



n[^]**TURAL** SELECTION **#**

Australasian
art reviews
summer 2005

Natural Selection Magazine

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Cover image: stuffed animal on
top of a cabinet in the lounge of the
Hostal Galerias Malda in Barcelona.
Photo: Warren Olds.

ISSN 1176-6808



This issue of *Natural Selection* has been team-edited. We have been lucky enough to be joined by four extraordinarily generous and discerning contributing editorial teams who deployed themselves to gather material for #3: Louise Tullett from Wellington; Matthew Hyland and Anja Buechele from Hackney, London; Liz Pulie and Luke Parker of Sydney-town; and, once again, James Lynch of Melbourne has pitched in, a veritable team of one. We are also grateful for the procurant energies of Rob McKenzie, and for the eagle eyes of Deborah Orum and Ralph Paine as proofers.

Dan Arps and Gwynneth Porter

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Following errors in *Natural Selection 2*, apologies must go to Elizabeth Newman. Her artist page should have been listed as *Untitled Poster 2004* assisted by Neal Haslem. And further apologies to Larissa Hjorth who is, in fact, completing her PhD on mobile phones and Japanese cute culture.

Mike Brown first crashed into the Australian art world in Sydney some time around 1960. His initial steps were taken in the company of Ross Crothall and Colin Lancel. Together they created the unwieldy enterprise of Annandale Imitation Realism. This collaborative project deployed collage, graffiti and junk to expansive and aggressive ends. Their exhibitions during this period involved sprawling installations of drawing, collage and sculpture with writing, pictures, figures and objects placed in cacophonous chorus.

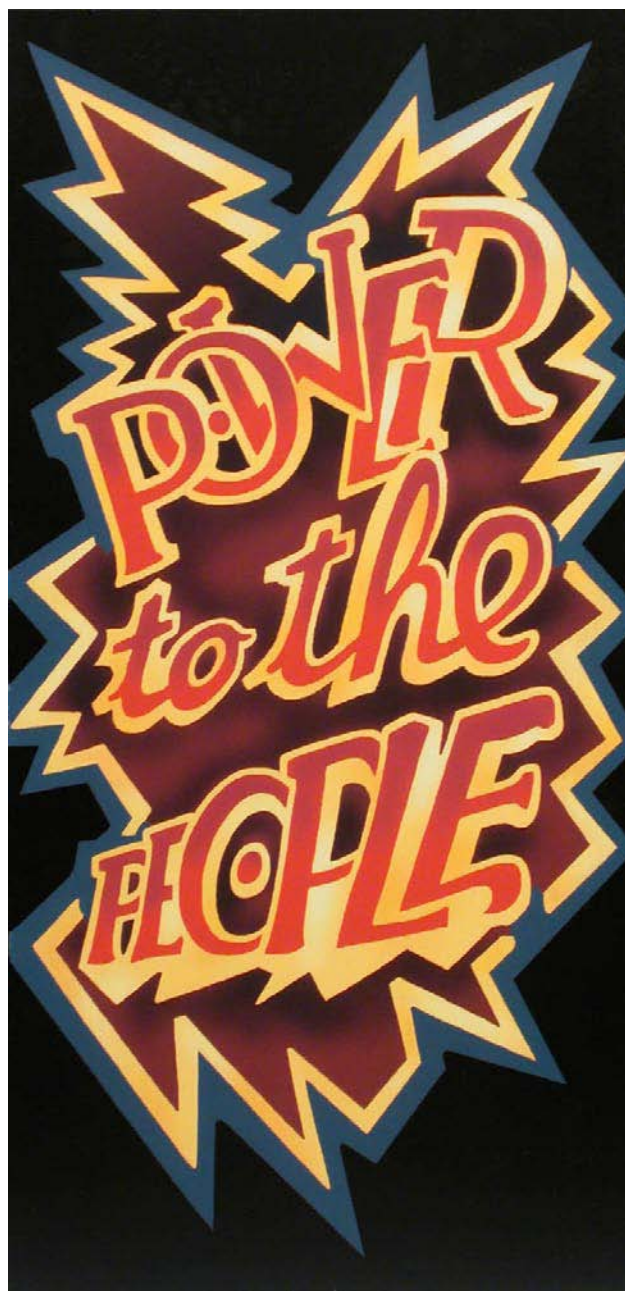
From c.1960 until his death in 1997, Brown produced a barrage of visual material. He navigated pornography, abstraction, pop lyrics and figuration, opening up and tracking diverse territory. I get the feeling much of his work was about the connectivity of known and unknown and the union of chaos and order. Accompanying this program was a heavy lashing of social agitation and the seductive concept of a 'revolution of the mind'. Words that recur when I think of his activities are proliferation, subversion, activism and belief.

As a devout fan of Brown's art, I often ask others for their opinion of his work. Despite having a big show at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1995, a majority of people are unaware of his existence. This seems an unfortunate situation. His series of Mindscapes have absorbed much of my looking. These abstract drawings that expand out from an almost arbitrary beginning, capturing, covering and outlining thought, seem to prefigure the current vogue for nomadic practice (Brown's work seems uncannily D&G). I think a fair bit of consciousness raising is needed about his ideas and his art.

Accompanying his visual practice, Brown also wrote. The essays here are a small fragment of a much larger body of writing. The bulk of this material is unpublished. Writing was a pivotal element of Brown's pursuits, but also one of the least known. Gary Catalano's essay 'The "Wreckings" of Mike Brown: an essay on the ideas of an artist', published in *Art and Australia* in April 1976, is the only article I've come across that makes sustained commentary on this activity. With luck this situation will change.

Shout-outs to Nick Selenitsch, my co-collaborator in sourcing and proliferating Mike Brown's writing. Many thanks should also be given to Clay Lucas, the artist's son, for his permission to reproduce these essays.

Located in Melbourne, Rob McKenzie devotes his energies to making, writing and publishing on art. Accompanying these pursuits, he also enjoys playing sport and 'doing' lunch.



Mike Brown, *Power to the People*, c.1990s, digital multiple, 60 x 28.8cm. © Courtesy of the Mike Brown Estate & Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

Just a perfect day (1961)

I have spent the day tramping the big, hungry city, and today it was a happy peaceful city, trundling along humming a tune to itself, dreaming about nothing very much while the sun it has not seen for days beamed down on it.

No-one I have talked to today has snarled or grumbled, and I have seen plenty of laughter and good-will.

I bought three yards of chain in a hardware store to hang a picture up by, and the chain got tangled as the shop assistant tried to measure it out, and in no time the chain was tangled around everything in sight, an eggbeater was pulled off a shelf and got bent, and then there were three assistants trying to help untangle the mess, laughing at each others clumsiness, and all succeeding very well at increasing the chaos.

Yesterday maybe there would've been snarls and swearwords, but not today when the world's wounds were healing in the spring warmth.

I left a musical instrument at a Railway Parcels Office and the woman looked at it and said, A banjo, is it? I said, That's right, and she wrote down banjo on the docket. She said that she was pleased to have guessed right because the day before a musician woman had brought in a cello in a case, and she had guessed that it was a viola, and the musician woman had been irritated and annoyed because her precious cello had been called a viola.

I said that she had been clever to guess the banjo because banjos have gone out of fashion, and you wouldn't see many around. That's right, she said, it's all guitars these days isn't it? But the banjo used to make a good old sound, as good as any instrument, she said with her eyes full of reminiscence.

The big hungry city is dreaming and laughing and reminiscing about nothing very much in particular on this warm spring day. Even the newspapers have relaxed their ever-watchful alertness for news that will shock and dismay.

The early placards told of a man sentenced to twenty years for a frightful rape attack on a nurse, and of a horror car smash in which two were killed. As the day wore on and the editors saw what sort of a day it was going to be, perhaps they realised that people would only read such a heading with the mildest of good-natured disinterest.

So the latest placard I have just passed by reads "Tax Rebate Windfall for Landowners," reflecting the public consciousness that the whole day is a windfall, a fruitful bounteous windfall that fell out of yesterday's grey sky.

Tomorrow might be the start of a Nuclear Holocaust, as the newspapers call it with such delicious poetry, or next month the tactical reverse of the present financial recession might turn into the rampaging rout of a depression. Who knows or cares? This is September 26th, 1961, a day thrown at men's feet by the idle hand of the sun-god, and whoever does not pick it up and handle it with loving care and carelessness must be a rogue, a waster and a thief.

There again it might be the bums, wasters, rogues and thieves who enjoyed today most of all, since they are mostly self-employed and would have been able to

take the day off from their usual wasting and thieving and roguery to enjoy themselves whatever way they wanted to.

My business in town today was to find a gallery, hall, Town Hall, church hall, abandoned factory or half-submerged lighthouse in which to exhibit the artwork I talked of two chapters ago.

Exhibiting with me as equal partners in the venture will be Rossy Pride-of-Day Crothall, the bearded streak-of-greased-lightning from Aotearoa, the land of the Kiwi and Waikato Three-X beer; and Honest Col John Lanceley, otherwise known as The Thief, from Sydney the same as me, Mike Jesus Bloody Christ Brown.

Is NOBODY interested in damaging the reputation of their building or establishment or whatever by housing a pile of hideous junk, some of it obscene, all of it absurd, and none of it a likely selling proposition?

Today I interviewed representatives from such varied institution as the National Art Gallery of New South Wales, Gowings, the Bonza Bargain Store, and Belborfolds the Dream Home of Fine Furniture – and all I got was affable expressions of goodwill in keeping with the bewilderingly benevolent sunny day.

At the Art Gallery I was told that it was gallery policy to only exhibit the paintings of artists who didn't need an exhibition because their reputation was already made, also the paintings of artists who were dead and buried and for the most part forgotten, Thank God, and also, though I am putting this bit in myself, paintings by artists who were never alive even when they perambulated about on the earth.

Well, there's the whole of Sydney to be explored yet, and I truly believe that if I am so stupid that I can't find a place, my sculptures will sprout legs and scout around for themselves, because most of them have more brains and personality than I have.

That is all I have to report for today, September 26th, although there were lots of other things I did which helped to make it one of the sweetest dreamiest peaches-and-creamiest days of my life and all for no particular reason.

For all the saints who from their labours' rest, for each and everyone of them a thripenny bit.

For all suffering Humanity a sixpenny Paddle Pop.

For all those not present with us here in this terrible dilemma, a kissy hug and a ball-pull.

I don't know what to think about anything (it don't matter, nohow)
(1971)

This is an exhibition in the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of the arts of the planet Tralfmadore, where the flying saucers come from.

If you've read any of the novels of Kurt Vonnegut Jr. you'll know what I'm talking about. If you haven't read any Vonnegut you're an ignoramus ill-equipped to survive the 20th century.

Peace anyhow.

Here we all are, huddled together for failing comfort, in the near-ruins of a civilization marked for early destruction by a wide array of gruesome means: "art" has meant a lot of different things at different times, what can it possibly mean in 1972?

You tell me, I'll tell you, and then we'll both know. Here's a bag full of muddled thoughts I guarantee you'll find most unhelpful...

* * * * *

Recently I moved from the city which was driving me nuts to a farmhouse 100 miles out in the country. From that vantage point the machinations of the art-world seem more weird, remote and incomprehensible than they ever did.

Why do I bother to scribble and paint pictures and do all that sort of stuff?

For me the answer comes back clear and strong – NOTHING BETTER TO DO.

That is to say, out of all the woeful array of non-activities that this society makes possible and permissible, art has for me the look of something at least marginally worth doing. Yet I am constantly reminded that even that narrow margin of "worthwhileness" is probably a mirage: by the time an exhibition of any kind has been mounted in the hallowed, stilted, exclusive air of an art gallery, it has been turned into something that one's healthiest reaction to would be to throw mud pies at.

What started out as a metaphysical inquiry has been turned into a sale of high-class chattels, and a public examination and judgment of something that was never meant to be either bought-and-sold, examined or judged, but lived.

* * * * *

...But so what? Is this then a complaint, or proclamation that something ought to be done?

That we need different, better types of art gallery, or that they should be done away with? That artists should change to non-marketable artforms, or simply be "better" artists than they in fact are?

We could make any or all these changes and still find ourselves just where we are.

The truth is that art considered as a separate subject from anything else has quite abruptly run out of validity; it can derive no more vitality from within itself until it is well into a process of becoming indistinguishable from science, politics, sociology, religion-&-philosophy, etc., etc., etc., until the "artist" has been recognised for what he is, a sort of



Mike Brown, *Mindscape II*, 1972, oil on canvas, 134.5 x 131cm.
© Courtesy of the Mike Brown Estate & Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

dinosaur doomed by fantastic over-specialisation to extinction.

Alienation from people and their "ordinary" doings has resulted in Art becoming an unforgivably dull subject. Visual art especially has alienated itself from fruitful social context and exists in an eerie limbo peopled by everyone-you-wouldn't-want-to-know-about: socialites and hip bank-clerks, businessmen and art scholars, professors and "instant" newspaper critics, art teachers, government officials and horse-traders.

(Hold it there! – I'm not trying to start class-warfare, but hell, what a heavy mix art-world people are!!)

Since art can never really be distinct from, and certainly not superior to, its social context, it follows that this exhibition, and this screed as well, is the uttermost bullshit. It's the best I could manage, yet bullshit it remains.

I should die of shame to exhibit it, especially when not far away, at La Perouse and Redfern there live the embattled remnants of a race that was massacred by mine, whose art-and-culture and way-of-life, superior to that of my own race in every important sense, was ferociously, contemptuously, deliberately suppressed and destroyed; I refer, of course, to the Australian Aborigines.

I sense an immense self-satisfaction in Western art still, that is quite void of justification: we think we're really somewhere, when in fact we're truly nowhere; lost a million miles from home: the most blazing heights of modern visual art are a tiny spark, albeit



Mike Brown, *Snow White*, 1987, collage, 51 x 63cm. © Courtesy of the Mike Brown Estate & Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

a healthy one, in an eternity of screeching blackness. We don't know what we're doing; we don't know what-the-fuck we're talking about. We grope, we dither, we idly fool about with concepts and notions that are as thin and tasteless as thin-air; the moment a feeble ray of light chances the way of one of us, we go into orgasms of adulation and crown him a genius. The arts-and-culture of the Aborigines, the Africans, New Guineans, South Americans, Indian and Chinese, Red Indians and Polynesians, in fact of almost everyone but us except perhaps in our far distant past, were no mere sparks of confused talent; they were, at best, lights that lighted up the universe. In their lights men became scarcely distinguishable from gods.

* * * * *

We are sick, sick, sick, and in self-disgust we're doing our best to destroy ourselves: the Bomb, poisoning-and-asphyxiation, social collapse and starvation; what'll it be?

* * * * *

And then again, so what? It don't matter nohow... in fact, the collapse of Western civilisation will be a blessing to the earth vastly greater even than the collapse of Rome, and that in its day was a blessing beyond compare. The point I want to come back to is, what in the name-of-all-that's-merciful do I hope to achieve, what do I imagine I'm doing, hanging a row of daubed sheets of

canvas on the walls of an elegant salon in this doomed putrescent shit-heap of a city, then sending invitations out to those scum-of-the-earth, the art intelligentsia, to come and gawk at the mess I've made?

Precious fucking little. I am utterly pessimistic about the prospect of any event within the teacup-whirlpool that is the Australian art world having an affect, good or ill, on anything whatsoever. However deftly one might deploy one's alleged aesthetic sensibilities, the fact remains that in utilising the existing art-vending machinery one is barking up the wrong tree entirely. Nor does any "right tree" exist, at least yet. The only earthly present use for the artist's imagination is in devising social circumstances, and means and methods of communication that will combine to create a "meaningful" human situation. What "meaningful" means, don't ask me – but we've all experienced isolated, usually happenchance events where some normally moribund art form has sprung into sizzling life: a song sung at a fireside by an amateur guitarist, which combined with the flickering shadows and awesome background silence to strike joy or holy terror into one's heart; a street poster pasted up at clandestine midnight which by morning light is a flash of brilliance against the peeling paint of a factory wall... a poem or speech at an impromptu meeting which fills one with indignation and lust for action against some injustice... a Bob Dylan verse heard above the din of a riotous party... a room that has been made

into such a warmly human environment that artifacts such as pottery, furniture, even paintings can “live” there without appearing to be mere status symbols, and are freed to deliver their messages of utility of philosophy as they were meant to be.

If an art from doesn’t “live” in this human-environmental sense, then it is meaningless, and dead, and the best thing to do is to bury it. We have a lot to bury: 99 percent of our culture or more is stillborn, never having even been intended by its makers to have lifeabundance, but merely serve as distraction from, a decoration to, a justification for a way of life that is leadin’ us nowhere, or to hell.

The first step for artists should be to de-specialise themselves, so that they are no longer dependent on any one type of communication machinery (art gallery, publishing house, cinema, etc.) nor moulded by its inherent limitations or corruptions into a crippled stance.

The notion that one was “meant to be” a painter rather than a writer, musician, philosopher, scientist or politician is a self-perpetuating cultural hypnosis. The only valuable quality any of these types of people have is not their special skills, but their acute awareness of the world and what it’s about: if this awareness is genuinely present it only takes time and work to develop the skill needed to translate it into any medium or activity.

Anyone with a brain in his head can write; anyone with a soul can play music if he tries; and everyone should develop political-philosophical-scientific understanding and integrate it with his activities.

* * * * *

So: this precious exhibition of mine, what does it represent?

An exercise in de-specialisation, yes?: but still so coloured by its art-worldliness as to make it nearly worthless as a human experience, except perhaps in a very negative sense.

Implicit in the act of painting is the expectation that it will be exhibited once or twice, and thereafter put in a cupboard to rot, or displayed in someone’s lounge room, or in a public collection if it’s incredibly lucky. This is what actually happens. So it goes.

What have I to say to anyone within such an environmental context?

Certainly nothing to the cupboard, nothing to most people’s lounge rooms, and nothing to the gallery-going jet-set. Nothing, that is, except DOODLY-DAH and YAH, and HOO-HAA, and GRUNK!... and fiddle-twiddle with the brush, and scribble-scribble, and humm, that looks quite nice there, and I’ll just slosh a little bit of red stuff there, it’s all the goddam same... within the context of the art world, I don’t know what to think, I don’t know what to do or say, except: WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU PEOPLE DOING IN AN ART GALLERY ANYWAY?? IF YOU’RE LOOKING FOR ART, YOU WON’T FIND IT HERE. You may as well hope to find religion in a church, health in a pill bottle, youth in a jar of cosmetics, true love in a brothel.

A few of the paintings have ended up despite themselves looking as though they mean something or other, or are trying to. Well, fancy that. And so what. And big deal. Forget it. It wasn’t what I meant to say, anyhow.

You and I, we’re a row of dummies in strait-jackets in a dungeon. And what have dummies in strait-jackets to say to each other? Nothing much except, Let’s get the hell outta here. And that’s what I’m saying to you now.

We have grown so used to constraint that we have forgotten that it’s possible to be free, that there’s a whole world outside your dungeon cell, and outside that again a whole universe, and outside that, who knows what? We have forgotten that art isn’t some special condiment you splash on life to make it taste a little better: if it’s anything at all, it’s everything there is, or was or will be, everything that a person can do, think or say to one another. It is a way of living and thinking, a way for me to transmit to you the totality of my being and for you to transmit your totality to me.

But that’s not the way we use it...

I see modern art as the first strivings of a healthy consciousness; but hundreds of years will probably have to pass before it has evolved into anything worth pissing on.

It won’t evolve by the efforts of artists slugging away manfully at artistic problems, because artistic problems don’t exist as such; they are merely mental blocks created by absurdities of our social condition. Artists should forget about art a little and start wondering about what they were born onto earth for, where they stand in relation to everything that’s happening in this world, whether what they are doing is as meaningful in a total sense as, say, planting a row of beans or cabbages, building a chicken coop, or going for a walk in the bush.

Does one really enjoy art, or is it just another rat-race? A truthful answer to this question should in the end produce some positive results, but it’s unlikely that they’ll take the form of anything we now recognise as art – except sometimes.

Painting pictures is OK; people were painting pictures before the Flood, and probably they’ll still be doing it when the moon falls to earth. But painting pictures isn’t the problem: first we have to revolutionise the world, and that’s a tall order, a long, nearly-hopeless task.

* * * * *

Smash US Imperialism.

Down with Everything.

Capitalism is a fat man eating a thin one.

Order = Chaos.

Everything = Nothing.

We are non-existent vibrations in a formless sea of nameless glunk.

Everything’s all right just as it is.

It don’t matter, nohow; and/or so it goes.

Paul Cézanne, Grandfather of Modern Art
(1961)



Above: Mike Brown, *Untitled*, c.1981, acrylic on canvas, 71.3 x 51cm.
Left: Mike Brown, *Poet Declaiming in the Wilderness*, c.1981, acrylic on canvas, 88 x 71.2cm. © Both images courtesy of the Mike Brown Estate & Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne.

I would like to dedicate this chapter to Paul Cézanne, grandfather of Modern Art, who not only simplified the whole physical universe into a simple and easily digestible assortment of cubes, spheres and cylinders to make life easier for Art students, but rendered an invaluable service to mankind by inventing shadow lettering.

No man but he could have done it. No one else would have wanted to do it. But he did it.

Yes he did it all right. He dunnit, no mistake.

