
be detached from head. This 'mouth' must be un-
assumed.

thinking today of thought stalled those days of
frozenness, nervous imprisonment writing is difficult
when you are not here talk through your hair see you
struggle with no words for hands the reverse

*"Incredible how close one can get to despair. When one
is talking, I mean."
"Yes."
"Sometimes talking to each other is as difficult as
dying."
"Yes."*

rupture of thought only presence can achieve

Terror of crowded places. He recognises every face he
has ever seen. But once they are gone their image is
gone, too. In their absence, he cannot think of them
unless he sings to himself the sound they make.
Intimacy is a tune.

and words were humming in my head accompanying

my tortured bicycle chain riding through the city -
'glean' - i gleaned your voice through your words,
slight smile, hands fighting with air seeking to shape
and unshape -

fenced view from shore to word
tear word
hear what hesitate

B.S. Johnson
Edward Gorey
Louis Zukofsky
Patrek
Mattin
M.H.
Emily Dickinson
Barbara O'Brien
G.J. Wolman through M.H.
Marguerite Duras
A.B.
M.G.K.

**anja buechele is a mobile hazard. foresees no end
to the condensement.**

I don't think much of myself, but I think about myself all the time

I've Abandoned Me: Ronnie van Hout at the New Gallery, Auckland Art Gallery, 13 December 2003 – 29 February, 2004

It was 1996. At the end of my first year at art school, a couple of my new university friends invited me, and some other like-minded colleagues, to participate in a show in an empty space at the back of a rather distasteful bar, that was sometimes used for parties, in the illustrious city of New Plymouth. This being my first visit I remember the shiver down my spine as we drove in our beige Toyota Corolla that we bought especially for the road trip around the wrong side of Mt. Taranaki and saw the hellish plumes of flame emanating from the oil refinery or bondage bar or whatever that thing is. Our show was well received by the surfer community, as well by the city council guy and concerned parents who where present etc. After the more responsible people left the opening there was a huge round of oil spots on tinfoil that left me admiring the big string of coloured lights that were always on because someone had secretly wired them directly to the power line in the alley.

Anyway the upshot was that while I was there I had the pleasure of seeing Ronnie van Hout's Govett-Brewster residency exhibition, *I'm OK*, which was on there along with another show of 'women's painting' that had what I now recognise as the cringe-and-groan-worthy title *Skirting Abstraction*. The van Hout show was a revelation to my barely post-teenage sensibility: it was bright and light and kind of messy. I remember an old wood-grain TV playing a video of the artist nailing bits of wood together at random; a pathetic little silver UFO hanging from the ceiling; a drawing of a stag's head rendered in a thin line of coloured plastercine; orange strawberry planters with pink latex heads with plastic carrots; a silver space suit; a small model of a rocket launcher, rendered in a monochrome white; piles of gouty body parts a wooden stand with words formed from clay: "help me I'm in the land of the giants". The installation weaved its way round the gallery like a drunk. This was a show that stuck in my head and rubbed off a little on my own sensibilities, funny and without being stupid and light without being unimportant.

I've Abandoned Me, the recent survey of van Hout's work, curated by the Dunedin Public Art Gallery's Justin Paton, seems a little better behaved by comparison. Based on the premise that van Hout's constant references to himself form some kind of explosion of his identity, a profusion of, as Justin Paton put it, meta-Ronnies and semi-Ronnies. But the overwhelming impression of *I've Abandoned Me* is one of almost single-minded consistency. The idea of van Hout as splintered-if-not-schizophrenic self seems a put-on, a mask, a disguise or a surface that conceals the super-consistent (and judging from the show, pretty well-organised) good-guy underneath.