He expected no fame from it, and but for this chapter would have received none. In his time he suffered for it, as all innovators must – he suffered the ridicule and derision of critics, fellow artists and signwriters, who one must suspect were just too lazy to put the shadows in the right places to give the soul-searching sensation of depth that the old painter originally intended.

I said at the beginning of the page that I would like to dedicate the chapter to a eulogy of Paul Cézanne. True, I would like to, but none of us can do exactly as he likes. There are other things in life than cubist shadow-lettering, and other men of genius than Paul Cézanne. Every page of every history book is a graveyard for great men; every grave is carefully tended and supplied with flowers by frantically adoring historians, who keep the memories of these men alive and flaming-bright despite the mountainous indifference of the masses who don't seem to want to know better.

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us. So sang psalm-singing King David, and by god he was right. Famous men should be praised, otherwise by definition they would cease to be great, and we would be left an impoverished race, dull and bereft of the leaven of genius.

That of course is the function of historians in our society; they are sort of public relations officers for long dead men; they whip up public enthusiasm, stimulate the arts by creating a demand for public monuments to explorers, kings, liberators and such like, and give comfort to those whose daily lives are devoid of the opportunity for doing great deeds.

Readers of history books should also be paid more, for their trouble in reading such bunkum.

History is Bunkum.

History is Stunkum.

History is Crunkum.

History stunk, stonk, stank, and still does, after all these years.

History is mildly entertaining, but a massive bore in large doses. History is more of a bore in larger doses and any dosage at all is just plain stonkum.

Inky pinky ponky

Daddy bought a donkey

Donkey cried when

Daddy died
Inky pinky stonkum
Inky pinky parles-vous
Daddy's little daughter she
Had a thrill with
Brother Bill

And got to like it so much she did it all the time.

In other words, History repeated itself, time and again.
History is always doing that, it's bloody repetitive, too
much so for me to waste my time on it any more.

Let's get back to dear old Paul Gauguin, who invented
shadow lettering while rolling around with Tahitian
lasses in the shadows of the sheltering palms, and
who, the historians tell us, shot off his left ball while
in a drunken stupor at a party in a Tamboran house
[CHECK DIARY FOR NAME], which is the South Seas
equivalent of the Moulin Rouge.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to Paul Gauguin
who proved conclusively to Medical Science that you
can still do it even with only one ball. This news has
given hope to many, and a new sense of security to
many others, including me, since I am an artist and
often get drunk at parties where firearms are readily
available for the playing of Russian Ballet.

On the subject of shadow lettering, I can only say
that as things have turned out, we would be better
off without it. It has become vulgar and common,
has become common property for the decoration of
municipal council buildings, sweet shops, railway
stations, and motion picture theatres and posters.

Modern shadow letterers merely strive for effect, and
seem to give no thought at all to the true fundamental
purpose of the art, which is to create a shimmering
illusion of an immense and mysterious depth on a
mere flat surface, so that the human soul is allowed
some relief and escape from the world of everyday
things, and can heal his ailing spirit by wandering
lonely as a cloud among the highways and byways of
a three-dimensional Classic Roman world.

How beautiful it is to see you climb to the very peak of
a gracefully sloped and pointed capital "A", the whole
thriving burgeoning scene of the modern metropolis
spread out before your eyes, history in the making,
money in the making, opportunities for the taking,
bread in the baking, lovers in hiding in Hyde Park, life
in a nutshell, love in a hut, the drama of death and life,
the birth pangs and growing pains of an adolescent
city, the momentary crystallisation and culmination of
umpteenth thousand years of historical gyrations as the
world rotates upon its madly-spinning and gyrating
axes, the axis of symmetry, the polar axis, the Axle-
grinders lament, a song of peaceful resignation and
acceptance of the turbulence of life.

Could I revive within me that symphony and song, to
such delight t'would win me I'd shout BRAVO, carry
on, and disregard the consequences and the fatal
rewards that the unfortunate possessor of the true
creative spirit has meted out to him by an unfeeling
cruel world.

Alas cruel world, alas, farewell, think but of me that
in a foreign land where persimmon and buobale strive
in an unholy struggle to the death in eagerness to
be the first to reach the life-restoring sunlight, think
only this of me: there is a part of me that is forever
British.

***Manhunt*: Aesthetics of the Amoral**

“BAN THESE EVIL GAMES,” read the *Daily Mail* headline after the murder of Stefan Pakeerah, allegedly a crime that copied the killings depicted by the infamous videogame *Manhunt*. The game had previously created similar outrage as earlier Rockstar titles such as *Grand Theft Auto 3* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, which were reviled by many as gratuitously violent, sexist and racist. The moral panic surrounding these games had led to a ban on the sale of *Manhunt* in New Zealand, Germany and other countries, while in the UK and elsewhere it was sold with an 18 rating, which should have prevented it from coming into the hands of the teenage murderer.

Although the investigation into the Stefan Pakeerah murder case found no evidence for a causal link between the killing and the game, *Manhunt* remained married to the murder in the public imagination – a pattern established by the mention of *Doom* in connection with the murders of highschool students at Columbine, and *Counter-Strike* in a similar case in Germany in 2002. While it seems easy enough to brush these allegations aside as simplistic explanations of a society unwilling or unable to engage with the institutionalised violence operating in late capitalist societies, it is hard to shrug off the discomfort caused by the fact that the videogame medium is perceived as primarily violent, if not downright evil, by a large majority of people.

Are videogames evil? So far, most serious investigations into the medium of the videogame – ranging from Stephen Poole’s popular history *Trigger Happy* to dense scholarly volumes such as David Myers’ *The Nature of the Videogame* – have shunned this question in favour of extolling the virtues of the medium. They argue that videogames represent a new form of storytelling, a new form of engagement with culture, even a new form of ideological critique. Following a similar line of reasoning, videogame journalism has praised games like *Grand Theft Auto 3* for their ‘satirical’ take on contemporary society, their self-referentiality and intertextuality.

In its review of *Manhunt*, *Edge* magazine (issue 132, January 2004) said: “The gore is disgusting, but it’s disgusting in the same way old-skool horror movies were, because of the use of over-the-top Troma-like evisceration.” It goes on to say that, “the title is much more interesting than the majority of videogames because the range of pop-cultural influences are so refreshingly different and diverse, from ‘The Warriors’ to ‘Running Man’ and ‘Escape from New York’ and beyond.”

In effect, the violence of *Manhunt* is justified by its rhetoric: satirical embellishment and intertextual references to other popcultural artefacts. On the face of it, this seems to be the same kind of logic that catapulted novels like Bret Easton Ellis’ *American Psycho* on the reading lists of academic literature departments all over the world. But is it really so

easy? Playing *Manhunt* myself, I could not shake the feeling that I was, somehow, the butt of a very sinister joke. To put it more precisely: the game’s appeal to my jaded and media-saturated mind, that was as obvious to me as to the *Edge* reviewer, seemed to me a deliberate manoeuvre to numb my critical faculties, a kind of counter-subterfuge that left me in an ethical and ideological dilemma.

In order to unravel the aporetic situation I found myself in vis-à-vis *Manhunt*, let me briefly summarise the game’s core mechanic, tinted, as it were, by my growing repulsion. In keeping with other Rockstar titles, the opening sequence of *Manhunt* has a distinct retro aesthetic simulating the grittiness of CCTV footage which evokes similar uses of this visual style in films by David Lynch and David Cronenberg. The other obvious influence on *Manhunt* are ‘snuff’ films with their typical conflation of sexuality and violence. This is clear from the game’s accompanying booklet which poses as a catalogue for Valiant Video Enterprise’s “domination and humiliation titles,” as well as the possibility to choose between a ‘hardcore’ and a ‘fetish’ difficulty setting at the beginning of the game.

Stereotypically enough, the game begins with the execution of the main character, which is later revealed as staged when he awakes to the sound of the ‘director’s’ voice offering him the following deal: if the protagonist – and thus, by extension, the player – is willing to supply him with footage for his films, he will be given a second chance to live. This ludicrous ‘Running Man’ scenario serves as the backdrop for the unfolding action of the game, with the ‘director’ doing just what his name implies: giving directions to the player.

It is this use of a (meta)narrative voice that is perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of *Manhunt*. Where other games depend on subtle or not-so-subtle cues to create the impression that it is the player, rather than the game, who controls narrative progression, this game quite unashamedly *orders* the player to do certain things – in most cases, kill her opponents in the most ghastly manner imaginable. What is interesting about this narrative voice is its inherent unreliability: it is all too easy to speculate that the director’s voice might indeed be just that, a voice in the player’s head. The suggested use of a headset while playing the game – whose inbuilt microphone will also alert nearby opponent’s to the protagonist’s presence – reinforces the effect of this stylistic device, instilling a relentless feeling of paranoid anxiety in the player.

Stealth is the protagonist’s most powerful weapon in the game – even more so than in seminal ‘stealth games’ like *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell*. Opponents are almost impossible to overcome in direct combat, requiring the player to slowly creep up behind them, and kill them with a quick blow to the head with a baseball bat or some similar form



of silent extermination. The extermination scenes themselves – using means such as plastic bags, wires, and glass shards – contain some of the most repulsive imagery ever seen in a videogame, including severed heads, extended agony and blood spurting onto the virtual camera’s ‘lens’. Most sordid of all, however, is the option of choosing the level of violence in these executions – quick kills are easy to perform, while drawn-out massacres require a high level of skill, which will be rewarded by an increased violence rating from the director.

Not that the victims are particularly deserving of sympathy: they are depicted as derelict dwellers of a decayed, sprawling suburbia – a setting which is almost the antithesis of the bustling urban settings of *Grand Theft Auto 3* and *Vice City*. It is this ‘grimy realism’ that sets *Manhunt* apart from other games in the genre, its predilection for the margins of society faintly reminiscent of Zola and Celine. This depiction of how violence is ‘de-centred’, pushed to the margins of society while at the same time remaining at its core, also explains why some benevolent reviewers might see the game as a ‘biting satire’ of contemporary society, as a slap in the face of neo-liberalism. The protagonist almost seems to evoke Agamben’s *homo sacer*, forced to prostitute himself at the behest of a disembodied, omnipotent voice.

Manhunt’s allusions to the sexual component of violence seem to support this reading to a certain extent: the victim’s plea to “just make it quick,” the

Rockstar Games’ *Manhunt*. Image courtesy of Romanian gaming magazine www.jucaushii.ro.

use of vulgarisms such as “pussy” and the director’s ambiguous running commentary (“You’re really getting me off”) seem to be employed solely to drive home the point that there is a quite strong (homo)sexual subtext to the game. This raises the question whether *Manhunt* should be praised for bringing to the fore these latent traits of many videogames, or condemned for its graphic sexual violence. Indeed, the questions about dominance and submission raised by these allusions to rape and humiliation serve as shorthand for *Manhunt*’s problematic ideological status.

After all, one must not forget that *Manhunt* is primarily a commodity, and the aesthetic it employs serves first and foremost to sell a product. While Edge magazine could still claim that “Rockstar’s stealth marketing strategy for *Manhunt* doesn’t appear to have worked” one week after the game’s launch in the UK (entering the charts in “the lowly position of 15th”), this changed radically after the murder of Stefan Pakeerah a couple of months later. Prior to the murder, second-hand copies of the game could be bought at bargain prices at videogame shops such as Game and Gamestop. But the sales were apparently given a boost by the retailers’ public announcements that they had taken the game off the shelves after the murder.

Shock and awe tactics like these are hardly a new

phenomenon in the media. As a caveat against simplistic cause-and-effect explanations, we may remind ourselves of the allegations of pornography raised against 20th century classics such as *Ulysses*, *Lolita* and *Tropic of Cancer*. It is a truism of media reception studies that obscenity is in the eyes (or the mind) of the beholder. And it would be disingenuous to suggest that Rockstar deliberately fuelled the connection between *Manhunt* and the murder of a teenage boy.

In its review of *Manhunt*, *Edge* magazine declared that the game was “amoral rather than immoral.” This offhand judgment brings us to the heart of the matter – the problematic relationship between satire, ideology and morality. Traditionally, satire has been viewed as a counter-ideological force, a corrective to the often cynical discourse of power. Jonathan Swift’s “modest proposal” to solve the problem of the Irish famine by letting the Irish eat their own children is a classic case in point. Swift’s proposal is superficially immoral, but of course it is moral in intent as well as critical of the dominant ideology of the time.

But satire has come a long way since the 18th century. Just as irony has lost its critical edge over the course of the 20th century (brilliantly analysed in David Foster Wallace’s “E unibus pluram” essay), satire is now employed ubiquitously and gratuitously – not least of all as a means to shift units by marketers. The ‘tongue in cheek’ stealth marketing website for *Manhunt*, <http://www.valiant-ent.tv>, clearly exemplifies this use of satire for the purpose of marketing. And while the appropriation of satire by the discourse of capital is hardly new or surprising, its use to shield videogames from ideological critique is worth a closer look. After all, the same logic operates across the games industry, a cultural industry that seems on the verge of taking over Hollywood’s status as arbiter of cultural discourse.

One of the industry’s flagships is *The Sims*, a simulation of suburban life in which the player succeeds by accumulating wealth and engaging in conspicuous consumption: A bigger house allows your ‘sim’ to invite more friends over, a plasma TV means they will come more often, feeding them well will increase the sim’s popularity, and being popular will make her happy. *The Sims*’ claim to fame is that it has penetrated new market segments, including the ever-elusive female clientele, thus becoming one of the biggest bestsellers in videogame history. All of this was achieved by cleverly mirroring the post-industrial lifestyle of the target audience – with often disorienting effects: the ontological vertigo experienced when watching one’s sim play *The Sims* on her computer is reminiscent of the Chinese-box worlds of Borges.

A recent study of *The Sims* by Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter found that the satirical element of making blatant consumerism the core mechanic of the game is a “no-lose gambit” as affirmation and negation co-exist peacefully in such a thoroughly post-modern setting. In other words: by leaving it up to the player whether she reads *The Sims* as critique or celebration of late capitalist society, the manufacturers elegantly steer clear of taking responsibility for their creation.

The same logic seems to be at work in *Manhunt*: packaging the game as a satire of the obsession with

violence and ‘authenticity’ within mainstream media seems to suggest that it somehow takes a position external to this discourse. *Manhunt* seems to attempt the impossible: to put itself and the violence it depicts under erasure, to become an index rather than an icon. This strategy conveniently shields the game from criticism from all directions – the game is not violent, it seems to say, it just reflects the violence of its own environment.

The critic is thus put in an awkward position: if she laments the *Manhunt*’s violence, she does not only appear reactionary, she also implicitly admits that she does not understand the game’s ‘subversiveness’. On the other hand, if she praises the game despite its violence, she may be criticised for succumbing to the game’s marketing-imbued rhetoric. Indeed, the very act of unravelling this dilemma attempted here seems to possess a slightly moralistic bent which contributes to the discomfort caused by playing the game.

It appears blunt to brand games like *Manhunt* and the genre it represents as ‘evil’. At the same time, it seems naïve to disregard Rockstar’s cynicism in marketing the game as a satire of itself, putting the player in the uncomfortable position of a witness to a grotesque spectacle. The game’s voyeurism can be read as a scathing critique of the way other media appeal to our voyeuristic instincts. Nevertheless, the game itself invites ‘pornographic’ readings that render its clever alienating effects futile. There will always be moments in which the player identifies entirely with the game’s protagonist, willing to overcome his opponents whatever it takes.

Ultimately, *Manhunt* is a game without any room for play. It is a rigid, totalitarian control structure, alienating the player, as it were, from the protagonist’s vile labour. The game self-consciously demands the player’s submission, exposing the latent authoritarianism of new media’s ideology of play. But *Manhunt*’s self-referential gesture is an empty signifier – it points at nothing but itself. Pretending to let the media-savvy player participate in an elaborate satire of the media’s manipulative power, it recreates and reinforces this discourse at the player’s expense. This double negation is what makes the game, in my view, immoral rather than amoral – it does not negate power, it reinforces it.

Julian Raul Kücklich does research on videogames. At least that’s what he says. Learn the truth at <http://particlestream.motime.com>.

Finishing School

Apparently there's a trend in the Melbourne art scene. People are graduating from art school in Canberra, hanging around for a couple of years and then moving to Melbourne. Armed with only with their futon and a CV hot off the printer ('Artist – previous exhibitions at Canberra School of Art Graduating Exhibition and Canberra Contemporary Art Space Manuka') they go boldly forth. But what is their mission? Infiltration? Assimilation? Or domination? These are not isolated incidents. The shocked tones of 'Oh, are they from Canberra, too' as someone makes the inevitable discovery are becoming familiar.

This is the story of one such group.

It was the end of the summer of '98. It was a beautiful day. I was wearing a pair of green slacks (Scanlan and Theodore I believe) and a crisp white shirt. The sky was a brilliant blue and I remember it was warm. How, in recent years I have forgotten what summer used to feel like, the feel of the sun actually warming your skin, those musical noises that birds used to make and the sweet sweet air of a planned city. It was my first day in the painting department. From here on I was to build friendships with my peers that would last until this very day.

Kezia was my best friend. We met the year before in foundation studies and with our intellects combined we would do rebellious things together like skip class to go to the gym or the health food co-op to buy figs and brazil nuts.

Every year the workshop had a painting party where we were required to dress up as a painting. Geoff, of course, had his Mondrian suit with matching crash helmet. Noel went as one of Picasso's ladies, with green paint down her nose.

But I will always remember Kezia covered in blue paint as one of Yves Klein's models greeted by only a series of dumb looks as no one could work out who she was.

Geoff was the guy who walked around the painting department looking like he owned it (he had short hair back then). He even rode a skateboard for a while and he painted the classics – guns, porn and men with bulging trousers.

I have to admit I found his early work pretty effective. That and his ability to carry large canvases on his head while riding his bike. Legend has it that the only reason he got into art school was because he was from Yackandandah. The assessors remembered him only due to his obscure birthplace.

Noel will always be remembered as a 'maverick' – so termed one crit session by our head of workshop. And the time she was told the colors she was using were repulsive.

Noel was one of those artists, who would always dress like her work. Like a manga character – lots of pinks, yellows, blacks and greens, and big boots. She

was 'good value' because she would actually talk in tutorials, even answer a question or simply offer an opinion.

When Justin arrived in third year he carried a black doctor's bag. He was there to lift the tone and rouse us from the apathy induced by eighteen hundred thousand hours of life drawing classes and painting lessons.

(I'd had an older sister who went to VCA, thought I had a fairly good idea of what to expect at art school, then never really did get over the indignity of suffering those classes in the first place.)

Justin wowed us with his theory, his tonal gradations, and his straight straight lines.

Bryan was a couple of years above me at art school – he had a studio down the road with Geoff and Kirsten. For some strange reason they were all into actually listening to electronic music. Except for Kirsten who drove a ute.

Quentin and Michael were a couple of years below the rest of and how they ended up part of our incredibly elite group I don't really know. Maybe it was due to the sheer quality of their work.

I first met them at a workshop party where they were DJing. In retrospect I'm sure they were just playing CDs but at the time I was prepared to believe they really could mix some phat beats.

Stuart was in the print media and drawing department and belonged to our group through the most lateral of means – by going out with Noel. He was a fan of the double denim and had trashy parties at his house.

And so there we all lived and studied, in that little green oasis, four hours from Sydney, eight hours from Melbourne. We had lakeside studios and group houses in O'Connor. On graduating we got jobs at NGA, the NPG, CCAS, CMAG, anywhere we could abbreviate. For a while Kezia and I lived over the back fence from Justin and Geoff. A few planks of wood had been kicked in so we could pass from garden to garden without walking round the block. We rode bikes everywhere and at night the sky was pitch black, the stars were bright and it was quiet.

But there was trouble in this paradise. People got out. They had gone to Melbourne and come back with these crazy stories.

'Some boy wonder won this prize and got given a hundred grand. Now he's got nine female assistants working for him.'

'Nobody even uses canvas in Melbourne. They just throw shit on the floor, make stuff out of felt, wool, cardboard, whatever, portraits out of fuckin' texta colours.'

I went to this show at this place called Gertrude Street



and everyone was wearing chunky belts. And not just black ones, but like white and red, all sorts of colors.'

And here we were painting. On canvas, using brushes.

We had spent the whole of second year copying still lifes for God's sake. We actually knew what to do with rabbit skin glue. We were shown how to make our own gesso.

And what's more, some of us were even painting abstracts...

"I woke up with a painting in mind – loads of washes of dark greens over a bright white base – like a slimy swamp monster type affair. Anyways, I fucked that one up halfway through – the paint wasn't mixed, too many lumps in the jam."

— Geoff Newton 6/01/02

And some of us were even making landscapes...

"My work is about the place where nature and culture collide."

— Artist Statement by miscellaneous Canberra School of Art student 2000

Yeah, so that's a particularly bad – well, terrible – artist statement.

But hey, that's the thing about Canberra, it's so darn pretty and so utterly peaceful that you stay there too long, you end up making pictures about the changing colors of the autumn leaves. (Bet they never did find that place of collision either.)

So we moved. First Brian in 2001, then Noel, then

May 2002. Left to right: Kezia Geddes, Madeleine Kidd, Justin Andrews. Photo: Stuart Bailey.

Geoff in 2002, then Noel moved back, then I moved down, then Justin in 2003, then Quentin, and once again Noel, and Kezia.

And for a while the scene seemed so big, so exotic, so alluring.

Openings were ablaze with vibrant colors, three quarter length trousers teamed with tunic tops, printed skirts, and shrunken knits.

This was contrasted with a look unmistakably shabby-chic that shouted out 'Hey, I spend my money on art supplies'. Elegantly disheveled, understated, but on closer inspection always rewarding.

There was a spirit of individualism linked by a common belief in layering, a strong use of irony and intelligent aesthetics. There was drinking, there was smoking and even works of art.

I could see that if we were going to get anywhere it was really time to start accessorizing.

Cut to the second week of August 2004.

Tuesday night opening, Justin Andrew at Seventh Gallery, Gertrude Street; Wednesday night Geoff Newton opening 24/7, Flinders Street; Thursday night Bryan Spier, Westspace, Anthony Street.

So most of us have been here for a couple of years now. But have we really assimilated?

The graffiti in the female toilets at Troika certainly suggests that Bryan has: 'Bryan Spier, the art tart, he broke my heart.'



And as I sit in my inner city studio – where Sebastian is stretching a canvas by the window, his face bathed in the soft light of the afternoon sun, and Eliot painting a background in the corner gently humming to himself – I wonder.

Am I glad I moved?

As if in answer, Hans comes in with the afternoon coffees. “I’m sorry I took so long but I couldn’t remember if you wanted a latte or a flat white so I got you both. And would you like us to do some overtime again tonight?”

I take a sip and get back to work.

Mixed Business is a group show of Justin Andrew, Michael Ascroft, Stuart Bailey, Madeline Kidd, Geoff Newton, Noel Skrzypczak, Bryn Spier and Quentin Sprague opening at Seventh Gallery, Melbourne on October 26, 2004.

Kezia decided she wanted a job and is currently studying curatorship at Melbourne Uni.

Stuart and Michael are still living in Canberra tied down to good jobs and family. Stuart says he wants to move. Michael is not so sure, still thinks he can be an individual...

Madeline Kidd is a painter who has forgotten how to do anything else, including simple conversation and cooking. She has a team of nine male assistants.

May 2002. Left to right: Amelia Stuparich, Justin Andrews, Noël Skrzypczak, Stuart Bailey. Photo: Geoff Newton.

Disasters of Peace

You love life, we love death

— from Associated Press translation of videotaped statement in the name of 'Al-Qaeda', claiming authorship of the March 11 Madrid bombings.

These words were seized on enthusiastically in Europe and America by Authorities (in both the active and the contemplative senses: 'leaders' and 'experts') who sought in the Atocha wreckage proof of the stubborn, atavistic anti-rationality of the Islamic mind. But this 'example of what the Prophet Mohammed said' can also be understood in almost exactly the reverse sense. Not as pre-modern cruelty howling theatrically against humanist values, but as an inhumanly rational description of bio-thanatopolitical reality in the contemporary material world.

(Any objection based on what's already known about the 'we' of the statement would barely merit a dismissive gesture here. But in order to pre-empt all confusion, some obvious principles may need to be spelled out once more. First, nothing whatsoever is known about the speaker's relation to the ephemeral subject 'Al-Qaeda', or about that subject's relation to the bombings. And even if speaker, bomber and 'Al-Qaeda' are presumed to be identical, the latter's (presumed) diffuse organizational form and its still more nebulous political constituency mean that who is and is not of the 'death-loving' party is a matter of idle speculation. But more importantly, the statement matters not for what it reveals about the speaker, but for its independent sense: for what it can be made to say about the *world*. As in the interpretation of any other text, there is no reason automatically to identify 'I' (or in this case, 'we') with the (presumed) author. Coherence, not biographical information, is what authorizes any reading.)

Some speakers using the 'Al-Qaeda' brand have claimed to be acting in the name of the Iraqi and Palestinian populations. The question of such unsolicited political representation's 'legitimacy' is meaningless, of course, where the questioner's approval is not being sought. Engaged intellectuals from neocon think tanks to liberal Muslim columnists have already squandered enough billions of words (or tonnes of 'general intellect') on 'critiques' of an absolute non-interlocutor. But because the concentrations of besieged life in Iraq and Palestine are also saturated with the televisual gaze, in spectacular perception they symbolize *all* the life capable of occupying the 'we' position in the 'Al-Qaeda' statement: the global 'class with nothing to lose and therefore nothing to defend'¹ in the most literal, urgent sense.

On these terms, the rationally inhuman paraphrase of 'you love life, we love death' would run:

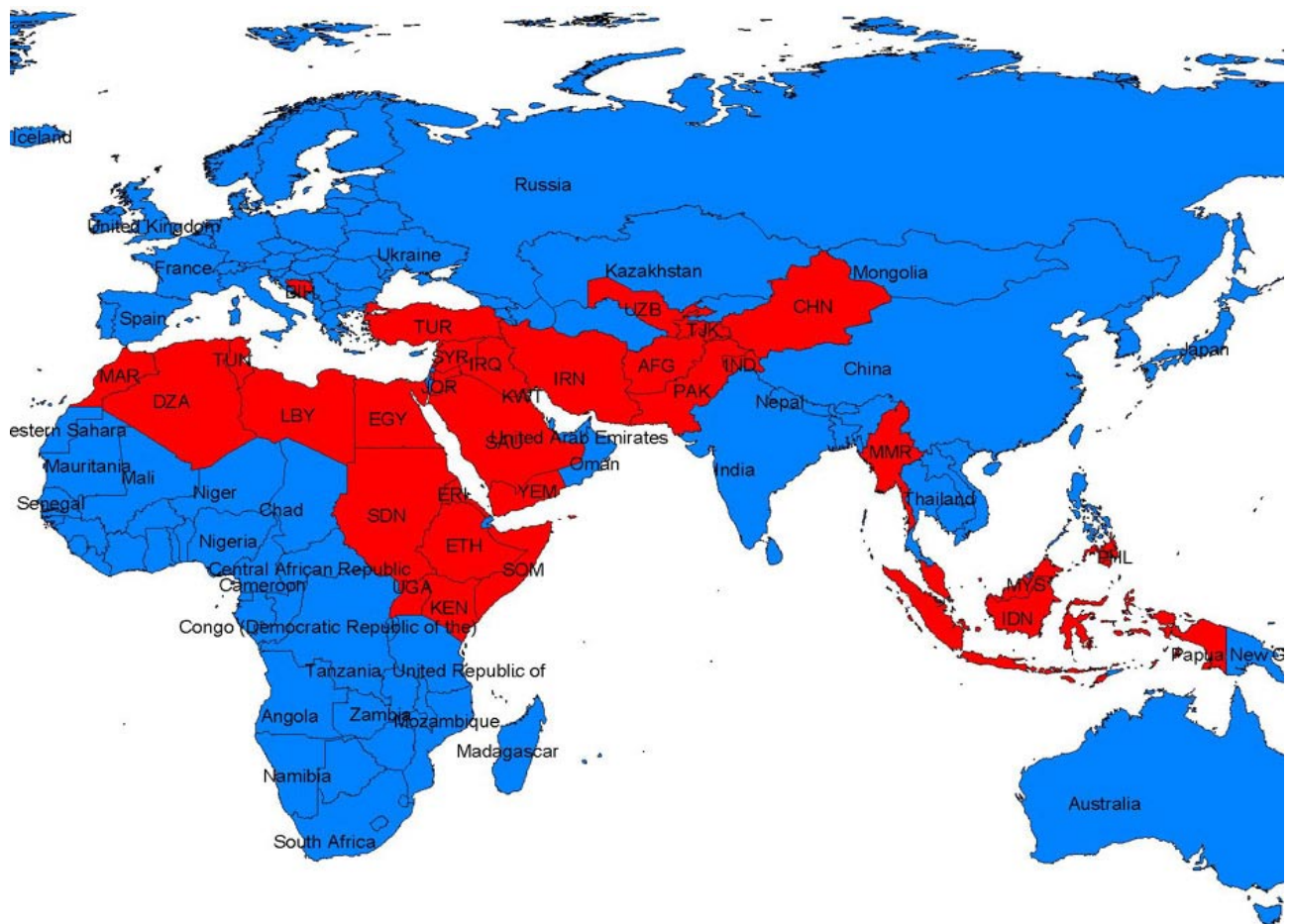
Exposure to death (our own and that of others) occupies our lived time (and living memory, and foreseeable



future), so fully that the distinction between 'life' and 'death' breaks down. Unlike you, we have no life separate from death to lose or defend: thus it only remains to become death-levellers, to redistribute our great surplus of death so it engulfs and becomes indistinct from your life.

The condition of this statement's truth is the self-evident fact that in this world, as it is now, the distribution of forced exposure to death (or the problem of survival) is violently unequal. This is no more a matter of natural tragedy or immoral actions than it is of divine visitation. To put it with appropriate crudeness, the present distribution of death reflects the division of labour in a world where capitalism is *universally indifferent* to the distinction between labour-power's 'life' and 'death', as long as its living and dying yields value. Dying is work when life is wholly consumed in producing value. A perfectly 'normal' phenomenon, inasmuch as millions of lifetimes are filled by waged and unwaged labour that eventually breaks or exhausts them. An 'extreme' case like the war and ensuing primitive accumulation in Iraq only demonstrates the same thing: by living and dying under multilateral siege, the newly proletarianized population *produces* the conditions for the security and reconstruction businesses, literally paying for the contractors' profits. The same logic underlies the transformation, noted by the SPK/PF(H), of 'biomatter man' – cells, genes, organs – into a productive, i.e. labouring, force. The universal equivalent transcends the life/death threshold: 'everyone is totally valuable, dead or alive'²

Capital's formal obliviousness to the difference between death and life almost seems to be parodied by the attitude of the class for whom existing social



relations have provided plenty to lose and defend. Continuous experience of shelter eventually breeds forgetfulness of the shelter itself, and of the reality of what it shelters from. This forgetting of death sometimes takes the form of an anomalous ignorance among 'educated' subjects, explicable only in terms of an inability to conceptualize and remember in the absence of direct exposure. Thus an editorialist in Italian left-moralist daily *L'Unità* ('founded by Antonio Gramsci', etc), cancelled 60 infernal years to call the Madrid bombs 'the worst barbarity in Europe since Nazi Germany'.

Affluent societies' officially-sponsored obsession with 'risk' and its management also depends on ignorance of death, or deep assurance of ultimate preservation. The tendency for the absence of any perceptible threat to appear primarily as sign of the threat's potential presence (as in 'anti-terrorism' vigilance) demands that the apparatus of 'security' fill every space indifferently. This wish bespeaks an enormous, ingenuous confidence in that apparatus, endowing it with the capacity to measure and pre-emptively control a risk as infinite as uncertainty itself³.

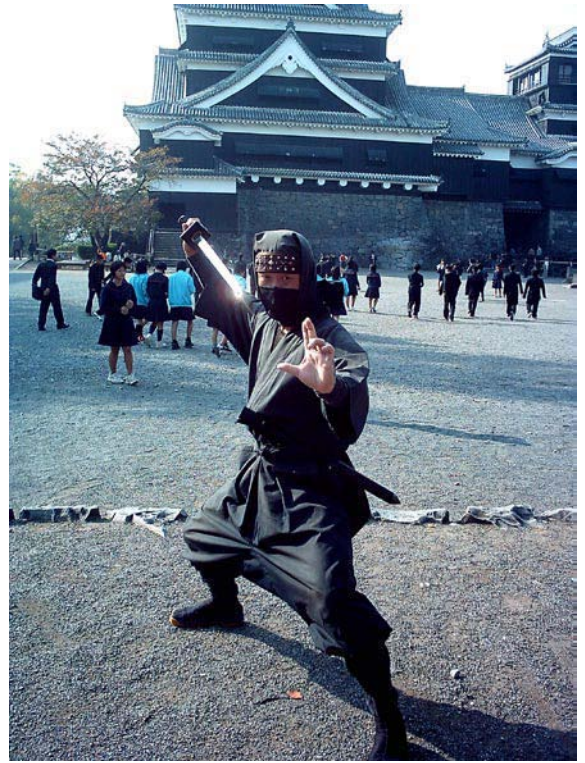
But the fact that so many life-lovers enjoy a subjective *experience* of shelter does not make their sense of security a true one. What they are really forgetful of is that capital's indifference to 'life' and 'death', which their own insouciance mimics playfully and which has left them living-space to play in, also guarantees that they themselves are never safe. The law of value is as unconcerned with their life as with others' death: the non-sensation of non-exposure is a contingent privilege, liable to be revoked devastatingly, sunk into

in the most abject 'bare life', at the remotest shift in global class cold-war. But one of the 'blessings' of their once-removed exposure, their brittle shelter, is forgetting that such special status is unusual and revocable. It remains to be seen whether another violent announcement that all privileges are cancelled, made 'on behalf of' the unsheltered, could disturb the oblivious, laying bare the minimum they hold in common with death-lovers: not 'humanity' but exposure, eligibility to be consumed by the apparatus that so far happens to have spared them.

Notes

1. See Amadeo Bordiga, 'Fundamental Theses of the Party': <http://www.marxists.org/archive/bordiga/works/1951/fundamental-theses.htm>
2. SPK.PF(H), 'The Communist manifesto for the Third Millennium': <http://www.spkpfh.de/GENOZIDengl.html>
3. In this way the risk-management congregation attributes to preventive mechanisms precisely the same spurious capacity for metacalculation claimed by the systems of professional gambling. See 'Say Fear is a Man's Best Friend', *Datacube* 9 & metamute: <http://www.metamute.com/look/article.tpl?IdLanguage=1&IdPublication=1&NrIssue=24&NrSection=5&N>

Matthew Hyland does not recall having been a dupe of not being a dupe.





Office Gossip Bastard Venting An interview with Tao Wells

Tao Wells is a difficult artist. At least that is what I had heard. I have long been interested in difficulty as a conscious tactic or as a thematic. Difficulty was one of the many possible themes for dreamy large group shows the co-editors of this magazine discussed at length until we came up with some other idea. We are interested in the idea of difficulty itself, rather than the way difficult might be seen as some kind of problem to be solved; a kind of pure difficulty.

Wells' installation, *Winning Teacher*, part of *The Bed You Lie In*, a show in Artspace's traditional emerging artists slot, consisted of a show within a show of work based on other works in the exhibition, and asked the curator to rank the works in the order of her preference. This was apparently a difficult proposition for curator Tessa Giblin, who opted to position the works in alphabetical order, rather than to show favouritism for one work over another. I guess Wells was attempting to scratch below the surface of Giblin's curatorial politics to see what was underneath, perhaps looking for a kernel of connoisseurship, or something.

Curatorial politics have also been in the limelight in Wells' hometown of Wellington, with *Panning for Gold*, a forum for curators about issues relating to curating. After hearing second-hand about goings-on at this curator-fest I thought it might be good to talk to Tao in a casual manner about these kinds of issues, and I suggested a theme of difficulty, which perhaps resulted in an interview with Tao with his *[sure, like it is only my problem!! T.W.]* difficulty face on.

My co-editor said that you were writing a short story during *Panning for Gold* at the City Gallery Wellington¹. What was it about?

I wrote about the room at the City Gallery, during the *Panning for Gold* talks, I had the most detectable feeling that we, the audience, were all in on it, were an inclusive bunch; there seemed to be no individuals, only a warm exasperating sigh, a collective desire to smother by design, much better to avoid responsibility... So I just tried to put down some of this feeling as it happened. I wrote:

A Particular Audience, (New Public)

Closer people, hear over my heart. The room breathed very stilly – as a group the feminine collective laughed out a giggle with the funny little man narrating. The body collective puts out its examples, spits of heads with arms and breasts, little mouths that speak squeaks, iron jaws, glass eyes stare vacant with collective momentum, another man is elevated, placed on his stool, his pedestal, his scrotum pulled his rectum exposed blathering out the insights of others staked heads, a row collected along the road.

She is visited. We sit together. I long for sleep her soft hit

sends this wave south. Now breathing is not my own, a breath escaped I did not know its name, my eyes fall back down my throat, the holes welcome the tentacle its tongue a wet smack, ripping my mask, my teeth grow out my fingers and grip this pencil in pain. The man is still speaking. I act with my 1st real thought, reach out and cut his neck sever the lump that makes him talk, put my hand down his neck pushing his head like a rock to block the flood, taping him up I seal his lump with plastic wrap and turn to face its female collective, I'm hit multiple times before I learn to move, my feet have been severed. I grip my knees and shift those thighs, to fall over roll under the table, stop hold my breath to hear over my heart the movement. The man had said something funny and the room licked his hand.

Another righteous adolescent fantasy from a grown man. I still like it though. An alternative title is "The man who grew more handsome for every kind thing he did."

Wow, interviews are great for minimal outlay and maximum return.

Nice. Since I rarely entertain insults I'll take that as an affirmative; lite sarcasm. But what the hell did you think of the story man!

No insult intended. I thought the story was great. I watched *American Psycho* again a few weeks ago, and your story reminded me of the drawings of dismembered corpses Patrick Bateman's secretary found in the appointment book in his desk drawer.

I remember that scene, and thinking I don't want it to end, I want to look at all the drawings, and then being surprised that it did go on for a really long time so you could look at all the drawings, as if it truly was someone's little art exhibit right here in the middle of this Hollywood movie. Fucking brilliant, strange leaked moment.

About the story you wrote: what made you want to write it? Was there something in the air at *Panning for Gold* – was the City Gallery's air conditioning spiked, something in the morning tea?

Remember creative writing in secondary school English? I tried it then and it was like a bad short story. This is similar but as I said before there really was this incredible atmosphere, one that I didn't want to acknowledge, it was too obvious too clumsy and burdensome, like a stereotype who is shaking your hand, so I was challenged to recognise this mood, this creature and identify its mechanisms, despite my own feelings of not wanting it to exist. I felt very much as if I was a reporter jotting down the visualisation of the air brought to life by the people breathing in that room, a room that I too had to breathe, and as a member of the audience a body to my horror was being shared. In a sense I was struggling to maintain my "adult"

identity confronted by such an all-consuming and what seemed to be [a] highly unaware or unmarked/challenged creature. I sometimes do this kind of thing, I'm one of those "poetry is really important" but hate hearing other peoples poetry kind of guy, (and I'm single and available:) somebody blow a whistle...

Can you tell me about your work in *The Bed You Lie In* at Artspace – what were you trying to do there?

The idea was simple enough: create a template/context/parameter/structure that would be seen negatively and take heat for it, [...] to reflect some ugly reality inherent to gallery culture and then pit this against the [artworks' attempt at] trying to communicate with each other (which is a positive generally, but hell) despite the environment in which it is received and placed. I think the relation between [their] works [and] mine is exciting and unstable; full of promise; much more interesting than the actual works; but mostly available only to those who enjoy and speak formal art qualities.

It was a sucker punch, where when I got hit I would lie on the floor and collect sympathy, which worked, only (surprise!), the gallery didn't get it, didn't want to be hit, fought me on every little thing and ultimately made me compromise the work's integrity to sooth their version of what I should be doing, as if they were a competing artist which is exactly how they behaved. Typical but unfortunate. [This] work springs from my distaste of curated theme shows, which having worked at Enjoy for so long, (52 shows/nine themes), just DOES NOT WORK! The artist's work is debased and its own integrity and contribution to a living art is undermined by devaluing the intelligence of its own framing and spitting in the face of the audience that actually gives a damn by making it serve some curator's tangent so painfully confessing its desperate appeal to the dumb and distracted. I say FUCK OFF. Artists/Curators if they know anything should know if the artist is weak stick the knife in, if they come out fighting leave 'em to it... but let the artist speak FIRST AND THE LOUDEST; at best curator [should] be a good facilitator and you too will shine, as an artist (like my rules make) you suck!!!!!!!! How many shows do we have to see of up-and-coming talent that is a selection of plucked feathers from a hundred different turkeys... How is this supposed to matter... Work is made in succession, and it needs that context to gain traction. NZ art destroys this, and has done it particularly effectively to a generation. How's them sour grapes!

Pretty sour. Do you think the problem is necessarily the form of the group show? I was thinking that the form of the group show manifests a crowd in some way, a political potentiality, or at least a nice idea. At any rate group shows don't always suck do they?

No brain teaser here, group shows are samplers no butts about it, theme or no theme; artists wanting to be noticed over any other concern [is] in this way perfectly justifiable, from a public point [of view] as well. But all things in moderation, one spoonful of sugar is sweet, a truckload is an environmental hazard. I think artists are used as a crowd, as gap filler, basically as a muted, dispirited audience, knitted into a blanket to throw over the heads of the movers and



Tao Wells' installation *Winning Teacher* (2004) involved a number of artists being invited to make better versions of the work by the other artists in the Artspace exhibition *The Bed You Lie In*. Here, Kaleb Bennett, *You'll Grow Out Of It*, after Daniel du Bern's, *Wandering Jew*

shakers to keep warm in a cold landscape, breathing everyone else's breath... Yeah crowds can make you sick, especially when a flow is being indicated, and we're all expected to flow with it. Alternatives, hmmm. Too much is determined by personalities having to get along. What if I disagree, or think you're an arse, should that mean I can't like your work or find the issue "engaging", We all know examples of this – so what, it's a tough business, get over it right? Individuals standing in a crowd, stand out because of what they believe in, debase this belief by not hearing it, and that individual is just an annoying personality that doesn't fit in but works great as a number to thicken the crowd.