Concentrating on self-portraiture, the exhibition does a good job of presenting a potentially unhealthy

level of self-absorption, but leaves out work by the artist that doesn't fit in to this scheme so neatly (for example countless military models executed with a straight face – I'm sure there are others but no list springs to mind). Museumification has seemingly ironed out many of the idiosyncrasies (conscious or unconscious) in van Hout's presentation strategies. Slick bracketless shelves replace DIY style hardware store brackets, botched fiberglass body parts give way to hyper-realistic silicone body casts almost in Duane Hanson hyper-style. (I noticed during his floor talk that van Hout and one of his figures had matching shoes.) This presentation strategy, while providing a sense of cohesion, gives the show a sparse, half-empty feel, and ironically raises each work to the level of some kind of masterpiece; a sentiment echoed by Chris Saines, director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, during the opening speech, saying that van Hout should by now surely be thought of on the same level as that other New Zealand art hero, Colin McCahon. I guess like brown, beige or fluoro being the new black, anti is the new hero. I guess without any kind of hero there are all of a sudden some problems for curators – who do I put in a show? How do I know what is good? And how can you be an artist without being some kind of hero or anti-hero? Perhaps these questions have been a bit hard, or not really. Whatever, the effect is to swap one romantic notion of what an artist is for another.

To see just exactly how today's romanised notion of what an artist is gets played out I shall turn to the exhibition at hand. Set out in a vaguely chronological fashion the starting point for the exhibition appears to be a copy of van Hout's high school leaving report, in which he apparently does well despite his eccentricities and is well liked (or was that tolerated?) for of his absence of malice.

Nearby are a series of embroidered canvas panels, including some that advertise for prospective band members. These are truly of their mid-nineties time, one looking for a member of 'Devon' carries on the then (and perhaps always) important task of deriding the eighties, and another looks for members of an 'alternative' band, perhaps one not far from his own, Into The Void – alternative art-rock, dumb but glam; the cool of rock music was another 90s NZ art trait, one that seems to smell of hero worship for the cooler than thou, karaoke style.

A number of works incorporate video, in a number of different ways. *Psycho House* (1999) was the first of these to appear in this show, a model of the house that featured in Alfred Hitchcock's seminal film, complete with a tiny video monitor set in to an upstairs window that shows the artist himself pacing backwards and forwards with a knife. Low droning music emanates, a kind of antidote to the stabbing high-pitched psycho theme. It seems like he is waiting for something to happen. I want to leave before it does.

In *House and School and UFO* (2001), a model of



Ronnie's own primary school is rendered in plywood with a very bat-like UFO looming ominously overhead. New Zealand's standardised prefab classrooms have always been creepy at night, perhaps something to do with the sparseness and openness of the buildings, a spaciousness not unlike van Hout's current installation style. This work is indebted to Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex*¹ (1996), which recreated every educational institution the artist ever attended only enhanced by the vaguery of his own memory, mapping the phantasmised spaces recovered from the memories of the alleged sexual abuse; van Hout's speaks of his fear of UFO abduction, a type of paranoia not uncommon in his home town of Christchurch, where one might recall the civic crèche scandal, an example of the type of mass hysteria that Kelly's work is critical of.

The relationship that van Hout's work has to international art magazines is an area that seems ripe for discussion, especially in its relation to art post-*Helter Skelter*. Perhaps that is what curator Justin Paton is referring to when his points to the semi-Ronnies, both not entirely Ronnie fixated on Ronnie and a lax and out and wasted kind of detachedness that you might find in a Brett Easton Ellis novel. (I remember in *The Rules of Attraction*, characters tended to bracket everything in terms of semi, as in 'I'm semi-turned-on,' or 'I'm semi-stoned.' Perhaps Van Hout is saying 'I'm semi-ripping this off but it fits the situation.')

Judging from its absence from the discussion of van

Ronnie van Hout, *Monster* (1999) photograph, collection of the artist.

Hout's work, originality is perhaps the hardest thing to talk about in New Zealand art. Perhaps one of the strangest things that I have noticed in the New Zealand art world in general is way in which the sources that New Zealand art draw from are often ignored, especially if those sources include work from elsewhere, transposed via international glossy art magazines². But doesn't the discussion of the work take place on a more interesting level if the things that the artist's are interested in and inform the work are also mentioned?

Chris Saines suggest that we mention van Hout in the same hushed reverential sentence as van Hout, I mean McCahon, so I'll give it a go. [Cue the Mists of Time...] I remember dimly back in 7th from art history being told that McCahon's early influences were modernists seen over here only in the then equivalent of the glossy art magazines. And then there was the Mondrian, the Abstract Expressionism and the black paintings he saw travelling. This of course was couched in terms of some kind of heroic identification with a revolutionary spirit, and once given the original impetus spouted profundities from his very soul; and that his quotes from various sources didn't mean any kind of lack of originality on his part. I guess New Zealand art history can be so easily overwhelmed by reverence and awe that some of the more interesting questions are never asked. Perhaps instead of thinking of van Hout as



being like McCahon, we should turn it around and reconsider McCahon in light of van Hout. McCahon as obsessive hobbyist fanboy... McCahon as drunk chimp painter (I AM drunk)...