Somebody wins both ways, the other body misses out. The nature of power, sure, keep it mysterious and they win, make it clear and we win, a stupid war on and on. Safe dead artists, and cute girly curators, it is difficult to even try to find this attractive. A crowded sports club after a game would have more sympathy/empathy, and attention!

Is there an issue here to do with problematic thematics? (A list of previous Artspace emergent artist shows: *Come, Flesh and Fruity, The Bed You Lie In*, the emergent artist as fuckable youth perhaps? *Prospect* as a title suggests this also. And *Panning for Gold*, I keep mentally changing

this title to Digging for Gold, which in turn reminds me of Dennis Cooper, who uses the term to describe finding desiccated poo in a junkie's bottom. (Come to think of it, a recovering curator introduced me to Dennis Cooper. Not personally, but you know, his books.)

Yeah, I remember something like that. Seems to fit. Fuckable youth, nice, make great 20 minutes of prime time. I really don't think galleries have any idea on how to position themselves in relation to ideas of public (of course I know, but they'd have to pay! I give enough free advice as it is)...

Yours seems quite a negative view of the crowd, perhaps of one that is controlled from outside. From what I saw of your Artspace work, there seemed to be an idea of the crowd as strength in numbers, the crowd as revolutionary potential. I thought this because of your strategy of meeting the idea of being placed in a crowd with a crowd of your own. You make reference to alternatives, in a dispirited kind of way, but I think your work presented one possible way of resisting.

I can repeat really the idea above of the crowd of adults. I enjoy the idea of making a population whose structure demands [that] they are in opposition, but aren't always. I respond to your "dispirited" comment because I think this is the crux of perceptions about my work, that the conceptual form of it shuts people down cause once you get the punch line, why look at the mess it made? And even if it is relative it is [so] in some historical/faded/academic way. All of which is true; I don't try to thwart those perceptions – but I try to put the "dispirited" element on the rules of production, not the content. In my case the rules that structured the work reflected the gallery's involvement, and were to me a rendition of nothing new, just what we all joke about, just here it is. All I did was say "this is it; this is what you are doing." This formalisation is to be bounced against, leaving the discovery of a lighter side leaking out. The not knowing whether this quality is valid or real, outside of the projected outcome, is where personal meaning is formulated and invested in, simulating Adultland, where adults live. I know this because of the amount of fuss it kicked up on one side, the constructive/positive effect it had on the other. Somehow it mattered. I have been criticised in the past for thinking that I think (yeah!) I can orchestrate or manipulate the audience's response to such a level, but to me it is parallel to the way an author uses the elements that comprise a metaphor to specifically refer to other established ideas, to weave a subtext, a back-drop of partially defined murkiness that pushes connections made by the reader in a very determined way. I want to use this subtext. I reckon there is some mileage in this, like a newspaper bothering to include which corporation employs the "scientist" quoted for "facts". It all relates back to the search for [the] adult, and the responsible behaviour maintenance programme, for short, education, that I want to reflect in my work. Just a few things...

Are artists being childish expecting to get their way all the time?

Wow, I read that once in a book that artists were childish, feminine, mentally unstable, dirty, insular, extroverted, extreme, banal... We're so bored with the

detail we're amused by the pattern. Hypothetically, when you're rushing by in a car and there is a nice view, who can be bothered driving? Well I can, and I will, with or without any one else saying so. If you want me to drive in your direction you will have to talk to me as someone who is driving not a passenger. Here is an idea, in a democracy founded on the principal of the broadly educated citizen, someone who can think and act independently of immediate financial gain, what school/university in the present world actually does [says] that? I live in this world. I teach at these institutions, do I expect anything to change? No and yes. Change never happens, but when it does it is instant, one year the government paid me to go to Uni, the next it didn't, then the next the word "mankind" no longer represented women; fantastic! A revolution that I was part of, you might have been there too, someone must have just woke up that morning knowing today is the day when "mankind" ends. I know I'd like to be one of those people, we all are in a way, bla bla bla...

What about those adult, masculine, sane, expansive, introverted, passive, trying to be interesting artists?

Right on! I'm directing a search for contact with a real balanced adult – responsible, mature, intelligent, capable etc. Not in the ideal but one that exists. Where does one find one, what circumstances to they come to be unearthed, how do you become one, and why is it good to be one? Why is it one and not many? A group of adults is almost a contradiction. To me the term makes a mockery of the hard-won identity of an adult. And of course it takes one to know one, though! This is I guess like some kind of structuralist approach to identity art, though I don't feel any knowing affinity. I think stereotypes [can be] helpful, [but] they become a burden when they are abused. White trash can be an affirmative.

What do you think a curator is? What do you think a curator should do? Do you have a list of ideal curator qualities/archetypes?

Polite, overly courteous, honest when they need to be, manipulative/cunning, ambitious, a sense of adventure, brave/courageous or a little sloppy... Just all the obvious stuff I suppose. What do you think, is it OK to talk about ideals? Doesn't that make you an idealist?

I think ideals are important to have at some point along the way. Ideals help to figure out what it is you are looking for. But having said that, it is important to find ways of moving towards them in the real world. I don't expect necessarily to achieve every ideal, but I do expect that if I have an ideal and put it in to a practice of moving towards it in the actual, then the actual becomes a little better. If you think about it in the right way your attempts might link up to others attempts, our experience of the actual might get a little more interesting, not in the future but now, in the process of doing. This magazine might be an example.

Making the kind of work that you do, which I am assuming relates to the common topic of "difficult" you mentioned earlier, it seems to me that some how there is an adaptation going on, but of the most awkward kind. Are you looking forward to the most painful birth in NZ art history? What is the ambition we "difficulters"



are wanting to achieve... or are we really over already, never will be, never wases, never wanted to be, which is a stupid question, anyhow there seems something painful in what "we" are doing, what is it...

Being difficult here is a difficult proposition. I get the feeling, most of the time, that people in general don't have the critical tools to deal with work that doesn't fit in to notions of figurative representation or established models of formalist abstraction, which can be frustrating when you are trying to get away from these models (good reasons to want to start a magazine or a project space?). I have found that if you work outside of these models in this context then, for the most part, work either gets read figuratively, or as a formal thing, or stupidly literally. I guess the gallery functions as some kind of "fictional field" that combined with an idea that people can revert to "childlike" state, or check their brains at the door in readiness for some cheap wonder. There is a lot more work happening in dealer spaces. This is not a bad thing but it does change my reading of work; I guess it carries a concrete notion of value, which when applied to more difficult work adds a new political/economic difficultness that I kind of like. It just doesn't happen very often, if ever. What do I want achieve? I just want to make the sort of work that I like, which always seems to change as soon as I get closer to something. Difficult work? I really don't know. I ended up in Auckland. Wherever you go there you are. And it's always happening somewhere else. Going overseas to make it is just as much as a modernist myth as

Tao Wells' installation *Winning Teacher* (2004). From right to left: Kaleb Bennett, *You'll Grow Out Of It*, after Daniel du Bern's *Wandering Jew*; Ryan Chadfield, *Sluagh(sic)*, after Louise Tullett's *I can't help my self*; Matthew Couper, *Untitled*, after New Artist's *Proposal of a New Artist*; Shay Launder, *Untitled*, after Rachael Grant's *Family Dump*; Genevieve Packer, *Genuine Imitation*, after Finn Ferrier's *Tourist Souvenir #3*; Terry Urbahn, *Untitled*, after Marnie Slater's *I can take your place*; Wendyhouse, *Untitled*, after Eve Armstrong's *Adaptives*; Richard Whyte/Wayfarer Gallery Presents, *The Successful Organisation of Space for the Modern Artist*, after Kim Paton's *Time Will Break the World (Edition two)*

anything else I was taught at art school. Maybe I'm just being passive-aggressive by hanging around.

Good to hear that passive-aggressive is out of the closet; I'm still in denial, looking for a big pay off, a cover or something. Who is your agent, can I ask how much you got, what percentage would I likely get, if I flexed it a little? You mentioned "people" as in "people in general don't have the...". When art is really cool is when it eliminates this idea of people in general; I want to be really cool, I am not interested in people in general, just people with particulars. The idea that people check their brains out at the door is a cool idea, so is "cheap wonder". I think curators have something to do with the framing of this "child-like state". The difficult position is with the coolest adults. I think difficulty is cool and so is the way that it questions the political/economic function of culture, but we weren't supposed to agree. Most idiots want to agree, look at any political party rally: Vote for me, YAY!!... It is like the whole history of art is



Tao Wells and new friends at the *The bed you lie in* after party. Image courtesy of Artspace.

a career infomercial. Do it your way, minimum fuss, save time, etc... I mean we are only talking because we have similar products to push... I tried to get T.J. McNamara, whose review of the show and my work ("Most gross of all") was wonderfully well intended, to revisit my work and write more about it, but the gallery "didn't get it", got all childish on me and it didn't happen... This whole interview is just office gossip bastards venting, which I think passes for quite high cultural status. I just want the galleries if they want my work to work for me, to take cue from my own beat, if that beat is what attracts them in the first place, otherwise I'll keep looking. There may be some perception that my relative obscurity is not purposeful, well these people should stay away from the stock market.

Notes

1. Co-ed: (The only reason that I knew he had written a story was that on the way out of the gallery we were discussing a sort of sexualised atmosphere we had picked up on during the proceedings. He had said something about a sort of vaginal

mist emanating from the podium and audience both, a sort of becoming-female, and that he had started to write, maybe overcome by the gas?

A sexualised atmosphere had been in evidence also the day before at the Spark artist-run spaces symposium at WINTEC. Here, the "thickening" of the Auckland art scene had been discussed as if it were erectile tissue, which was pretty funny – new galleries were described (following a recent curious newspaper article) as cropping up "like a proliferation of female genitalia on mutant fish".

Then one panel was introduced as featuring, in reference to the artist-run scene's supposed incestuous-ness, "people you have slept with or want to sleep with or who may be sleeping with each other" or something like that. As a panellist, I was blushing too hard to write it down.

By the next day this waning impression of sexualisation was restimulated by the Christian Jankowski video playing while the professionally naughty Tobias Berger gave his keynote speech at the City Gallery. For this work the artist had coopted an existing Greek media commentary TV show. In it, the artist walked around libidinally, pausing behind the seated guests as they talked about art, his hand resting on the backs of seats strokingly, his gaze drinking up each of the attractive speakers, his pleasure prolonged uncomfortably past the TV viewer's threshold for expected narrative progression.

All these emptily sexed up factors sort of tumbled together in my imagination with the *The Bed You Lie In* invitation featuring all the artists collaged onto a big bed. Suddenly the word emergent started to connote a pooh coming out, or the way a growing hard-on starts to peak out through its foreskin's little jersey neck.

Maybe, I thought, all this has something to do with the way that many people want art to pleasure them passively while they lie on their backs. Thinking about it now, I wonder if some sort of short-circuit of the general libido has taken place whereby it is more immediately awakened by strangers than by intimates, and someone else is supposed to do the fucking?

Or maybe the sexualisation of these curatorial confabs was a kindly reassertion of the life of the body into an area of cultural production notoriously stuck up in its head; a systemic corrective measure somewhat like the mysterious curved graphs of hawk/rabbit population controls... After all, I think most people were aware that there were no artists invited to speak on panels on either day. And everyone on them, myself included had at some point been art institutionalised.

(Recently I was sent a Negri-esque paper about adultery by a colleague which might shed some light on this phenomenon. In it the subject of cheating on your spouse at conferences, an apparently rife practice, was treated. The analysis went something like this: academic drudgery plus marital drudgery equals agony, and the lack of thinking space left results in poorly judged flurries of sexually acting out with anyone who represents not-work and not-home just to feel alive again.)

Anyway, this sexualisation made it a little difficult for me to concentrate, and this was not the only reason. Very early on in the proceedings I was "outed" as being an essentialist for writing that artist-curators tend to have a larger range of ideas to bring to the task of curating than non-artist curators. I spent much of the day feeling misunderstood, then, I realised that my accusers were right. Rather than something to be ashamed of, it is A-OK, important even, to be an essentialist in the Spivak/strategic essentialist sense of the word – whereby groups of dis-empowered people identify as kin based on shared historical experiences of being and being-treated as a cultural type, for example, artists.

Later I realised that it was not surprising, given that the post-structuralist imperative to not identify as anything plays right into the hands of those holding the power, that the curator-centric discussion on the day avoided the question of why artists are allowed so little agency in institutions like the plague. (GP)

Negri's tent, or, Rough outlines on the being of māori

In which—being compared to a tent—the philosopher Antonio Negri's text "Kairòs, Alma Venus, Multitudo: Nine lessons to myself"¹ is pitched any-place-whatsoever along the coastline of that joyous and beautiful dislocation which we call Erewhon.²

Kua hua te marama
—Pēpeha³

A 'tent' is precisely a complex of space and time that could never serve as the object of any recognition whatsoever
—Eric Alliez⁴

The campsite

My little take on Negri's time problem goes something like this: if the very name 'materialism' suggests a primacy for spatial metaphors; for concepts and notions of space—matter, extension, void, fullness, division—then what of time? How might a materialist conception of time work? How might time matter to matter, within time, within matter? In this, time will not be transcendent to life, not projected onto life from the outside. Negri's thought refuses any spatialisation of time and all understandings of time as ex-trinsic measure, i.e. measure from the outside, imposed measure. If we statistically (or otherwise) take measure of that-which-has-been in an attempt to fully determine a that-which-is-coming, then we 'take away all ontological consistency from time and so any consistency from past and future.'⁵ And similarly, when we allocate the present a determinable place on some homogenous plane of time, and proceed to divide up that present à la Zeno, then we take away much of time's positivity, much of its generative force and creativity.

Time for Negri is a corporeal relation: all the body knows is the restless present. All the body knows is an indeterminate metamorphosis of time, a time of times. The felt, temporal (self-) presence of a body—quivering, sleeping, plunging, drifting, erupting, etc.—in the inestimable here and now of its being *this*, or *that*, is often named *haecceity*. We can track the meaning of this enigmatic word, via Deleuze and Guattari and Zen poetry, back to the fourteenth century humanist scholar Dun Scotus: its sense perfectly conveys 'such-ness', 'singularity of existence'. A friendship, a season, this cresting wave, the scent of a plum, a battle: bodies, events, *haecceity*. Yet when it comes to time, Negri also turns toward Epicurus and his famous *clinamen*. Meaning 'swerve' or 'deviation', *clinamen* clearly signifies as a spatial term, hence Negri recasts its sense along temporal lines, as a passage felt and conveyed but whose qualities remain immeasurable. *Clinamen* comes to mean: a constant 'opening' of time in the present, thus allowing for the possibility of a complete separation of past from future. A swerving now-time is a potential for change, for the practical and imaginative construction of new being. With Negri then, the future (the 'to-come') is not understood as some fixed, in-built destiny of the past, but is rather imagined and expressed

in the open condition of the present. And the past ('the eternal') is not measured and judged in order to invest the strictures of a controlled future, but rather explored from within the present, experimented with, re-evaluated. Negri's eventual name for this kind of present is *kairòs*. *Kairòs*—meaning the embodied action of both singular and collective subjectivities—is both *haecceity* and *clinamen* together, but it further qualifies these terms by adding the important sense of 'a decision'.

Because exposed to all these restless elements of time, my any-place-whatsoever along the coastline of Erewhon will now require the provision of a tent, the immediate shelter and make-shift bearing of a tent.

The groundsheet

The common name 'māori' continues to seek an adequation within the real: becoming-māori.⁶ Yet at the same time, the continuity of becoming finds itself broken open by every decision to use this common name: being-māori. The being of māori is a temporal and open linguistic act of naming. If from within my vacillating sense of things I suddenly decide to bring together a name and a life-world by stating, "this is māori", then this act, this severing of time in the precariousness of a here and now, is also a new generation of being in that it breaks with the continuity of the past in order to somehow rejoin and enhance the future. Of course my decision is only a singular event, but it is a singular event located in a common field of other such events. Language is the community of these events—a 'being-with'—and so this act of naming can only participate in the 'dialogue and perhaps clashing' of this community. All linguistic *praxis* seeks no other truth.⁷

1st pole

Self-caused, māori is that life-world through which a desire for the co-operative generation of both subjectivity and community emerges. As such, the being of māori is said to *consist* within a kind of potential for shared productivity, or within an immanent bio-politics of aroha and non-ownership.⁸ Those who are māori are a tribe, a tribe of tribes, an association of associations, an ohu of ohu. All self-constituting and aimed at collective action, those who are māori *are* the common. Or better, those who are māori *produce* the common. Living labour.

2nd pole

Here, in the world of light, the common once assumed the unfurling, generative shape of a nomadic mytho-praxis. Then came the epoch of money, commodities and the Crown, and so the common recomposed itself along fresh lines of action and resistance. The signing of the Treaty of Waitangi marked the transition between these two forms. Today a new form of the being of māori is struggling to be born.

3rd pole

From Epicurus to Spinoza, from Marx to Deleuze and Guattari, Negri continues a 'red thread' of politico-

philosophical thought. With Deleuze and Guattari this thread passed by way of an understanding of tribes as 'societies against the State'.⁹ History is thus rendered both anti-evolutionary and anti-dialectical: the tribe does not predate the State as a political form, but is rather always already a contemporary counter-power to either an existing State, or to any group within the tribe that is perceived as tending towards the State form. Perhaps most groups tend towards the State form in varying degrees, so the differences would lie in the constantly emerging collective desires of the members. Hence the anti-dialectical nature of Deleuze and Guattari's thought: the political is always the coming expression of positive desires, rather than the mediation of opposite desires. *Political-forming*.

The canvas

The conceptual dyad Sovereignty-Rangatiratanga is directly contrary to that named the common. Sovereignty-Rangatiratanga is a pure mystification of both subjectivity and community. It erects a transcendental illusion of Power that is extremely coercive and corrupt in its real effects.¹⁰ When iwi choose the path of Sovereignty-Rangatiratanga over the path of the common they choose Power over biopolitics, coercion and corruption over co-operation. Any further sustained pursuit of property and juridical rights by iwi using concepts and precepts derived from State Law, and in conjunction with the force of that law, may now only result in a further loss of an amazing historical willingness and ability to partake in the militant struggle for the common. The way of the common passes through neither private property nor public ownership: all dimensions of a modern public-ness were privatised years ago, just as the politics of the State has become indistinguishable from the vicissitudes of a neo-liberal marketplace. Rather than by means of any pre-established *ethnos* as defined by the inflexible taxonomies of an Iwi-State, the way of the common proceeds via an *ethos* created by the immanent self-organisation of those who are māori.

The State fails to represent the life-world of the common, and this precisely because present conditions ensure that the State has rapidly become representative of only two things: the naked greed of global Capital, and a mobile yet never the less always pre-constituted 'imagined community'. Perhaps this is why both the Nation-State and the traditional political party now appear as redundant forms to those who desire the common. The common is neither another corrupt expression of Capital nor another illusion of identity and Power.

So who or what now represents the common? Nobody and no thing: those who are māori remain immanent to themselves and therefore require no form of representation. The life-world of the common cannot be represented by those with a 'proper' place in the present Order. Those who occupy such places can only represent themselves and their own interests, while those who are māori exclude themselves from the present Order. Or better, those who are māori *resist* (culturally, sexually, economically, artistically, etc.) their allocated places within that Order: 'desertion and exodus'. All this is rendered extremely complex and paradoxical given present (postmodern) conditions.¹¹ Today the State—locally, nationally, supranationally—and the Corporations (including iwi, the media, the financial sector, the NGOs, agribusiness, and so forth) have hybridised to produce a 'smooth' and seemingly immanent form of Sovereignty



which allows no outside. All productive (human) labour has been subsumed within a Capitalist Sovereignty.¹²

1st guy-rope

Negri's philosophy of the common conducts a devastating critique of this new form of Sovereignty, 'from within it', as a form of resistance. It brings fresh conceptual tools to the task of a coming social transformation. Unwilling to request a return to the theoretical conditions of a long past modern world, i.e. the separation of the State—as the mediator and enforcer of contracts—from civil society and Capital, the singularities and communities who both compose and enact the common have welcomed Negri's thought into the open-scape of their thinking and dwelling. And by way of a prior, reciprocal gesture, his 'lessons' to himself unfold and extend a unique, almost poetic hospitality out into the magic void of time whence coming events 'will not have been begun by chance'.¹³

2nd guy-rope

In the course summary of his 1975–76 seminars at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault correlates the birth of the modern Nation-State with two emergent discourses of power: a juridico-philosophical one of mediation, legislation and universal rights; and a historico-political one of struggle, resistance and strategy. The subject who speaks from within the former is the jurist, 'standing between the adversaries, at the centre of and above the fray, imposing an armistice, establishing an order that brings reconciliation', while the subject of the latter speaks from amongst the 'fray', presenting 'the perspectival and strategic truth that will allow him to be victorious'.¹⁴ Contra Hobbes—a 'jurist' for whom the only way out of humanity's continual state of war was via a peace mediated and guaranteed by State Sovereignty—Foucault situates his own discourse firmly in 'the camp' of the historico-political strategists.¹⁵ Exemplary as a virtual mode of struggle and resistance, Foucault's philosophy transforms itself here into a political activism dedicated to the forensic task of analysing all the blood splattered and smeared mirrorings of a very real, very 'modern' dialectic: war and peace, peace and war, war=peace. Today Negri, like Foucault before him, conducts his own 'war on war'. A thousand new problems begin here.

The flysheet

Race. Here on the common there is but a single race: the multi-coloured, mutating difference of the all.¹⁶ So

why say that the Foreshore and Seabed Act is racist? The danger of this assertion would be that it ends up mirroring the pure, oppressive ideology of the State. The Act was designed to limit the statutory Power of iwi, so things should extend from there, that is, from whether one agrees or disagrees with the statement, 'the statutory Power of iwi requires limiting.' For those who desire the common, all forms of transcendent Power require limiting. Our question then: how best to achieve these limits? Would yet more contracts and law be the best form of limit? Given that these kinds of limit stem directly from the coercive and corrupt Power of the State, then the contradictions and difficulties in using them to limit Sovereign Power itself seem obvious. Put differently, if we are to limit the contractually defined Rangatiratanga of iwi, aren't we then equally obliged to limit the Sovereignty of the State? The State's and iwi *recognition* of the Treaty of Waitangi as binding means in effect that no signatory retains a greater or lesser claim to absolute legitimacy (seniority notwithstanding). Given that in this region of global Power there exists a very real fusion of both iwi and State, it would seem contradictory to limit the Rangatiratanga of iwi while not reciprocally limiting the Sovereignty of the State.¹⁷

4th pole

This is a similar problem to the one Marx grappled with *vis-à-vis* both Hegel's concept of civil society and the French situation in 1848. How is it possible for the State to limit its own transcendent and coercive elements and thereby become the self-determination of a community, the unmediated 'content' of a common people? Marx's answer was of course through the constituting of 'true democracy' (communism with a small 'c'), by which he meant the ongoing political expression of a 'concrete' people, *minus* the 'abstract' illusion of transcendent Power.¹⁸ And yet who are 'the people' of the postmodern Empire? And just who is colonising who here in the Society of the Spectacle? Nations, peoples, races; these abstractions no longer satisfy any imagination. In the becoming-slum-and-palace of a very Imperial world, Marx's problem is today reconfigured, and in his place Negri asks: who are the locals who everywhere are capable of subtracting transcendent Power from the global situation?¹⁹

5th pole

On a coastline all claims to the indigenous dissolve like sea-foam in the wind. The whenua fractalises here, allowing thought to be cast out over the edge of things like a net sweeping the maritime void. Everything eternal is now awash and now reappearing in the vast, indeterminate arrival-departure time of a future common world.

4th guy-rope

Back in the 1980's, while Mururoa atoll suffered the ignominy of remaining a nuclear test-site, many went around exclaiming: "Keep French theory out of the South Pacific!" And to this others replied: "The French military-industrial complex, yes!—but theory? To the contrary, we urgently require fresh thought and therefore must seek out the best, and right now the French are the best!" Of course Negri is not French; he was born in the Veneto, in Padua, but spent many years of political exile living in Paris during the post-'68 period of French intellectual radiance. But situations and conditions change. Negri now lives in Rome from where he launches his exquisitely crafted texts, his *tāonga*-Roma, thus adding his *mana* to the 'general

intelligence' of the common. And today, rather than simply *emitting* from charged centres, revolutionary philosophical thought also *emerges*, post-Seattle/Genoa, along the pathways of a multidimensional, global network of radiance.

Yet a perverse sense of distance, fear and isolation still haunts the world: divine laws of the local, xenophobia, various nationalisms, nativisms. Witness Israel. In opposition to this, and held firmly in a positivity of desire, the 'elsewhere' (and the 'other') of those who create the common is nothing if not the immanent, fertile void of every local site; the empty place-holder around which all 'heres and nows', all singular beings, gather. Viva marae!

5th guy-rope

And so on the common, *within* the common, even the living thought of the ancestors is located and acquired globally: '[a]cquisition of this sort essentially means a gathering in of inalienable qualities from power-filled places of origin somewhere in geographically distant space/time, so that the uninterrupted flow of cultured human existence, begun and continued by ancestral benefactors also located in cosmological space/time, may continue unabated. All those who honourably engage in this activity for the social good are evidencing an aspect of ideal human behaviour, are acting "ancestrally."²⁰

6th guy-rope

The Proper name New Zealand names the One, the Nation-State. Yet we continue to use another name, Aotearoa. The name Aotearoa does not name the One. Aotearoa names the multiple, the tribal. The names New Zealand and Aotearoa are not synonymous; they don't mean the same thing. When we refer to this region of islands here in the southern Pacific as 'New Zealand/Aotearoa', we are in effect saying that *two* political forms both operate and confront each other here: the tribal form and the State form. This does not mean, however, that the tribal form is the prerogative of iwi. The tribal is a virtuality traversing and empowering the all. If I have been calling this virtuality 'māori'—with a small 'm'—then it was only in an attempt to bring a perhaps forgotten meaning to the fore. Through a wonderful juxtaposition of sense, the name 'māori' signifies not only 'common' but also 'fresh'. The life-world of māori can thus said to be composed of those events in which a profoundly quotidian relation forms and extends itself via both a renewed giving of gifts, and a further reaching of agreements in fresh association.

7th guy-rope

I have been opposing all this to the transcendent domain of legal contracts and written pacts, and to the general fencing and policing of the world that stems directly from these. But without wishing to get lost in the misty aporias and swamplands of postmodern gift-theology, we immediately sense a problem here. In giving, or by donating something, are we imposing another *kind* of obligation on the person or group who receives the gift? Or is all trace of a gift used-up, destroyed in the very act of giving? In other words, is a gift of no return ever possible? A giving-without-taking would simply equate to a taking-without-giving, they travel the same infinite and vicious circle, the same eternal-return of gifts and theft, debt and guilt. Yet wouldn't to give and to take, to take and to give, be best... ungreedily?²¹ Perhaps the *mana* (*virtu*) of the common lies only in an ability to create—and

constantly recreate—both adequate and splendid pathways for the living, flowing distribution of time's pure generosity.

8th guy-rope

Are we māori enough yet?

The tent pegs

1. This text, along with another entitled "The Constitution of Time", is to be found in A. Negri, *Time for Revolution*, trans. M. Mandarini (London and New York: Continuum, 2003).
2. The title of Samuel Butler's novel *Erewhon* provided Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari with a way of rethinking utopia: *Erewhon* 'refers not only to no-where but also to now-here.' In this sense, utopia becomes an immanent struggle occurring both within and against the real of present conditions. See their *What is Philosophy?* trans. G. Burchell and H. Tomlinson (London & New York: Verso, 1994), p. 100.
3. 'The moon is full.' Moko Mead and N. Grove, *Ngā Pāpeha a ngā Tīpuna* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2001), p. 272.
4. E. Alliez, *The Signature of the World, Or, What is Deleuze and Guattari's Philosophy?* trans. E. R. Albert and A. Toscano (London & New York: Continuum, 2004).
5. A. Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 162.
6. If an important division lies between Proper names and common names, then this essay is in part an exploration of, and experimentation with, that division. My starting point for this thematic was to highlight to myself a perhaps minutely perceived difference in meaning between the Proper name 'Māori' and the common name 'māori'; to make this difference grow until the two versions of the name took on a rather complex and unstable relationship. The strange thing was that in order to achieve this it seemed necessary to refrain from using the Proper name 'Māori' anywhere in the body of the text. Given the rapidly growing dangers of any politics based in ethnic identity, I felt a space needed to be opened up in which the openness and co-operation of a belonging-as-such was what was important for the coming world. Meaning 'ordinary, or common' and 'fresh', the common name 'māori' seemed to me exemplary when attempting to imagine the topography of such a space. In contrast, the meaning of the Proper name 'Māori' seems thoroughly overdetermined and therefore somewhat out of bounds to the imaginary.
7. Arriving at things from a different angle, Giorgio Agamben puts it like this: "[t]he originary nucleus of signification is neither in the signifier or the signified, neither in writing nor in the voice, but in the fold of the presence on which they are established: the *logos*, which characterises the human as *zoon logon echon* (living thing using language), is this fold that gathers and divides all things in the 'putting together' of presence. And the human is precisely this fracture of presence, which opens a world and over which language holds itself." G. Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. R. L. Martinez (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 156.
8. Following Negri, who follows Foucault, we oppose biopolitics to Biopower: "One must be clear about the concept of biopolitics. It literally means the intertwining of power and life. The fact that power has chosen to place its imprint upon life itself, to make life its privileged surface of inscription, is not new: it is what Foucault called '[B]iopower,' whose birth at the end of the eighteenth century he described. But resistance to [B]iopower exists. To say that life resists power means that it affirms its own power, which is to say its capacity for creation, invention, production, subjectivation. This is what we call 'biopolitical': the resistance of life to power, from within it—inside this power, which has besieged life." A. Negri, *Negri on Negri: Antonio Negri in Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 64.
9. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of history is laid out in "1227: Treatise on Nomadology—The War Machine" and "7000 B.C.: Apparatus of Capture", two parallel chapters of their extraordinary text *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. B. Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). The 'nomadology' contains their tribute to the memory of Pierre Clastres, the anthropologist from whose text, *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology*, trans. R. Hurley and A. Stein (New York: Zone Books, 1989), they adopt the definition of tribal societies as those which retain *anticipation-prevention* mechanisms, these coordinating reciprocal, distributive forms of ritual and exchange and thus both opening and closing the virtual limits of the group's various milieus. For tribal societies, all productivity connects the flows of the social body with those of the world-space and the time of the cosmos along lateral, immanent projections: the body of the earth. However, for the State, production flows vertically, towards the body of the Emperor and his transcendent God. The permanence of 'land' and property is constituted in a re-turned, reterritorialised projection of this transcendence: the Law. 'E ka huakina! E ka huakina! E ka tohungia! E ka tohungia!'
10. Corruption can be understood here in at least four ways: the neo-liberal promotion of individual choice (privatisation); the managed exploitation of co-operative labour; the linguistic corruption of ideology; and a complete lack of any resonance between value and being. See: M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. 201–203 & 389–392.
11. Negri is exemplary in his continued use of the term 'postmodern' when naming the present era. The global 'event' of '68 severed this era from its former, the 'modern'. See especially: A. Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 188; and M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire*, pp. 137–143.
12. I use Deleuze & Guattari's term 'smooth' with reference to the world-space of the nomadic war machine. Global Imperialism has today captured this space, by blending with it and adopting its contours, its *modus operandi*—with one aim in mind: to control and plunder, through a complex and dynamic interplay of 'territorial rootedness' (Corporatised Nation-States and tribes); diffuse and autonomous webs of communication (air-space, highways, informatics, etc); the constant reproduction and circulation of a global market; and the 'management' of monetary and financial measure—all guaranteed by a 'supranational' force (the planetary military-industrial complex). 'In order to respond to the power of the multitude [the power of those who are māori], sovereignty extends its centre of gravity within deterritorialised horizons.' Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 228.
13. A. Negri, *Time for Revolution*, p. 146.
14. M. Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended": *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-76*, trans. D. Macey (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 265–272.
15. As Negri states, 'There is no truth that does not derive from choosing sides, because truth is never neutral [...] Political militancy is the form through which the joy of truth and the pleasure of life are rendered accessible. Militancy develops a linguistic field that corresponds to the fullness of passions.' A. Negri, *Negri on Negri*, p.38.

16. Deleuze and Guattari put it like this: 'The race-tribe exists only at the level of an oppressed race, and in the name of oppression it suffers: there is no race but inferior, minoritarian; there is no dominant race; a race is defined not by its purity but rather by the impurity conferred upon it by a system of domination. Bastard and mixed-blood are the true names of race.' *A Thousand Plateaus*, p.379.
17. Traditionally, the Labour Party was an attempt to represent the 'mixed-blood and inferior' race i.e. those who identified as working class, the oppressed, etc. By passing the Foreshore and Seabed Act, the present government is actually displaying its socialist roots. In this sense there may be a potential for the Act to symbolically limit the Powers of both State and iwi. All the juridical debates come into play here: liberalism vs. pragmatism, Western positivist law vs. Eastern natural law, etc.
18. For a brilliant recent analysis of the formation of Marx's thought regarding democracy see: S. Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London and New York: Verso, 2003), especially pp. 309–311.
19. Asking the same urgent question, Mike Davis investigates the incredible situation inside megacities of Asia, Africa, South America, etc. See his 'future' report: "Planet of Slums: Urban Involution and the Informal Proletariat" (London: *New Left Review*, March/April 2004), pp. 5–34.
20. M. W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade, and Power* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 145.
21. I am following a late essay by Deleuze. Co-written with his wife Fanny Deleuze, "Nietzsche and Saint Paul, Lawrence and John of Patmos" is a vital, intimate study of D. H. Lawrence's text *Apocalypse; and the Writings on Revelation* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1995). The essay offers a precise set of reflection-points on the problem of 'the gift' in Western thought. Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 36–55.

Ralph Paine is an artist who lives in Auckland.

Preface I

When Gwyn and Dan invited us to guest edit the Sydney section for this issue of Natural Selection, Liz and I sat down and had a long conversation about the proposition. In thinking through who we might ask to contribute a piece of writing (for we at first concentrated on the fact that Natural Selection in its past guises has been pretty much a text based affair) we discussed various agendas that were operating in the art world, and who might contribute something.

Did we want to ask one group for a polemic about their quest to get better artist fees from institutions? I couldn't really see the point in this, as I don't really agree with the idea that better artists fees from institutions would make any difference at all to the situation of artists. Their protest misses the point that exhibiting in such spaces is a privileged position that many people won't ever occupy. And seeking bigger fees for doing so fails to address that these institutions are increasingly becoming leaden with bureaucracy, driven by their marketing departments, and conservative in their approach. It also misses a point made by Daniel Malone to Gwyn, (and cited in one of her recent essays) – that artists and institutions are codependent, but that artists are endlessly replenishable.

Liz and I discussed how dire writing on the Sydney art scene has become, particularly in the mainstream press (see my review of the reviewers below). In fact we got pretty depressed about the whole idea of collating anything at all.

Then we thought about our friends and colleagues, who, in the face of all these obstacles – limited spaces to exhibit in, little time and money to create work, virtually no 'commercial market' for their 'product' – continue to make exciting and inspirational work. We decided to throw open our editorial arms and invite some people who we know and admire to contribute anything they wanted. The result is almost like a group show, except we don't have any curatorial rationale in operation... Just a bunch of pages that we hope someone somewhere finds as intriguing,

confounding, hilarious and inspiring as we do.

Reviewing the Reviewers

The best recent mainstream coverage of contemporary art came from Anne Loxley, who wrote for about a year for the Sydney Morning Herald on every second Tuesday. She pulled no punches – criticising sloppy work, questioning the curatorial rationale of institutions such as the MCA, and pointing out the increasingly market driven nature of the Sydney gallery system. Little wonder the Herald discontinued her column, and it's interesting that this occurred following a couple of particularly scathing reviews of certain 'blue-chip' galleries and institutions. The reasons given to Loxley for her discontinuation by the arts editor Bryce Hallet were "a change of direction for the reader", and "budgetary constraints". Increasingly the newspaper coverage of contemporary art in Sydney is thinly veiled advertorial.

The main art writer for the Sydney Morning Herald (filling the big shoes left by the infamous John McDonald) is Peter Hill, who is also an artist. Whereas the conservative McDonald was openly hostile to much contemporary art, Hill writes little in the way of critical responses to work. Often he will interview the artists over a latte, or regurgitate press releases/essays that accompany the exhibition (commissioned by the artist or gallery, and thus never critical of the work). He even liked the Affordable Art Fair (which would have to be one of the most deplorable, problematic recent developments in the Sydney 'Art Market'). Perhaps he's afraid of the reaction if he takes a critical stance. Perhaps he's just a nice guy. Either way, it's boring, unhelpful and often just stupid.

The best coverage of the Sydney art scene at the moment comes via an anonymous blog (www.artlife.blogspot.com), a diary that can be as celebratory or as cutting as it likes thanks to its anonymity. It's refreshingly honest, one of the only published voices currently keeping a critical and intelligent eye on things.

Preface II

In Sydney today, there seems to be a much smaller amount of publicly available, critical, interesting writing on art than there was, say, ten years ago. Newspapers don't contain much in the way of art criticism, and a common approach to the art writing that is in their pages is that of the 'listing' style – exhibitions are wrapped up in a paragraph or two of descriptive writing, under some sort of 'things to do in Sydney today' heading.

It also seems there has been a corresponding increase in the number of artist-run publications and websites. This may be a result of the lack of more mainstream publishing arenas for art discussion or criticism. It could also be the result of the changing nature of art 'practice' – the fact that creating and exhibiting art is not necessarily the sum total of what it means to be an artist these days.

The increase in artist-run publications has resulted in an increase in requests to artists from other artists, to make written contributions to their projects. Do artists make good critics? Do they make good writers? Some do, and some don't. As artists, anything they have to say about art (their own or others') is surely

valid – but it may not be interestingly written. If something is badly written, it won't hold anyone's attention for long, and it's difficult to commission good writing when there isn't any money available to commission with.

It's so hard to sit down and write something good – the process can be terrifying. Staring at a computer screen and waiting for a profound comment (or essay) to make its way from scattered thoughts to orderly consciousness is not fun. It's so easy to give up, and think, 'oh well...I didn't make it to contribute to publication 'X' this time, maybe I can do something for the next issue'. Procrastination is easier, as is walking away from the project completely to do something else, like colour in, or play Playstation.

Here, in our contribution from Sydney for Natural Selection Issue #3, we have picked some artists we know and love, and asked them to contribute anything – written or visual – for publication. The results have been very little in the way of writing, but a lot of interesting visual work. Hopefully this gives some indication of what it is to be an artist in Sydney.

ENVIE DE SORTIR ?

Ciné, théâtre, resto ...

**MAIS VOUS N'AVEZ
PAS ENVIE
D'Y ALLER SEUL(E) !**

Contactez-nous et
choisissez une personne
qui souhaite, comme vous,
être accompagnée

**POUR UNE
SORTIE A DEUX**

APPELEZ

01 46 28 40 10

VIVALDI Communication (Ass. loi 1901)

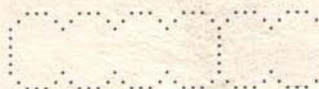
AVONTUURLIJK, SPANNEND, MYSTERIEUS EN... ROMANTISCH

the **MAN** in the
IRON MASK
NU IN DE BIOSCOOP!