The other point, also from dim 7th form memories, is the importance, drummed into us throughout many art classes, of having an artist model, so that the markers (mysterious people) could tell if your work was good or not via its resemblance to an international or local precedent. This is the system that van Hout came through and the significance of which is pointed out by their inclusion of his leavers reference from Mairehau High School. One wonders if it is an attitude adopted at all levels of the New Zealand art institution, producing an odd dilemma for the New Zealand artist – a need for originality and authenticity left over from modernism combined with an academic conservatism prepared only to vouch for the idea received via a recognised international precedent.

That New Zealand art is seldom discussed in terms of its international context reinforces its parochial nature, and traps it in its own adolescence, that state of awkwardness where the idiosyncrasies of the self are formed through unutterable aspirations, much like the teenage concerns that emerge from van Hout's oeuvre. I think it is his adolescence that makes van Hout an important and influential figure in the New Zealand art world. Van Hout champions the wonders of the geekiness of your classic third former and the embarrassed awkwardness of the fourth former, like the New Zealand art world in the nineties – self-absorbed but with low self-esteem, more reactionary than revolutionary?

Ronnie van Hout, *Monkey Madness, Self-Portrait, Sculpt D. Dog* (2001) photographs, courtesy of Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney.

Notes

1. See Anthony Vidler, "Deep Space/Repressed Memory: Mike Kelley's Educational Complex" in *Mike Kelley: 1985-1996*, Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona.
2. Robert Leonard writing a partial list of artists that van Hout has drawn from isn't exactly in-depth discussion.

Dan Arps is an artist living in Auckland and is the co-editor of *Natural Selection* magazine.

IATROCAPITALISM! BARE LABOUR! UNLIMITED LIABILITY!

The self-evident spat out in occasional undocumented case studies

**Object 'A'
Matters and Memory**

'Children's trusts to champion safety of youngsters at risk' (Financial Times, 9/9/03)

New government green paper, 'Every Child Matters', promises "the most far-reaching reform of child services for 30 years" (T.Blair).

The proposals are presented as a 'response' to the inquiry into the social services' failure to prevent the death of eight year-old Victoria Climbié. (Once again, the shock effect of an exceptional catastrophe infects the most commonplace administration of social life). The most impressive aspects seem to be:

(1.) that every child will be given a personal number at birth, to which a sort of risk-profile will gradually be attached. The number will follow the child throughout childhood and adolescence. No mention is made (at least not anywhere in the media) of what happens to the number after that (or when 'after' might be). The policy-makers don't appear to be bothering to pretend that the information would be destroyed or detached from the newly responsible adult's institutional profile at a particular point; rather, while 'debate' about ID cards continues feebly to rage, it doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone to ask the question.

(2.) that 'Tragedy' will be prevented in future (never mind for now that a Tragic end traditionally results precisely from a heroic attempt to STOP fate taking its course) by the 'sweeping away of legal, technical and cultural barriers'(cultural change through legislation?!) to 'information sharing' between the various agencies with a stake in the nascent citizen, eg. doctors, counsellors, teachers, social workers, police and other criminal justice professionals. The child is simultaneously 'at risk' of physical and mental illness, of abuse at home or by strangers, of academic underachievement, of schoolyard bullying, and of becoming a truant, an ASBO*, a criminal etc; therefore protection against all these things will be provided by 'integrated [i.e. cross-agency] teams... based in and around schools and children's centres'. Around the nexus of risk, then, medical, psychological, educational and police forms of observation converge. Practical consequences of this interdisciplinary approach could be, first, that low-level police or quasi-police action, not being categorically distinct from that of teachers, nurses etc, would be insinuated casually and pervasively into the general fabric of 'protection', appearing as 'common sense', almost as technical intervention, without the stigma of formal judicial procedure. Second, all the other elements of the risk/personality profile would potentially be available for police hermeneutics: data sharing implicitly establishes the premise that, for instance, a child's psychological or educational attributes have

some bearing on his or her criminal status, and vice versa.