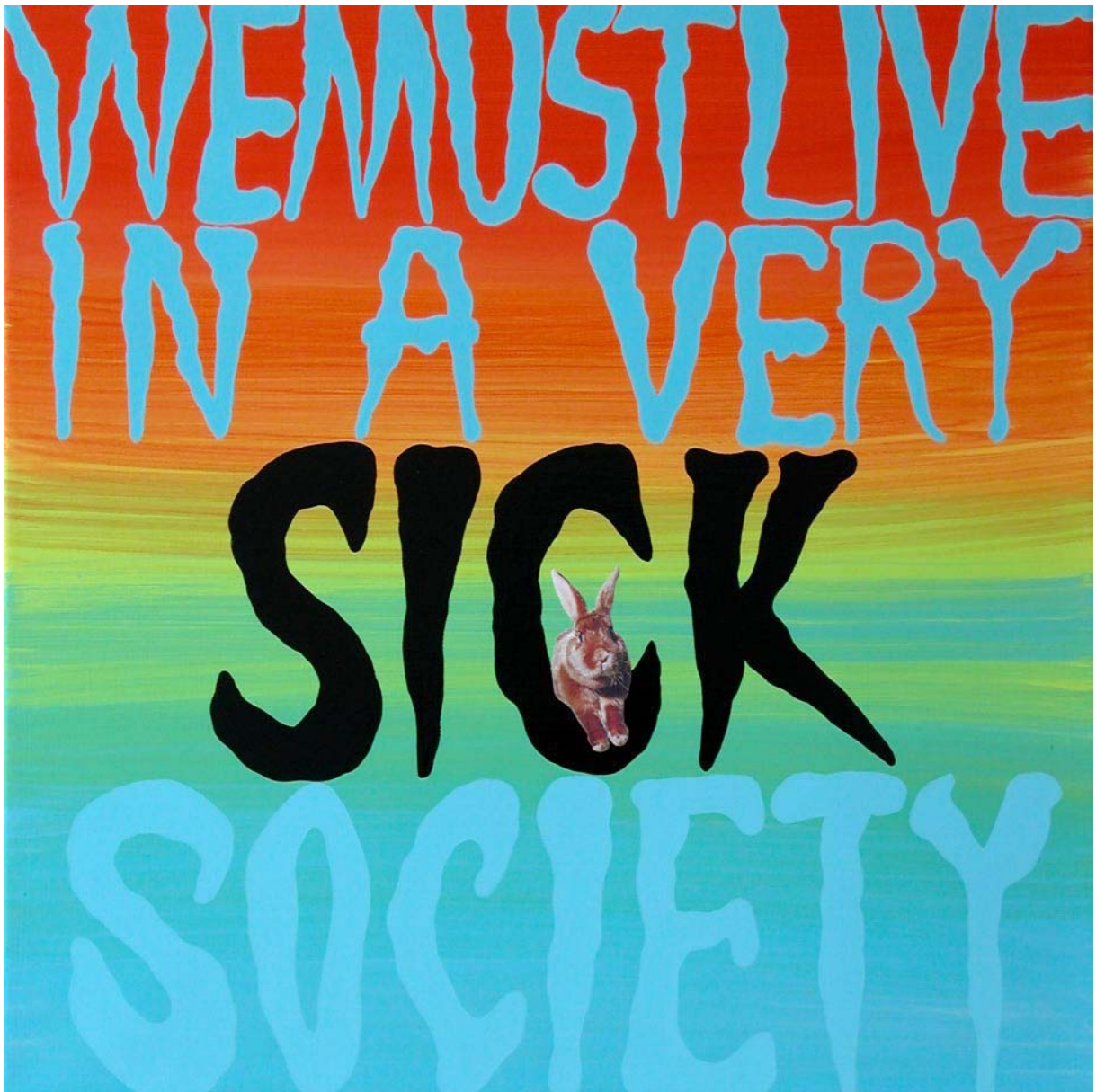


NOT
FOR
SALE

BOOMERANG SCHOOLCARDS
POSTBUS 763
1000 AT AMSTERDAM

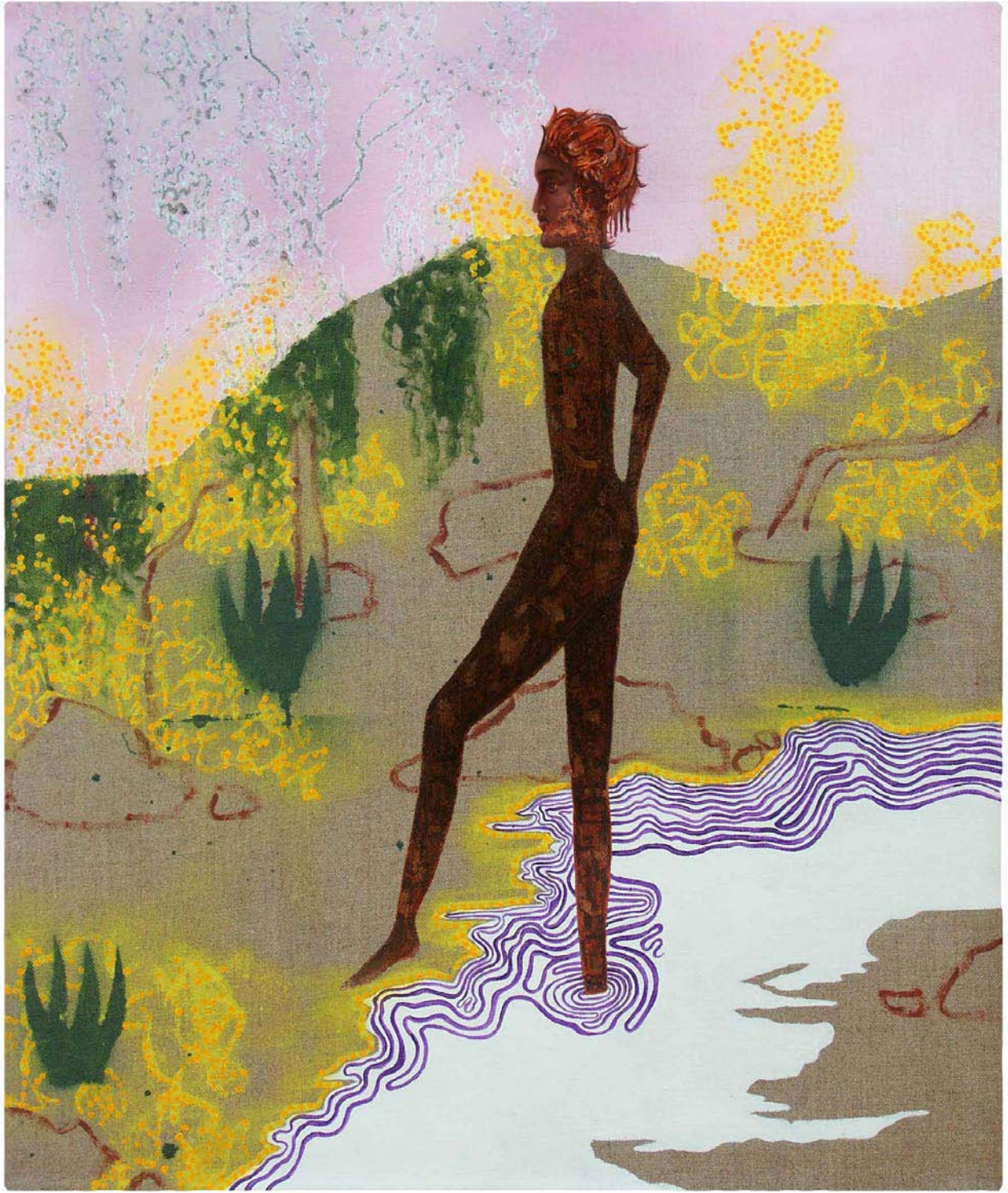


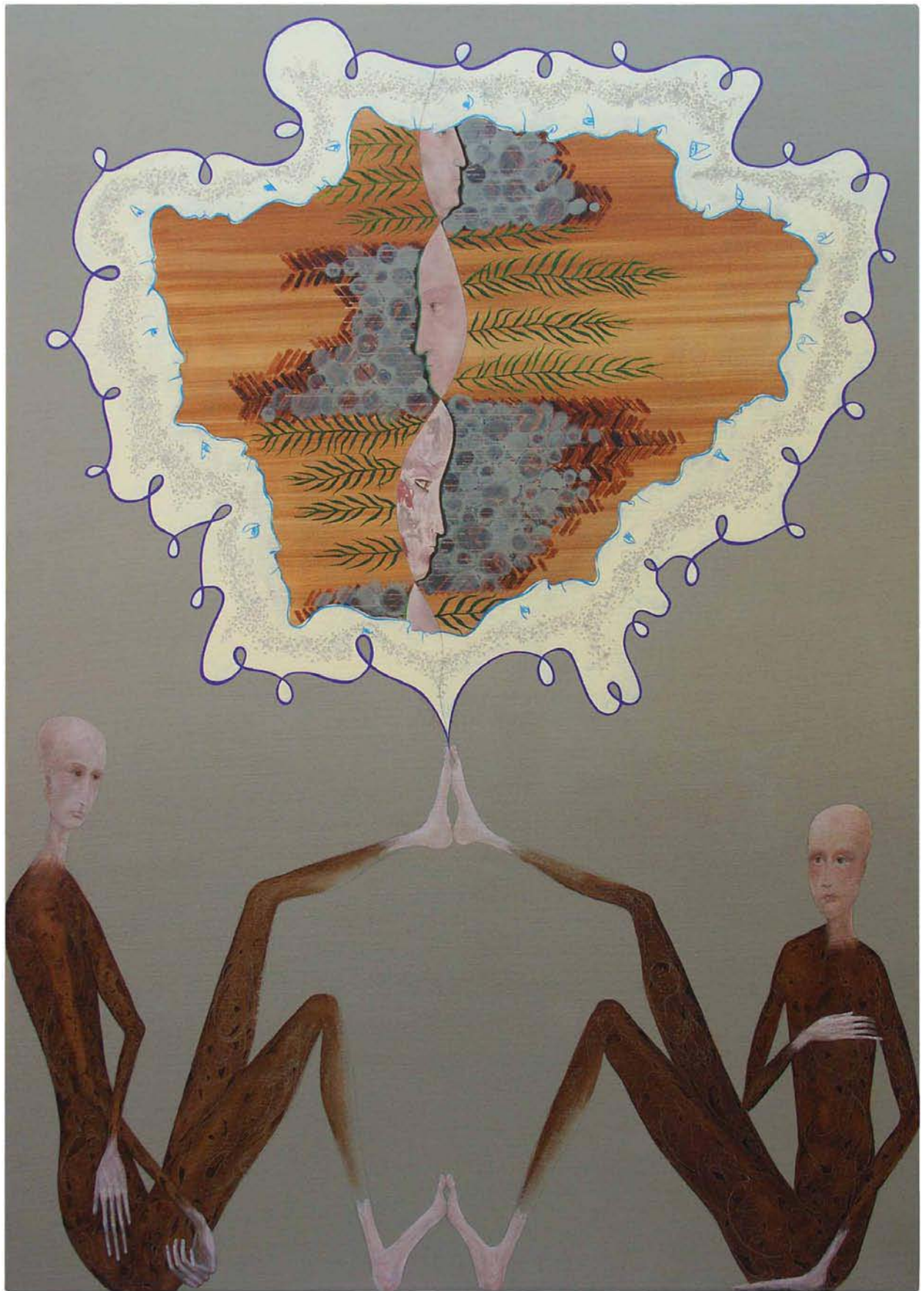
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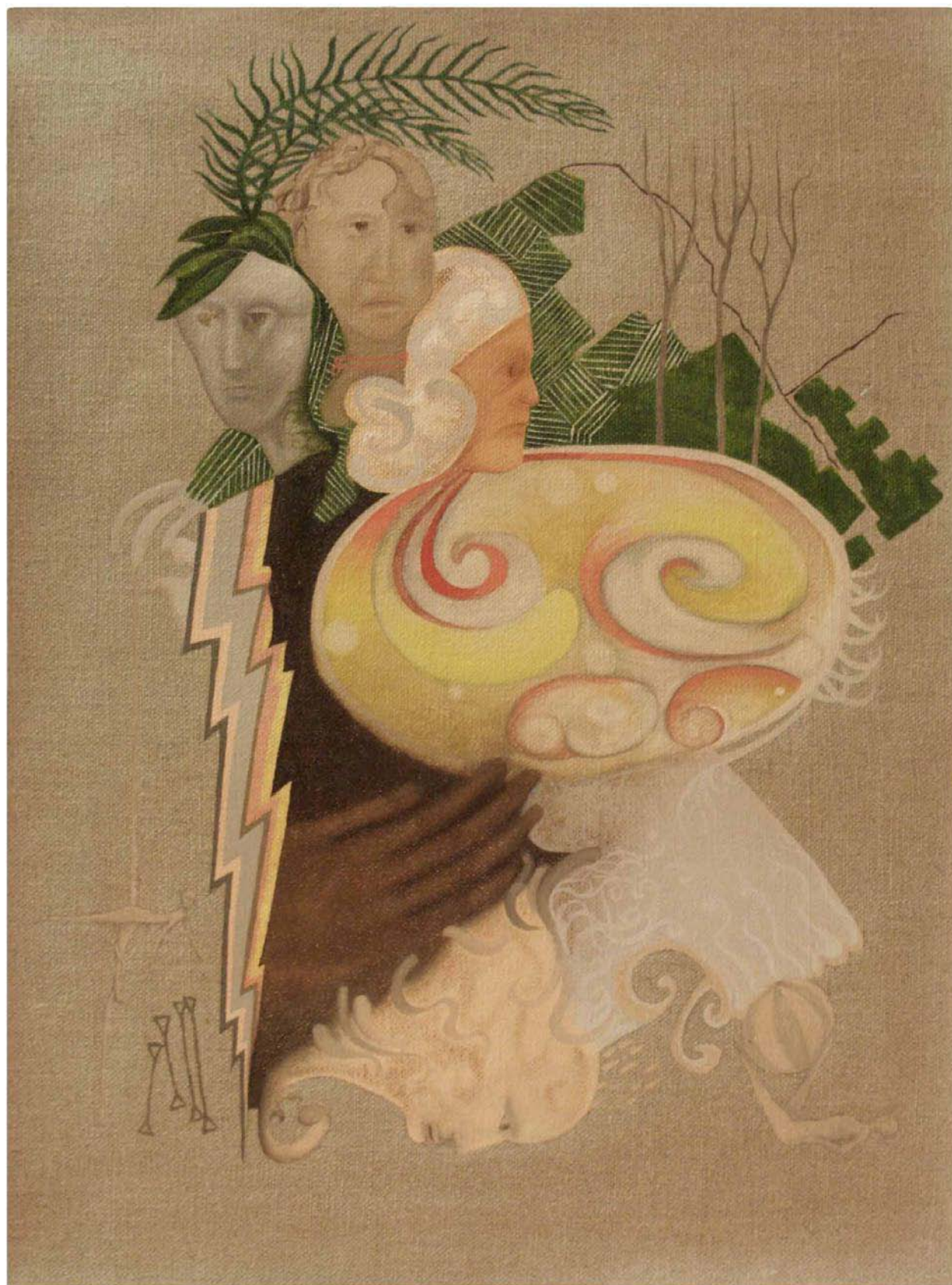












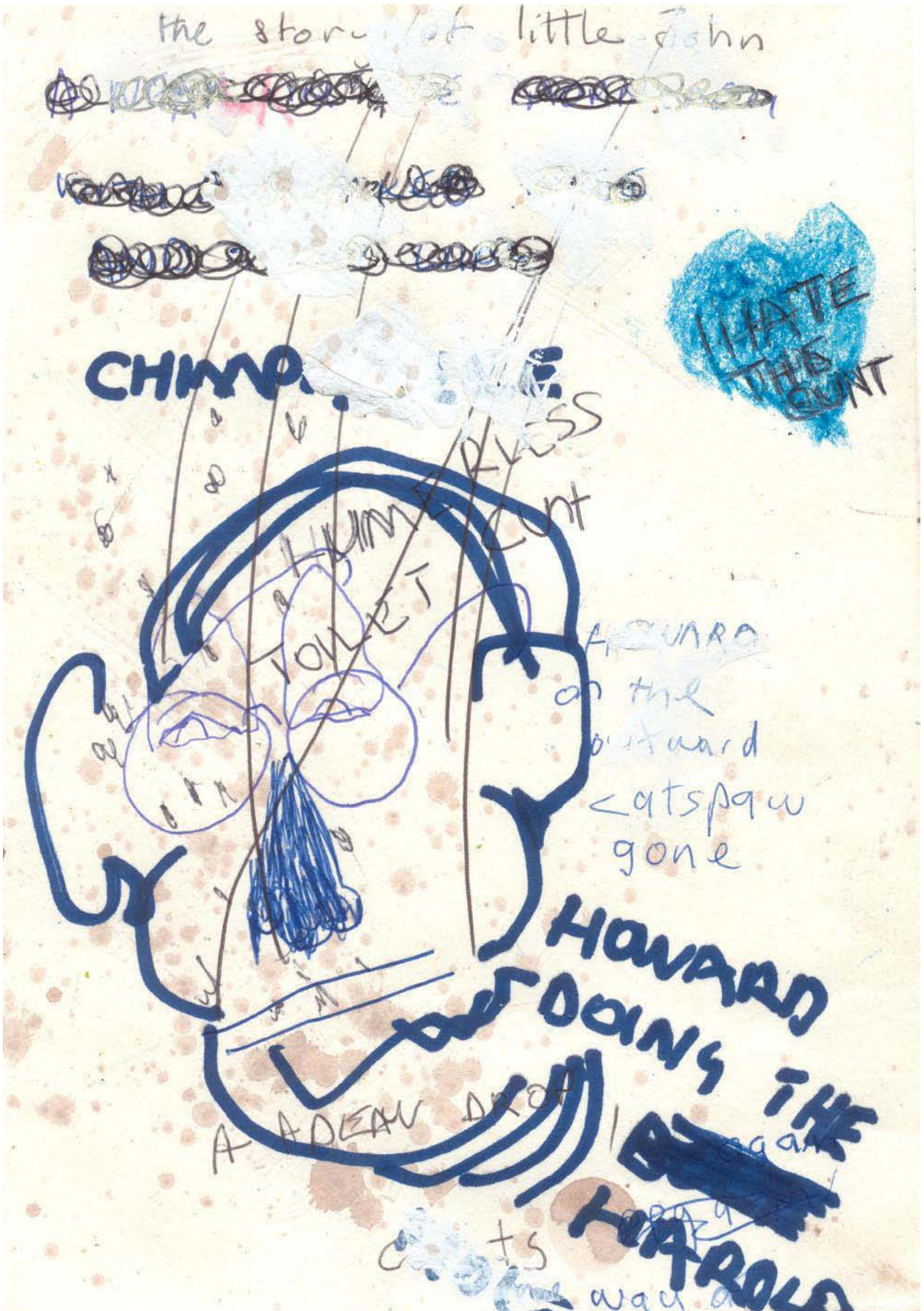
TAXI
DRIVERS
WANTED

ALL
SHIFTS
AVAILABLE













A medium strip on Parramatta
JODY'S HALLWAY road

The toilet on a peak hour
commuter train from Central
to Penrith.

UNDER A TREE IN ORANGE

At my boyfriend's year 12 formal
BATHROOM ~~AT WAREHOUSE~~

~~IN A CAR~~

IN AN AIRPLANE IN A RED
JUMPER

With Lucas watching
IN GEORGE + JOE'S BEDROOM

on a plane when I was 18
PETE'S HJ HOLDEN
my neighbour's lounge
room at Ashfield.

IN HOSPITAL

Alena's backyard & dunny.

ON THE GRASS IN
THE BACKYARD
~~in the back~~

on a ~~train~~ ^{overnight} train to Melbourne
during the pilots strike.
IN THE HOTEL TOILETS AT
THE SUNSHINE COAST.

Back of a taxi
ON THE KITCHEN BENCH

DENDY QUAYS

Creepy Crawly walk in
Tassie.

Lapstone entry to Blue Mountain
national park.

SHOPPING ARCADE DURING
SCHOOLIES WEEK.

in front of kitchen window
IN THE POOL

roadside

Gardi Park
in Barcelona.

~~my boyfriend's father's car~~ FOUR MAN TENT

my boyfriend's father's car
CAMPING AT NEWNES

MORI Gallery

on the verandah.

~~my garage~~ bunk room at
camp.

my garage.

my friend's lounge room floor in
Brunswick.

Recycled Australian Paper

driving
through the CBD

The Cases that Haunt Us: From Jack the Ripper to Jonbenet Ramsey
The FBI's legendary mindhunter unravels the mysteries that won't go away
by John Douglas, Mark Olshaker

JonBenet Ramsey: Inside the Ramsey Murder Investigation
by Steve Thomas with Don Davis

Who Killed Jonbenet Ramsey?
Cyril Wecht, M.D., Charles Bosworth, Jr., Charles Bosworth, Jr.

Perfect Murder, Perfect Town:
The Uncensored Story of the JonBenet Murder and the Grand Jury's Search for the Final Truth
by Lawrence Schiller

Death of Innocence: The Untold Story of JonBenet's Murder and Investigation
John Ramsey, Patricia Ann Ramsey

Death of a Little Princess: The Tragic Story of the Murder of Jonbenet Ramsey
Carlton Smith

Presumed Guilty:
An Investigation into the JonBenet Ramsey Case, the Media, and the Culture of Pornography
Stephen Singula

Jonbenet Knows Evil Love
Richard Rubache

Who Will Speak for JonBenet?: A New Investigator Reads Between the Lines
Andrew G. Hodges

JonBenet's Mother: The Tragedy and the Truth
Linda Edison McLean, Linda McLean

A Little Girl's Dream?: A JonBenet Ramsey Story
Eleanor Von Duyke, Dwight Wallington

A Mother Gone Bad: The Hidden Confessions of JonBenet's Killer
Andrew Gerry Hodges, Andrew G. Hodge

Jonbenet's Gift: A Miracle for the Millenium
Jane Gray Stobie



MYMOTHER
MYMURDER
MYMOTHER
MYMURDER
MYMOTHER







Self Portrait

"...me / maybe I should have stayed in commercial art? / I am not a very strong character...sometimes / I feel I am a lion (without a red eye) ripping off..."

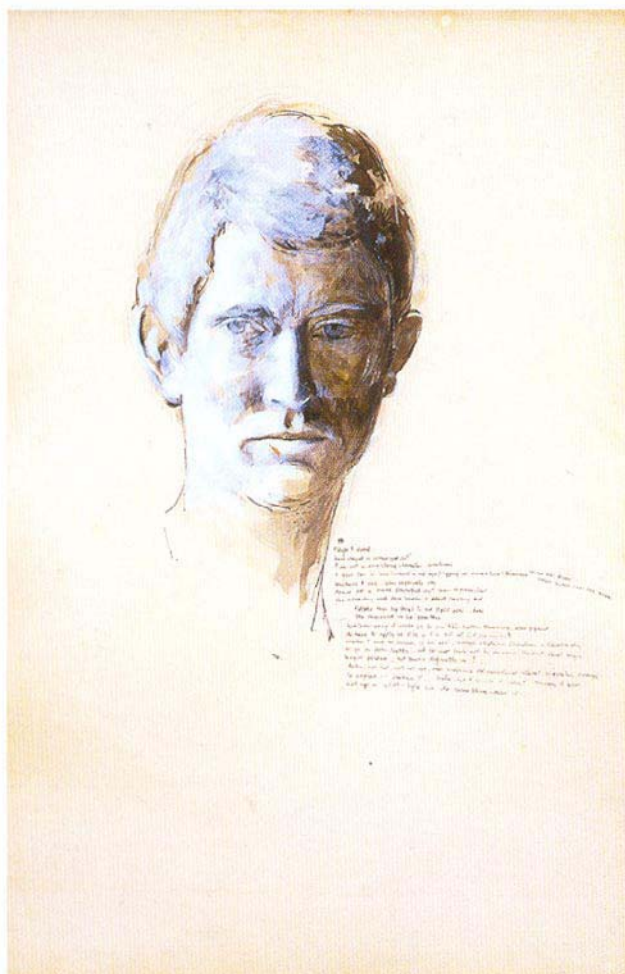
That's Brett Whiteley in a written text on a self portrait drawing from the '60s that turned up at a Christies Australia auction recently. It should really have been purchased by the National Portrait Gallery in Canberra as it seems to me to be a telling admission. Not just about Whiteley but about a lot of Australian art. Maybe all Australian art: all Western art full stop.

I'm wanting to write a sort of 'daydream' piece about what I would curate if I could be Director of the Sydney Biennale. I didn't see the 2004 Biennale because, yes, I live in Brisbane and I was busy. But really it was because everyone said it was poor. In fact they often said far worse than that but I'm not repeating that. For a measured and invaluable rundown of the Biennale see Michael Desmond's review in *Art Monthly Australia* August 2004.

Of course MY Sydney Biennale would be pop culture extravaganza. Once and for all pitting the Mass Media against its High Art cousin and seeing if there really was any difference. Imagine rooms where episodes of *Big Brother* or *Australian Idol* face off against Bruce Nauman or Gillian Wearing. Eminem vs Wolfgang Tillmans (well actually already done by Pet Shop Boys). Quicksilver vs Jorge Pardo. Benetton vs Haacke, Abba vs Culture Club, Pearl Jam vs Nirvana, Hirst vs... well Hirst. You get the picture. And it has partially been done before in various shows over the years: "Art meets Ads", the book from *Avantgarde & Kampagne* at the Kunsthalle Dusseldorf 1992; Peter Greenaway's 1991 *The Physical Self* show; exhibitions on art and shopping; *Let's Entertain: Life's Guilty Pleasures* at the Walker Art Centre, Minneapolis and touring; on and on. There was *Virtual Reality* curated by Mary Eagle and Chris Chapman at the NGA. But it hasn't been done in Australia on any large-scale declarative manner of a 'big themed' *Perspecta* for example.

Call me old fashioned but I think the Sydney Biennale should be built around themes that are pertinent to Australian culture. Not some well-meaning concept that could produce an art show done by anyone, for anyone, anywhere, any time. An exhibition consisting of X group of artists when Y or Z group of artists would just as easily fit: a recipe for a polite nothingness. A way of art presentation that all too often fills our public spaces.

Which brings me back to Brett Whiteley. I've always been nagged by a doubt about White Australian Art generally. Why were our impressionists really so illustrative? Why was abstraction never really ever accepted here? Why are the Angry Penguins seen now as precursors to Pop Art? (I mean Sidney Nolan's *Ned Kelly* paintings are really cartoons.) Why were so



Description from the auction catalogue: "Brett Whiteley (1939-1992), *Self Portrait*, inscribed 'me/maybe I should/have stayed in commercial art?/I am not a very strong character... sometimes/ I feel I am a lion (without a red eye) ripping off...' (lower centre), ink and gouache, 55.3 x 37 cm, Provenance: Gift from the artist to Mr. Prizcak, Bequeathed by the above to the present owner in 1970. \$10,000 - 15,000"

many incredibly successful Australian artists once gainfully employed in advertising, Charles Blackman for example? (And if not Robert Dickson then he should have been.) Why were many of the painters in the canonical *The Field* exhibition 1968 actually really graphic artists? (Not that there's anything wrong with that as the *Seinfeld* episode goes.) Why were so many Australian artists at their best when war artists 'reporting'. And are still so. I only like George Gittoes' and Rick Amor's war artist work. Why was post-modernism (theory illustrated) so endemic here? And then there's Paul Taylor and *Popism*.

I'm not against advertising and the graphic arts. Far from it. But looked at from the beginning of a new century, with the collapse of the high/low divide,

Aussie art looks like a precursor here. Not a follower. But they said that also of Australia's embrace of post-modernism. Just as I often think that reality TV looks like '70s video art. Maybe the Australian public always knew what was right. I just wish someone in the Fine Art establishment would have the manners to acknowledge the state of play. I personally think the general public would be delighted.

But no. Yet again we will deal with really exceptional mass culture as rarefied artefacts 'cleansed' clean of their real origins and 'elevated' to high art land. In the way that exceptional black athletes are 'cleansed' for white mainstream consumption. More same old same old.

Turn all the art galleries into convention centres and motels for the rich and put the galleries in Westfield shopping centres. Be actually avante garde! Move the Sydney Biennale to Surfers Paradise and the Billabong headquarters to Sydney.

And if I sound like an Italian Futurist I don't care.

I keep running these pieces by an art historian friend just to annoy him. I keep thinking I will get some glimmer of a new approach to all this from him: some old school rebuttal that will strip away at my arguments, my populist ravings. Bring me back to my senses. But I'm afraid each time I engage him on this I receive almost exactly the same email (maybe he just re-sends with some faint adjustments).

I suppose that is art history to most art historians: the same email on re-send. The Futurists already did it Scott.

Scott Redford is an artist, curator and sometime writer.

Why Tijuana?



Three years ago, while living in Los Angeles I came up with the idea of organising an exhibition of Australian artists involved with artists run projects. This year the exhibition, *JUNKET* finally happened. Not in Los Angeles, USA but in Tijuana Mexico.

For many the border describes Tijuana. People move to Tijuana from all over Mexico because of its proximity to the border. This works in 2 ways: as a place from which to illegally cross into the US, and because of the possibility of work. Many US companies have built factories in Tijuana called *maquiladores* where parts from the US are assembled and then sent back to the US. Tijuana is a new city, having grown from a village to a metropolis of over 2 million people, making it one of Mexico's fastest growing cities. A consequence of this is the lack of infrastructure and housing to accommodate a rapidly increasing population. Land gets squatted on and communities come into being as more people claim land. Over time the government has had to formally recognise these areas, introducing running water and electricity.

Culturally, the border has generated many amazing

The graffiti in TJ has its own particular style.

projects in Tijuana. Every 2 years an exhibition is held called *inSITE* that is situated in Tijuana and San Diego on the US side of the border, and the places between. Some works have been situated in the in-between place you walk through on the way into Tijuana from the US. A group of artists, designers, film/video makers, VJs and DJs known as the Nortec Collective was formed in Tijuana and has virtually spawned an entire movement of contemporary culture. The idea of the border has become almost prescriptive for artists from Tijuana, to the point that many feel "the border" has been drained of any meaning in relation to their art practices.

Tijuana's cultural and geographical position as a border town intrigued me as a site for a show of Australian art. Particularly with Australia's hysteria regarding our border. We have some few thousand people attempting to come to Australia by boat, and many more simply over staying their visas. In Tijuana thousands of people daily cross the border backwards and forwards legally and illegally. There is a traffic

jam going into the US everyday with hundreds of cars, and the foot traffic stretches into a queue 100s of metres long.

Australians can visit the US without any visa. Mexicans have many restrictions placed on them if they want to visit the USA. They have to prove they are employed in Mexico in a responsible job before they are allowed to visit the US. There is a visa that allows people to cross the border daily to work in the US, and there is seasonal work available as fruit pickers and packers. For many people in Tijuana to go to the US is almost an impossibility. One visit I made to Tijuana was to extend my tourist visa for another 6 months. The US immigration office is right at the Mexican side of the border. To get back into the US you must walk right by it. A large flagpole with a huge US flag hanging from it stands outside the building. So there I was outside, waiting for my name to be called when some US immigration officers walked back from the US side of the border with 4 Mexican men wearing plastic restraining cuffs. When they got to the US Office they simply uncuffed them and let them “go” back into Mexico. I have no idea why they were cuffed, but it was probably for not having the right papers. On another trip returning from Tijuana the greyhound bus had been travelling for about 1 hour in the US heading north back to Los Angeles. The bus pulled into a roadside station/mini mall and an immigration agent came aboard. Everyone had to show him their travel papers and passports before the bus continued on its journey.

Of course not everyone in Tijuana is obsessed with getting into the US. There is a burgeoning middle class in Tijuana, and it is a rich city compared to many other parts of Mexico. But the border maintains a strong presence for both Mexicans living in Tijuana and people visiting Tijuana.

I had been to Tijuana 3 times, the first was for a day with friends where we dragged ourselves along the horror tourist stretch of La Revolucion: donkeys painted with zebra stripes, children hustling, sprikers hassling you to go into their bars, young drunk Americans, prostitutes, loud music, shops full of tourist crap: “I’ve been drunk in Tijuana” t-shirts, Corona beer t-shirts, ghastly handicrafts. We didn’t last long and were back in the States within a few hours.

The next time I went down with Nadine Christensen (an artist in the exhibition) to visit a friend of hers, Sarah Tuke (also an artist in the exhibition) who lives in Tijuana with her partner Angel and their new son Pablo. This second trip was illuminating. Sarah lent us a car and we headed down to the beach “Playa de Tijuana” where a twenty foot-high steel-mesh border fence runs 100m into the sea. The city of Tijuana runs right up to the fence. On the US side a vast no-man’s land of scrubby desert is illuminated at night by spotlights and patrolled by border guards on 4-wheeled motorbikes with guns.

On this second trip to Tijuana Sarah and her partner Angel gave Nadine and I a mini-tour of Tijuana. We saw the school that Angel had set up with his wife in a slum area that had originally all been squatted land. We saw the galleries attached to education institutes and we saw the main state-run gallery CECUT in a dome-shaped earthen-coloured building.

With this second, and then third visit, to Tijuana the idea of bringing the exhibition *JUNKET*, which I had already begun organising, appeared to be not simply an interesting idea but a distinct possibility. Sarah and Angel took Nadine and I to see Cecilia Navaro, the visual arts co-ordinator at ICBC who suggested I send them a package of slides, resumes and exhibition thematic. And that is how *JUNKET* came to be in Tijuana.

With the gallery in Tijuana the Instituto de Cultura de Baja California (ICBC) committed and 15 artists confirmed: Simon Barney, Carla Cescon, Josie Cavallaro, Ryszard Dabek, Nadine Christensen, Alex Gawronski, Shane Haseman, Joerg Hubmann, Anne Kay, Lisa Kelly, Jason Markou, Sarah Tuke, The Twilight Girls (Helen Hyatt-Johnston and I), Simon Yates and Paul White, plus, with the inclusion of slides and paper based works from Westspace, CLUBSproject inc, Elastic, Briefcase and Phatspace, we were ready to go.

With some financial support from NAVA (yeah NAVA) and the NSW Ministry for the Arts I scrounged together not quite enough money to cover the cost of a catalogue (miniature in size), the freight, plus 2 airfares to Los Angeles. The artists chipped in \$35 each to assist with the costs of the freight and catalogue after the shipping costs were nearly double my initial expectations.

Somehow the work finally arrived in Tijuana after much e-mailing to and fro between the shipping company, the gallery and the ever-helpful Sarah Tuke who lives in Tijuana. Anne Kay and I turned up a week before the show opened to install the work. Of course the gallery was not quite ready for us. There was an exhibition still up of velvet paintings, a technique and style that is based in Tijuana traditionally for the tourist trade. ICBC regularly holds an exhibition of velvet paintings. Some of the artists had approached the concept in interesting ways, with one artist painting miniatures inside jewellery cases lined with velvet. Others were horribly painted with not even a redeeming kitsch factor. And the walls of the gallery had been painted an interesting shade of olive green. So we spent the next 2 days wandering around Tijuana and drifting in and out of the gallery to see how the de-install was going and to “subtly” hurry them along.

In Australia I had got people to roughly install the work before I packed it into the crate, so I had a guide as to how the works were to be installed. Anne Kay and I spent the next few days moving things around the space, pinning things up, pulling them down and moving them until gradually the show settled into its final configuration. We were helped all through the installation by the gallery assistant at ICBC, who was fantastic – very capable, quick, competent and thoughtful.

Once again we stayed with Sarah and Angel, who were living in a suburb east of downtown Tijuana on a mesa or plateau called Otay. Each day we would drive, or to be more precise were driven in a taxi, past this long stretch of metal fencing with large lights behind it. Not having really thought about it I assumed it was a gigantic parking lot for either a shopping mall or airport. Of course it is the border fence between Mexico and the USA.



Only one artist in *JUNKET* deals with issues related to immigration, Anne Kay. She made a short documentary on DVD called “Things people I know, say about Australia and Immigration” in which she interviewed Australians about Australia’s immigration and refugee policies. Other artists’ work included an interactive CD-ROM by Ryszard Dabek that intrigued many people visiting the show. Simon Yates had sent examples of his zine called *Opportunities*, the contents informed by the stuff that comes through the Salvation Army store he works in at Dulwich Hill, Sydney. Simon also supplied a set of mirror glasses that reverse your vision, which many of the children absolutely loved. Josie Cavallaro sent a work called *The Artist Sings La Bamba* in which she photographed her mouth singing the famous Mexican tune *La Bamba*. These mouths were placed along a musical score made from string and drawing pins. Sarah Tuke did a painting called *I Miss Vegemite*, made with vegemite and acrylic paint. Simon Barney had handed over a Briefcase gallery show called *Tracing Kit* that was photocopies by various artists that could be traced on the light box built into the briefcase. Shane Haseman made an hilarious and bemusing DVD called *8 Actions* that somebody liked (or possibly hated) so much they stole the DVD out of the player. Joerg Hubmann made a series of wall works (drawings, paintings and an essay) called *I’m a black cunt trying to be a white cunt* concerned with his position as a recent immigrant to Australia and his response to indigenous Australia. Paul White supplied a beautiful drawing of a Mexican street at night plus 3 felt stitched drawings from a “Disaster series”, simply done, that resonated next to his intricate pencil drawing. Nadine Christensen had 2 drawings on black card with silver ink and a very subtle green pencil that are very beautiful and strange as they appear to be both a landscape and some kind of technical marks from some kind of device. Carla Cescon’s hanging latex sculpture of strange half human half flying fox animals engaged the Mexican audience. Alex Gawronski’s audiotape loop of a session in federal parliament bemused the gallery visitors as the chant of “Order, order” was



Left: A local enjoying Simon Yates’ *Mirror Glasses*, where the left and right vision is switched. **Right:** A sign writer painting the *JUNKET* exhibition sign. Most signage in Tijuana (and Mexico) is done by hand.

repeated over and over. Jason Markou’s ready-made *Rest stop*, a bread board that had split in two creating a pair of stylised elephants. The *Twilight Girls* series of photographs of themselves as gladiatorial figures in costumes made from sausage in a landscape of jelly was interpreted as both amusing and revolting. Lisa Kelly’s works of gently draped fabric with images printed onto them of innocuous rubbish bins and plants were a gentle reminder that this show was from another country.

Several artist-run projects supplied images: CLUBSproject inc in Melbourne, Westspace in Melbourne, Briefcase in Sydney and Phatspace in Sydney. Lisa Kelly generously handed over a number of her self-published journals *Uniglory* and *Elastic* also donated three of their *Elastic* printed projects book. A slide projection of works from the artist-run spaces seemed to intrigue people as much for the fact they got to control how fast the images sped by as for their content. CLUBSproject sent a large package of paper-based work from a huge range of artists, exhibitions and projects that filled an entire wall and looked fantastic.

The opening night was very lively, with the audience actively engaged with the works: playing, reading, watching, looking. Unexpectedly, there was a lot of media attention. Several newspaper journalists interviewed us and some TV stations turned up as well. The Australian Ambassador to Mexico popped into ICBC to see the show, attracting further media interest. And we left the day after the show opened, relieved that after 3 years of planning it had finally happened. I still can’t believe it.

Now the show has finished in Tijuana. The work is still there as I wait to see if another gallery in the Americas is interested in hosting the show... and until I raise



sufficient funds to ship the work back to Australia.

And I'll take this opportunity to give big thanks to all the people who supported this venture: all the artists; the gallery in Tijuana, ICBC; Anne Kay; NAVA; NSW Ministry for the Arts; Sarah Tuke and Angel Benson for too many things to list; Artspace in Sydney for studio space when it was most needed and for assistance in getting funds; T.E.D. Shipping for getting the work to Tijuana on time; Phatspace, Westspace, Briefcase, CLUBSInc for agreeing to be a part of the project; the Wilds in Los Angeles for putting us up, and up with us.

Sarah Tuke, *I Miss Vegemite*, acrylic and vegemite on canvas, jar of vegemite, installation view, ICBC, Tijuana.

Jane Polkinghorne is a visual artist living in Sydney. She works across various media including sculpture/installation, photography and film and video. She often works collaboratively with Helen Hyatt-Johnston as The Twilight Girls. Over the last 2 years Jane has been organising and co-ordinating the exhibition *JUNKET* at the Instituto de Cultura de Baja California in Tijuana Mexico in August 2004. Currently she is trying to get other venues in the Americas for the show.

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Living in a Zoo

Some blanket statements on the cool of drawing, the rise and rise of animals and new spaces to do art in Wellington



"They're making a fool of us, they're living on nuts and berries."
— Talking Heads.

Though we seem to have moved away from fads of making knitted and miniaturized art, and as we slowly float around in work concerned with science and imagining the panicked urban and the dead-pan suburban, as we get sick of someone else's spew on utopia, I look out and see a sketched forest filled with animals that just keep on roaring. Maybe it's just that everyone has finally learned to dream in the same language as Michel Harrison, but it seems drawing is still the staple of cool and its elephants, tigers, tales, dogs and winged bears that the medium is raining.

The popularity of drawing will no doubt reach its New Zealand climax with the up-coming drawing competition co-run between Artspace and The Physics Room. It is good to see that creative opportunities have been well extended from the limiting colouring-in competitions of the past. Yet this sense of childishness is an intriguing one. Is it a lust for naiveté that is governing the production in pencil of many a pet? Drawing is a craft that hovers between the goofy and the highly technical, and yet nearly all hand drawn work has a hyper-personalised feel, often leading the looker into some alternative dimension of imagination.

You had to be there; SH_FT rewarded its visitors with the possibility of an aerial view and an oral experience. What appears like dead bugs on the bench were in fact the carefully placed tuning forks and bridges connecting the strings of McCarthy's drawing-come-instrument installation. Image care of James McCarthy.

Currently at Peter McCleavey Gallery, Andrew McLeod shows a large (painted) drawing, reminiscent of an underwater Bill Hammond. Floating in this bubble paradise is a selection of fish, an octopus or two, but don't fear, the birds are there too. In other works sparrows face off with monster minimalist twigs, and a nude lady lounges over the forms. Her presence makes me wonder if the popularity of animals is simply because people are harder to draw; it's easier to draw a dog than a woman. Maybe large breasts are just the next big thing.

It is interesting to see the dribbling of personal galaxies in contrast to digital design and drawing. It has been said that the popularity of certain computer programs leads to everyone 'drawing' the same style. There was the Photoshop look that brought an influx of colour gradations and the iterated/stamp repeated image. I believe Macromedia Flash was one part of the *flat plains of colour sliding around the web page* problem, and yet digital drawing and the illustrated net cause more than aesthetic irritations. The straight text of

the traditional web page can usually be converted to sound, enabling the bad sighted and blind access to net information. No longer – if Flash has been used to construct the page, audio translation is not possible, the blind are out of luck. Decoration has overrun the minorities.

When the traditionally private act of reading is transferred to reading on the web, we under go the act in one of the most public spaces possible. As computers change the notion of public space, the insular imagination depicted in drawing becomes increasingly popular. Drawing offers a quick, straightforward and finite plain on which to engage the viewer. Looking at drawings in many ways is like stroking a dog. It is a pleasant feeling but the fleas rarely invite you to their fun fur parties.

To step into an entirely new space is what the first (and hopefully not the last) installment by SH_FT, *The Ouse Project*, offered us Wellingtonians. Organised as a temporary exhibition site, in the car-showroom part of town, perhaps the most exciting thing about the SH_FT experience was moving through the space while not knowing where it began or ended. Like a well decorated industrial flat warming, the project allowed us to sniff around. Yes, apart from the Tiger beer we were the only animals.

James McCarthy used the left over relics of the office space, a wooden side-bench acting like the hull/body of a guitar, to create his instrument. The charting of an otherwise unremarkable space through the decoration and amplification of its surface is what SH_FT best achieved. Through site-specific and site-complementary works, we were given the chance to marvel at the quality of concert and wood veneer. Reagan Gentry collected a swarm of ironing boards together and bolted them into a platform that was able to take the weight of a huge pile of rubble. This pile of dust and rocks had the sensation of a levitating mountain, and imbued its corner of the room with a stillness one expected any minute to give way to avalanche volume.

The lack of animals was made up for through the most intriguing aspect of McCarthy's work. His instrument's use of the existing bench top was also the surface on which he constructed a one-point perspective image of the space using guitar strings. Strings representing, walls, beams, and lines of sight were interwoven with tuning forks and bridges. As James played his drawing, both illustrated and actual space reverberated, creating an occasion. The success of this work was ultimately how it collected people not rats, how it rendered the space but also renewed its function.

The examples are few but the feeling is here, there is a soft figuration in the air.

Amy Howden-Chapman lives in Wellington, writes and makes art with writing in it.