Just how efficiently this kind of provisional, technical mechanism might outflank the formal justice system is spelled out admirably by the apologist quoted in the article as promising that the new framework provides the exciting opportunity for 'services' to intervene BEFORE action is required according to the usual fixed criteria.

*NB: ASBO = Anti-Social Behaviour Order

**Object 'B'
'Not even as substance, only as subject'**

(same newspaper, same day as the above!): 'New vaccines to help fight addiction'.

Interpreted literally, this headline seems to promise a new kind of immunization that would make it possible to ingest physically addictive substances without the risk of physical dependency, or more precisely of physical withdrawal on stopping. But of course, it's the very opposite. The 'researchers' are anxious to point out that the product isn't intended to be any immediate use to actual addicts, and (curious as this may sound for a so-called vaccine), certainly not to anyone who hasn't become addicted yet. No, it's for those who have been addicted in the past and have already gone through withdrawal to 'help keep them from relapsing'. As you might have guessed by now, it doesn't 'fight addiction' at all, if addiction to a substance means depending on it physically. Rather, it blocks the body's pleasure-response to a particular molecule, so that the *substance* is still 'addictive', but the *subject* loses the desire to indulge in 'at-risk behaviour'. The potential utility for the 'good behaviour contracts' model of toughness on the causes of crime hardly need stating, and the FT didn't bother in its report. A more interesting omission is any clear statement as to whether each vaccination is really only effective against one particular substance, and if so, how. The examples used throughout the report are nicotine and cocaine, but it's not suggested that these are the only drugs the vaccine 'helps' against. Does a team of ultra-Platonic scientists imagine that we're born with a built-in set of brand-sensitive receptors, a unique one for every drug ever discovered or still to be synthesised, and that the 'vaccine' has only to seek these out and destroy them? Otherwise, it's hard not to conclude that the researchers are proposing a sort of pre-emptive strike against a large and nebulously-defined area of neural activity in the name of eliminating a risk supposed to be concealed somewhere inside it.

**Object 'C'
'Jacobins and Freemasons'***

Agamben's 'biopolitical death machine' – the permanent state of exception that locates sovereign decision over life and death in 'technical' administration of bodies – is developed most audaciously not at

Guantanamo Bay but in the everyday machinery of 'health'. Recent SPK literature rightly insists anew on the co-dependency of the structure of exception and that of medicine; the argument is also beautifully expounded in Lars von Trier's *The Kingdom*, whatever the director intended. The plot summary speaks for itself. Almost all the male doctors in the eponymous big haunted Copenhagen hospital are solemnly-initiated members of a masonic-type Lodge (whose name the *Digest* forgets). Slate-faced Dr. Bondo is a professor of pathology, with a particular research interest in hepatosarcoma of the liver. After waiting for years to work on a suitably destroyed liver, he finally finds a patient who's dying from one, but the comatose patient's family won't consent to dissection. Bondo begs the Brothers of the Lodge for help; a shit-stirring Swedish consultant suggests that the problem could be solved by *transplanting* the liver into the body of a signed-up organ donor. After almost a whole episode of taciturn brooding, Bondo decides that there's only one ethical way to do this. At the next Lodge meeting he begs special leave to interrupt the bacchanal to address his Brother surgeons on a matter of exceptional urgency: will they come to his aid by transplanting the hepatosarcomatic liver from the now brain-dead patient into *Bondo himself*? If the liver subsists in his body for 10 minutes it will legally and ethically be his own; after that he can have his native liver transplanted back into him, and the hepatosarcoma will be fully at his experimental disposal. The drunken Specialists, of course, are more than happy to oblige. The one who naively objects that this would 'compromise their Oath' is curtly reminded that allegiance to the Brotherhood overrides all oaths. The operation can take place immediately: the rule-overriding obligations of the Brotherhood will remain in force, as an *Extraordinary Lodge* is instituted in the one conveniently unoccupied operating theatre: the *Civil Emergency Room*.

*NB: 'Jacobins and Freemasons': Living transversality among EU functionaries, as denounced by Umberto Bossi, the Italian Minister of Reforms.

>>>>yet more of the same soon>>>>

Inside: farce repeats itself as history

IATROCAPITALISM! BARE LABOUR! UNLIMITED LIABILITY!

containing the second part of the spat-out self-evident

(*you're never safe, nohow*)

Object 'A'.

Action, time and vision

(BBC radio report, some time in August): Managers of a hospital somewhere in England (?) are informed by the relevant authority (??) that they face personal criminal prosecution if they fail to implement an 'Action Plan' against 'workplace stress' within a given time. A better example of how 'stress' works as diagnostic concept and administrative tool could hardly be imagined, for it transpires as the report goes on that in the context of this hospital the phrase 'workplace stress' refers directly to *length of working hours*. To the *Digest's* tiny mind, 'stress' always looks like a device to medicalize heterogeneous material conflicts or problems. Or, if you like, to displace attention from specific, multiple, diachronic etc causes of personal misery to the homogeneous, synchronic totality of their effect as symptom on the *individual* sufferer. So that, of course, the remedial action prescribed is always adjustment of the individual, in whom the 'stress' is located, to the conditions. The hospital example spells out what this means in practice in giant phosphorescent letters: *the entire question of 'working hours' – the politics and 'economics' of labour time – is subsumed under the medical-technical, individualizing logic of 'stress.'* Presumably, once a sensitive enough Action Plan to deal with stress-effects is in place (and after all, its perfection need only be relative; it's in a lot of parties' interests if it perpetually needs to be updated), then the problem of labour time can be treated as resolved permanently, or at least relegated to the status of a technical matter.

The theme was picked up again a couple of days later in a short *Financial Times* story (18/8/03) on a survey by Read Training, purportedly showing that more men (than in an undefined past) are 'accepting the need for stress-management training'. Apparently men, more so than women, used to be ashamed about accepting instruction in how to manage the stress-symptom, but now they no longer feel that accepting training means relinquishing responsibility and therefore is a 'sign of weakness'. Understandably given the different light in which it would cast men's newfound openness, it's not even contemplated that stress-management training might be disdained not because it entails giving up manly responsibility, but because it makes the trainees responsible for adapting endlessly to whatever besets them...

Object 'B'.

This is what democracy looks like (and pension reform think tanks would be pleased too)

Rome daily *Il Messagero* (8/10) tells a story – with a happy ending, it's immediately emphasised – about an 'unusual caller' on a radio talk show. A young, distressed female caller, pleading with the host to help her: 'I found out a week ago that I'm pregnant, and I want to have an abortion but my parents don't want me to. What should I do?' In the next few hours, over 200 calls come in, almost every single one of them beseeching her not to abort. Arguing from beatific example: 'I had my first baby when I was 17, now I have 11 children and I'm as happy as can be.' Or laying more sophisticated ethical snares: 'Think of all those poor couples who try so hard to have children and can't! You *must* keep the baby!' Not long afterwards, the caller calls back to bear witness to the reality of empathetic legislation: 'Thank you all so much, my mind's made up now. If it's a boy I'll call him Davide, if it's a girl, Martina'.

Object 'C'.

...von Krankheit eine Arme, c. 1834

(From Roy Porter, *London, A Social History* p.315.) 'A rationalist administrator, Edwin Chadwick [N.B. Victorian Benthamite commissioner for London workhouses and sewers] expected to cure pauperism through the 'less eligibility' philosophy of the workhouse system, a self-operating mechanism for eliminating pauperism: the workhouse being intended as nastier than work. Yet destitution did not diminish. Why then was his pet workhouse system not working? Chadwick blamed disease. By preventing labour, sickness caused penury. The struggle against disease therefore fell, he argued, within the scope of government.'

IATROCAPITALISM! BARE LABOUR! UNLIMITED LIABILITY!

The physician says I have "Nervous Prostration". Possibly I have – I do not know the Names of Sickness.

– Emily Dickinson

Object 'a'

The US litigation sector has taken time over its inevitable massive mobilization post-9/11. Only now are the outlines of the ingenious legal strategy incubated over the last two years beginning to emerge. Lawyers hired by victims' families and other 'materially damaged' parties are suing airport security agencies, airlines, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and the owners of the World Trade Center for 'negligence in the prevention of terrorism.' To an extent that seems exceptional today but is easy to imagine as a near-future norm, their case lays bare the 'effective fiction' of Law's application to anomic life by appealing to it directly. New York district court judge Alvin Hellerstein had little choice but to throw out American and United Airlines' objections, allowing the case to go ahead, because the plaintiffs are invoking, and thus putting to the test the mechanism that ultimately founds Law's capture of life in every case: the 'sovereign', retrospective decision to 'apply' Law to unlegislated anomie.

The terms of Hellerstein's ruling lay out this logic of unlimited liability with breathtaking candour. The airlines admitted responsibility for the fate of the passengers on the planes, but they argued that they couldn't be held accountable for the effects of the towers' collapse, 'because the consequences of the attacks were unpredictable'. The Judge was bound to disagree: the airlines are answerable for *all* the deaths and other 'damage' that day, *because from the moment the terrorists boarded the aeroplane everything was possible*. In other words, the legal principle of probability, of 'reasonably' intelligible cause and effect, was instantly suspended when the 'terrorists' appeared. By their very presence they created a sort of subaltern 'state of exception', within which all laws were in force but none could be applied. This didn't mean the cancellation of legal responsibility, although the latter is articulated precisely in terms of the idealized common sense of cause and effect. On the contrary, the impossibility of delimiting responsibility for *particular* effects meant that *all parties could be limitlessly accountable for everything that happened*.

Neither the space nor the patience is available here to go into why it might be convenient right now for the Empathetic Security State¹ to have this principle, *on which the application of all Law always implicitly depends*, brought a little further out into the open in a high-profile, emotion-saturated test case. It's at least a 'sign of the times' that this happens at a moment when 'security and public health risks' tend to be presented in terms of virtually permanent invisible menace, perpetually threatening to detach cause

from comprehensible effect, to paralyse society and individuals with ever-exceptional undecideability.

A less banal chain of consequences, however, might follow from a legal precedent unobtrusively established by the ruling, almost as a by-product of the main vindication of Law's biopolitical basis in unlimited liability. According to the court, the hijacked aeroplanes (and, by extension, all the territory attacked using them, and, by extension, all the world in which another such attack remains possible...) were transformed into something like zones of exception, in which 'anything was possible', with all application of Law suspended even as all laws remained in force. (Enforcement of the 'suspended' laws, of course, is merely deferred, until the future moment of their unlimited retrospective application to everything 'within' the episode of causal undecideability.) Accounting for the events in these terms, however, entails determining the hijackers' legal position in relation to them, even if only implicitly. In traditional legal theory, the power to initiate and end the state of exception is exclusive to the sovereign; in fact the essential quality of sovereignty consists in this prerogative. Judge Hellerstein departs dramatically from this tradition, for, geopolitical conspiracy theories aside, no constituted sovereign power can be said to have 'declared' the airborne exception. 'Everything was possible' *from the moment the terrorists boarded the aeroplane*: the exceptional circumstance is unequivocally attributed to their action. Their embarkation was the last causally intelligible act before the suspension of legal causality, and the interlude ended with their final 'decision' on the flying bombs' delivery. Whatever Hellerstein intended, the ruling marks a breakthrough in materialist jurisprudence: sovereign power is fully secularized, detached from all residue of divine right or moral content, even from the need for a fixed relation to a given sovereign body. In bestowing it on a few lightly-armed civilian 'irregulars', the Judge acknowledged sovereignty to be assumed, contested and transferred, bought, sold and usurped, according to the prosaic contingencies of material power. Never before have such plainly subaltern subjects been endowed *in Law* with the regal privilege of concentrating the 'decision over death' in their own miserably exposed bodies, interrupting the legal order and in doing so renewing its 'exceptional' basis in the lethal management of life.

Object 'a'.1

Some national justice systems have advanced further than others in updating the idea of a crime from that of a *event* occurring at a particular time and place to that of a *pure potentiality of the criminal body*, as much an essential personal attribute before as after it first manifests itself in whatever transgressive act. The UK leads the world in this kind of research, with particular success in the pre-emptive enclosure of potential or latent criminals. Nonetheless, although the British biopolice works on the cutting edge, a few lessons remain to be learned from overseas.

Late in 2003 the Inner London Crown Court convicted Mohammed Dica, described without fail by newspapers as 'an asylum seeker', of *biological grievous bodily harm*, for infecting two lovers 'with HIV, which causes Aids'. The verdict was 'greeted with tears, applause and shouts of "yes"'. Around the same time, however, a Federal court in Switzerland showed just how far Law can really go towards annexing the indeterminate in cases of this kind. According to *Corriere del Ticino*, a Zurich 'drug addict' was imprisoned 15 months ago for 'Aids contamination'. Except that no virus except fear was actually transmitted: he only *believed* he'd infected his partner, and this belief was the basis for the original conviction. When he tested HIV-negative, the erstwhile pathogen appealed against his sentence, but he lost his appeal and has to stay in jail. The court ruled that, *even though it wasn't what he was initially convicted for*, having had sexual relations with his partner made him guilty of an *impossible crime* under article 23 of the Swiss penal code.

Object 'a'.2

The Bio-Power Digest is pleased to announce the winner of its PERSON OF THE YEAR award for 2004, some 11 months before other journals do likewise. By universal acclamation, the title of *Bio-Power Digest* PERSON OF THE YEAR, 2004, goes to THE WHITE COLLAR PSYCHOPATH, a forger of new weapons from old illness.

University of British Columbia psychology professor Robert Hare says psychopaths 'are motivated by three things: thrill-seeking, game-playing and hurting people'. They are also 'skilled connmen and manipulators. Even professional psychologists can easily be misled by them'. (*Financial Times* 13/1/04) The real achievement of the psychopathic agents in the business community doesn't lie in the kinds of low level havoc wreaked individually on immediate working environments – lost productivity, spiralling 'stress', poisoned 'leadership', enervation of 'team spirit', common theft, etc. More impressive than any of these is the way the psychopathic insurgency's innumerable cells combine to sabotage the language and manners of professionalism, infecting the circulation of relative trust, the 'immaterial' social collaboration that business runs on, with a ghastly undecideability.

Of course, this entropy-bomb could not have been detonated in the 'workplace' without the help of a new hybrid of clinical psychology and classical Human Resources doctrine, indirectly called into being by the psychopaths themselves. Over the last few years managers had come to notice how often pathological impulses and immaculate 'self-presentation skills' coincided in the same workers. Eventually concern became frantic enough to merit a fresh round of iatro-consultancy. The likes of Prof. Hare and his clinical colleague Paul Barbiak were quick to upgrade 'coincidence' to the status of *causal relation*: what if the psychopaths came across like perfect employees not in spite of their pathology but *because of it*?

Working on this hypothesis, they used a test devised by Hare to distinguish psychopathic criminals from healthy ones, adapting it to suit executive clients. The scientists tested a subject by asking *his or her colleagues* 'to answer Yes, No or Maybe to questions about his or her behaviour.' The questions were about: 'creating a power network used for personal gain; lying to co-workers; coming across as smooth, polished and charming; and using a lot of management jargon to impress people.'

With this kind of 'awareness', the definition of the potentially 'psychopathic' is dilated enough to embrace the most sophisticated expressions of 'social intelligence' as comfortably as petty office dishonesty. For a business, even to monitor the phenomenon – never mind the results – means admitting the apocalyptic idea that any manifestation in a worker's behaviour of socially and industrially desirable subjective qualities might in fact be manifesting nothing more than the worker's expertise in disguising a total lack of these attributes. Professor Hare suggests that about an hour's close observation by a team of inquisitors from across the corporate hierarchy should be enough to bring out giveaway traits like 'punctuating conversation with unnecessary hand gestures' in a white collar psychopath. These are utopian mathematics, projecting a future in which paroxysms of surveillance would devour all work-time, leaving 'productive capacity' gutted by the cost of monitoring capital's psychopathic substratum.

Notes

1. viz. *The Bio-Power Digest*, as yet-unwritten editions. For now it should suffice to note that this state-form might take as its motto a British youth fashion label's disconcerting promise to its client-base: *We Are You*. See also: N. Rousseau, *A Turkey Votes for Christmas* <http://www.spacehijackers.co.uk/html/projects/zapa/naomir.html>
2. viz. *The Bio-Power Digest*, edition 2.