All this gives me the mean reds

***The Bed You Lie In*, Artspace, Auckland; and *Milky Way Bar*, Michael Hirschfeld Gallery, City Gallery, Wellington**

This year's annual new artists show at Artspace was a show about "examining the role of the art world as a social institution". Curator Tessa Giblin spoke about her desire for *The Bed You Lie In* to be the kind of show that positioned the participating artists in relation to one another. The kind of show you might be able to use for laying claim to a larger, more collective style reflected by the combined work of the artists involved. As a participating artist, it leaves me to think on the others in the show, the connections that may span across our work, and the choices Giblin made in putting us together. Featuring Eve Armstrong, Kah-Bee Chow, Daniel du Bern, Finn Ferrier, Rachael Grant, Kim Paton, Marnie Slater, Tao Wells and myself, it is interesting to then note that five of these eight artists, again including me, are Wellington-based and of the same peer group. Here we found ourselves in a show about political relations as colleagues, friends and enemies all at once.

No doubt though the curator knew what she was doing when she invited, essentially, the cream of Enjoy to present their own versions of the challenges and failings of the art world. The potential for our work however to display such an inbred nature sadly seemed to be lost in the design of the exhibition, and for a show that claimed to give rise to a self-defined context through the work presented, why did I feel mostly empty and bored by the display of work? And different from other common kinds of apathy, I experienced rather an overwhelming sense of divorce. Admittedly, these feelings are clouded by a general institutional distrust, and one that fuels my practice as much as dampens it; however, shouldn't I feel more from a show apparently showcasing a significant concern of my own practice? My experience has left me wondering such things. Along with, what purpose do these shows serve anyway? What does it mean to be new? And do group shows always have to be such a letdown?

Happy co-incidence was to help my enquiries, when four weeks later I found myself, along with half my bed-fellows lined up under a different slogan; this time for the City Gallery's version of 'new' in *Milky Way Bar* (named after the Bill Manhire poem). With an even tighter association of artists (admittedly due to the local agenda of the show), socio-political likeness was again also the theme: "...connected by time and place... its about what these artists are making, thinking and communicating now".

I was happy enough with this simplicity of connection, and it's true pretty much. Marina Cains, Ryan Chadfield, Regan Gentry, Greg Sharp and the double dippers, Kim Paton, Daniel du Burn, Marnie Slater and myself once more, have all studied or gotten drunk together at some point.

"The Artists in *Milky Way Bar* are united by their shared

experience of being an emerging artist in Wellington now". Emerging. This must be a close first on the list of cringe art terms, with its over-used emptiness evoking an automatic disregard for whatever seems to follow. New is slightly better; new at least seems to imply a shifting relevancy; however, this too seems to be getting a little lazy in its use.

It is this idea of use that becomes particularly illuminating when you consider who is behind the choice of term; in this case, young curators acting in their own particular institution's good faith. Of course someone needs to make the call – who's new, what's hot – but please, just with some thoroughness, with a little extended integrity.

This leads on to probably my main gripe. How do these gestures of inclusion by the Institution show a support for emergent practices and not just emergent artists, or, even more bluntly, emergent art? All I'd like is for my work to exist beyond a group show trinket, for some more talking and some more time. In the case of both shows there was a two-week turn around between invitation and installation. And while Artspace shouted some plane tickets and material costs for those asked for it, the Hirschfeld offered shiny posters in place of an artist's fee.

If I return to *The Bed You Lie In*, was this show trying to ask a serious question about what art might be? Or was it simply an easy well-used theme, used once more, as an excuse to raise the flag for the young and up-and-coming punks out there? Finding myself photo-shopped *in bed* with the other artists on the flyer seemed to bring this home. Just like advertising, sex, and youth, sells.

Overwhelmingly these shows feel like branding exercises. Between the political agendas of *The Bed You Lie In* and the particular aesthetic drive of *Milky Way Bar*, the artists and their chosen work operate a little too much like cut-outs, advertising the currently desired new.

But for all of this moaning, it has been satisfying and revealing in many ways more personal and tangential to find myself in two high-gloss shows with some of my friends. Indeed a significant motivation for this article was to air some of these gaps in discussion and to be able to raise agendas relative to (how I perceive) our own positions as new artists. Acting on an opportunity to review my peers seems analogous to this and I hope still that the point of these shows really is to begin a discussion of such ideas, of what our practices may share. And perhaps as a kind of extended version of the *Milky Way Bar* press statement, localised snippets of trivia such as CDs we might swap (the Silver Jews for the Tindersticks) or that we all either make or drink the coffee at the same café seem as interesting and of appropriate connectedness as our sharing of a the same learning institution and the particular culture of Wellington's project space, Enjoy.



Group effort: (Left to right) Daniel du Bern, Tao Wells, Louise Tulett and Marnie Slater, installing Daniel's work for *The Bed You Lie In*, Artspace, 2004. Image courtesy of Artspace.

While curatorially the two shows played off politics against aesthetics, collectively the work often oscillated around performativity. Marnie, with her Hirschfeld installation in particular, reduces so well an imaginative theatricality present rather strongly in both Kim's and my own work, to a point of idiosyncratic rigour. A slightly lumpy, but beautifully shiny, white model mountain reaching knee-height sits between two steps, one functional and one not, to conceal a three tier ladder. Protruding upwards and a little precariously to the side is a driftwood flagpole, flying the suitably fitting hand sewn statement, "now". Placed in front and to the right of Daniel's work, there was a bleeding of surfaces, activities and sounds between Marnie's small monument and Daniel's video of flying cabbages that offered possibly the greatest poetry within the wider installation of the Hirschfeld show.

Such performative offerings were generally a little quieter in Wellington's sideline galaxy. More on show seemed to be, what I find myself increasingly referring to as, the "New Massey Minimalism" (there's that word again). It's not so surprising though given the staff at the hub of it all, New Zealand minimal heavy weights, Maddie Leach and Simon Morris. Add Karin van Roosmalen, Anne Noble, Gavin Hipkins and Eugene Hansen, and a clear local brand of influence arises. As four new artists, Daniel, Kim, Marine and I are certainly influenced by such conceptual and stylistic tropes. Minimalism has touched us all, with It's pre-occupations with materials, surface, potential and performativity.

Milky Way Bar saw such ideas expressed through

craft. Kim's meticulously crafted European style toboggan, waiting patiently on a slab of white, was successfully taunting in its denial of use. Likewise on an opposite wall, my painstaking installation of 50 meters of fairy lights bent and tacked to the wall in an almost self defeating proclamation: No small wonder.

And for all of us the work in *Milky Way Bar* was somehow quieter and cleaner than *The Bed You Lie In*. Well, quieter at least. For *The Bed You Lie In* Kim presented a scaled version of her locally infamous project staged late last year at Enjoy, where she built an entire new set of gallery walls 60cm out from the existing ones, creating a looping circuit around a unobtainable space. The sheer phenomenological experience of the work, let alone it's questioning of the expectations and performance of its audience harks to an interpretation of minimal strategies consistent to all of us.

Daniel is probably the most forthcoming amongst us with theorising his own work and would no doubt dispute his position within my band of the new minimalists. However, within his fascination-come-obsession with re-interpretations of the landscape, his results often come up trumps. Especially given our current situation where the transparent appropriation of strategies from earlier periods of art could be said to sum up a number of new contemporary shifts,

Daniel's appropriation of minimalism is more one of style than content. To recall something from earlier in his repertoire, and from Massey's first ever graduate show (2003): a large, upright, rectangular, crate-style plywood construction with a single entrance via one-side, that offered the choice to step onto, to jump up into, to jump up and feel ridiculous as you managed to catch the glimpse of some weed like thing creeping around a shelf as high as two meters above you. It is Daniel's silliness that often saves him, and it is the case with such similar tactics at play in his Hirschfeld work. *Back to Nature* (featuring Greg Sharp, also exhibiting in the show) projects a static frame of a young guy sporadically running into shot to hurl a cabbage into the sprawling bush. It's possible that the only minimalism here at all is the clean lines, white on ply, materials kind of minimalism; it is such stylistic definition though that makes for a clear eruption of a new minimal from its original.

It's a good thing though that not all of us are so serious about such a minimal type of enquiry, and the subliminal strength of more absent friends should also be acknowledged. Ryan Chadfield, currently somewhere in Sydney and possibly the glam-kid king of new, has managed to consistently mark his place. As well as exhibiting a work this year in *Milky Way Bar* that debuted in the 2003 Artspace new artists show *Follow The White Rabbit*, he also arranged a backdoor pass to *The Bed You Lie In* via Tao's collaborative project.

Ryan's work produced for Tao's project *Winning Teacher* was commissioned as a better duplicate of my own. Ryan turned up the day prior to the shows opening with a four-bin filing cabinet, a lump of wood, a potted dish of human nails and a badly cared for photograph of a boy in his paddling pool. The next day there was an addition of tape and a pungent, unavoidably bodily smell.

I find myself a little too implicated to uncover exactly what Ryan's comments on my work here might be, although I am able to approach the relationships between us as artists, where it is easiest to look within my own process for possible answers. My work presented at Artspace was part documentation, part reconstruction of a solo project staged earlier in the year at Enjoy. Titled *I've given up on you*, it consisted of an oversize place-card reading "No show", a telephone on the floor that never stopped ringing and a man-hole built into the ceiling with its lid pushed back, showing a blank and ominous slit of black. My unannounced opening performance perhaps lived beyond all of this though. Arriving late, and in ridiculous disguise I attempted to go un-noticed, while being noticed more than ever. Between blatant stares and requests for the "drunk woman" to be asked to leave, it was suitably confusing for all of us.

Ephemera of the performance and a new trap door became *I can't help myself*; and I think, is it the battle of longing against self-loathing that Ryan and I share most? Is it our autobiography that relates us most strongly? This would also make sense given *Winning Teacher's* rationale.

Tao's work for Artspace, as a presentation of a strategy, is the most generous and successful of places to find myself arriving at in my own discussion of the themes in this article. When negotiating his

involvement with the show, Tao proposed to make better versions of all the other work to be exhibited, which would then be ranked for display by Artspace. He in turn handed this task of reproduction over to, mostly, his teaching colleagues (Massey again). What ensued was a wonderful and unsettling battle of authority, authenticity, and institutional critique, along side a whole of lot hurt egos and inflamed artistic temperaments. What Tao so eloquently bought to the surface though were the core social relationships of showing within groups. Thankfully Tao managed defiantly to carry all of the comparative and competitive spirit for all of us.

Again, since all of this, I've found myself in yet another group show. This time though I decided to have a little more fun. Collaborating with Shay Launder, we erected a trip wire across the entranceway to one of the gallery spaces. And while no-one fell flat on their face, the knowing pop of the cork leaving its jam and the caught steps and awkward laughs seem to sum up most poetically perhaps all of this sad, but annoying angst.

Louise Tulett lives in Wellington where she throws a daily dice between Enjoy, Massey University and general research into the world. She especially likes finding the time for her pressing hobby as producer of concept bands and learning to wait for things that may come.

Another word on Tony Clark

Tony Clark, Galerie Seippel, Cologne, April/July 2004

Over two decades, painter Tony Clark's use of classical motifs, landscape, sculptural reliefs, cartoon-like images, myrioramas, Kufic script, abstractions, thought forms, town plans etc. has been to synthesize historically separate visual languages. Narcotic color, and impure, mixed-up transferences characterize the output.

The work in this exhibition is an assemblage of genres: landscapes, portraits, images of birds and flowers, geometric compositions. All are part of a larger project – the assimilation of various historical styles, reconciled in their modes of signification as contemporary forms. The idea of a deranged semblance is at the essence of the images. Many of the works show vegetal nature; foliage, flowers, fruit, in its category of the new and ever identical.

Referencing classicism and modernism, non-western history, and the untutored, this project has a radicality. Not content to revert to type, Clark's interest in Islamic script or Poussin and Claude-like landscapes is mixed with other interests, in, say, fascist triumphalism. Fascist triumphalism was a revival of typical features of Roman Imperial architecture. Upscale dimensions in arches, columns, pillars, domes and the use of 'noble' materials like marble were favored. The satellite city built in the outer suburbs of Rome, EUR, is an example of this kind of architecture, and Clark once painted one of the fascist-era administrative buildings there, The Palace of Italian Civilization, which references the Colosseum. Mussolini cleared away a lot of 'clutter'(read humble dwellings) from around Rome's ancient monuments such as Hadrian's Pantheon, during this era. Clark has often used the sculptural relief form, reducing landscape to starkly shaded 3-tone diagram/cartoons. In this Cologne show, a flower, as symbol of the plant world, is rendered in cyanide blue against a sky of sienna brown, within an economy of means where flourishes of paint suggest things. Clark looks at still-life subject matter as a sculptural found object, using minimal biomorphic forms and harsh contrast to show flora and fauna in terms of plastic design.

Living in Sicily for about eight years, its outside-of-time quality reminds him of living in Rome as a child. He also has lived part of the time in London since the mid-'90s, being something of a nomad, having shows in Europe etc, but has continued exhibiting in Sydney and in Melbourne, where Heide Museum of Modern Art had a survey exhibition of his works in the late '90s. Most of these new works were made in Sicily, and it could be said that a ghostly ancient Greek philosopher oversaw these paintings, particularly Clark's self-portrait. In this exhibition the human (figure) appears for the first time, presented as portraiture, recognizably in Clark's style. (Prior to the appearance of these portraits, some bird portraits were done...) Often in past exhibits reconfigured or

abstracted natural forms predominated, along with architectural or design motifs, but recently a focus on some other traditional genres, notably a profusion of floral designs, show Clark as colorist.

The artist has recently returned to the smaller scale and various restricted palettes of many years duration, this time using pale, undercoat pinks, sienna, blue (and black marker pen). In an accord of searing light and shade, starkly lit blue trees with black shadows are foregrounded; behind them, pale pink clouds on sienna make up a pure and disturbing chromatic. Sitting strangely amongst the other works is a simplified 3D portrait of King Charles I, in soft pinks. In this collision of styles and genres, an experiment mixing, for example, emblems of earliest modernity with 17th century fashions, it becomes a wayward essay in design.

Clark's position underplays the institutional significance of the 'major painting' in preference for a more ad hoc, do-it-yourself attitude. With the most recent work – the mysterious *Geometric with Bird's Head* raises an eyebrow. To one viewer, this could be seen to be referring to the denatured lives of city dwellers, as the English sparrow slowly disappears, as landscape becomes a thing contested. If a bird's song is its existential refrain, denoting territory, then the absence of song could manifest as a bird bisected by geometric, angular planes, symbolizing dystopian aspects of technology. Due to modernism's underwriting of so-called purity, anything living a non-human life has much to fear from the old 'red, yellow and blue.' Within a larger contemporary/historical axis, these works are announced by an off-key and exuberant color retinue.

An afterword by Mia van der Rohe

Even a superficial genealogy of Tony Clark's paintings reveals an inevitable awareness of 'outsideness' – a consciousness inherited from Lautreumont that derives an aesthetic from anarchic visual equations. His 'preliminary' designs, exhibited as ends in themselves, explore the emotional tenor of the personal made public. Clark has taken Venturi's ideas further than most, producing, for instance, murals both with Flintstone forms and an effusive classical Arcadia. From Arabia to China his influences extend the modernist canon via the discarded occult. Significantly, in an essay he has commented on the incisive componentry of the Gothic, in his late friend Howard Arkley's paintings – a praise of the liberty of improvisation over the dogma of the rigorously planned and enforced.

Clark's displacements and sources espouse a politics difficult to rationalize, but certainly availed to the ludic (i.e. is he a landscape artist with his *Myrioramas*?, a Pop artist with his day-glo?, a muralist/decorator with his wall paintings?, a court painter with his portraits?, a calligrapher with his Arabic? etc). His leveling of hierarchies (art, social, cultural) proceeds



Tony Clark, *Charles I*, 2004. Image courtesy of Galerie Seippel.

to an expansive underground, where, with little contradiction, *Architectural Digest* and Wedgwood designs also converge. As he has commented, "...I don't know the evens but I've always been intrigued by all the odds and the footnotes to history, the tangential connections and so on... [Painting] was a way of pursuing art historical interests without having to worry too much about it... You couldn't write a thesis on 'What if Mantegna had been an 18th century interior decorator?' but you could certainly produce a whole range of work on that subject in painting."¹ The writer/musician Nick Cave found him to be an influential teacher, aiding his ideas of pressing paradox upon the dialogue of pop music to produce a more delirious, over-inscribed type of stage/voice performance. In Clark's shadow world

what ultimately emerges visually is a scrambled algorithm of the seen. Liberty is a by-product.

Notes

1. Interview with Tony Clark by Leo Edelstein, *Journal of Contemporary Art* (jca-online.com), ed. Klaus Ottmann, New York, 1995

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Cornucopia?

Telecom Prospect 2004: New Art New Zealand, City Gallery Wellington, 30 May – 22 August 2004

New Zealand was blessed by nature as a land of mineral wealth and rich soils. Through the hard work of the noble pioneers the land had been tamed and it had become a veritable garden of abundance.¹

Prospect would seem to be a benign, albeit obligatory, title for a survey exhibition of new New Zealand art. As Ian Wedde has pointed out, it follows a well-trodden path. Internationally, the last thirty years has seen a plethora of exhibitions sharing similar titles and credos – *Perspecta*, *Documenta*, *Prospect* (Düsseldorf).² Hypothetically speaking, the premise for these shows is quite straightforward: to create an exhibition that, through sampling a variety of artists' work, maps current art practice, formulating a coherent narrative that epitomises the concerns and fashions of art now. Yet if one looks a little closer to home, the word *prospect* also alludes to something quite different; to actions we associate not with the present but with the past. It calls to mind the imperialist colonisation of New Zealand by the British – the search for new pastures and gold. It could easily be said this title would be equally well suited to an exhibition of colonial landscape paintings.³

Perhaps *Prospect* curator Emma Bugden was thinking of the retrograde implications of the term when she put the show together. Her emphasised inclusion of some of New Zealand's older artists such as Ian Scott, Dick Frizzell, Bill Culbert, Ralph Hotere and Don Driver offers a questioning to the relevance of the *new*, when positioned in relation to *prospect*. However, considering the fact that the contemporary references in these artists work is relatively inconsequential, newness is limited to that of simply being physically constructed in the last two years.⁴

And while it is possible to postulate that the inclusion of these artists is a conscious decision to investigate the concept of the new, other aspects of the exhibition contradict this claim. The decision to only include work that has been made recently, by living artists, is antithetical to such lines of enquiry. It opposes the possibility of reinscribed value and meaning being attributed to existing work as a result of a shift in context – such as the work of Henry J. Darger, included in the 2002 Sydney Biennale. Furthermore, rather than tying itself back to any distinct critical position, *Prospect* presented a diverse range of art practitioners of highly varied levels of experience and exposure, whose work speaks of an equally broad set of concepts and contextual frameworks.⁵ Existing within such a broad position, the potential for *Prospect's* criticality was quickly limited to a series of vague assumptions and guesswork on the part of the viewer. *Prospect* seemed to be more interested in pursuing a literal understanding of new – as merely being anything that physically came into being within the last two



or three years – than considering the more complex, interesting and problematic implications of the word.

Though the exhibition en masse may have failed to adequately address this concept of the new, the work of particular artists in the show did. Darryn George, whom Bugden gave pride of place in the upper gallery of Adam Art Gallery, is perhaps one of the best examples of this. His hard-edge geometric paintings based on tukutuku⁶ – rendered in a jarring palette of beige, cream, maroon, fluorescent yellow and black – recall the work of Gordon Walters. But where Walters' use of Maori motif (in his case, kowhaiwhai) constitutes appropriation, George's does not. Instead it is formulated from a place where both Western hard-edge abstraction and customary Maori art are equally established and revered traditions. George's work draws upon both of these with a pronounced sense of reciprocity, respect and understanding, presenting a hybridity that posits biculturalism as praxis.

If we consider *Prospect* to be a neo-colonial enterprise – wherein artists and their work are 'searched out', to then be claimed by Bugden, the City Gallery and 'New Zealand' – then Francis Uprichard and Daniel Malone are two artists whose work in *Prospect* is worth discussing. Like many artists before her, Uprichard discusses the present through addressing the past. Her work, contemporary Pakeha incarnations of moko mokai and patu, not only serves to remind us of the ethically and culturally unsound practices underpinning the collection and presentation of indigenous artefacts during colonial times, and the subsequent current issues of cultural redress; it co-opts the curio trade into contemporary art, suggesting that it is not the distant past that we would like to think it is; that the young artist has taken the place of the indigenous person as The Other: whom is looked upon with curiosity, whose wares are collected for their mystifying qualities that shock, appear obscene and grotesque. It is fitting that Uprichard is now based in London, where perhaps the most extreme example of this cultural phenomenon has taken place – Charles Saatchi and the Young British Artists: Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Jake and Dinos Chapman, et al.⁷

In *Mythopoeia – There and Back Again*, Malone also addresses the neo-colonial, directly responding to Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and the media fanfare that has surrounded it. Through presenting a range of counterfeit *LOTR* collectables (postage stamps, coins, Telecom calling cards, beer, etc.), Malone's work questions the authenticity and credibility of *LOTR*. It poignantly acknowledges the way that its reality is one that conflates fiction and fact; firstly, by Tolkien's fantasy being enacted within the New Zealand landscape, albeit somewhat altered; and secondly, through New Zealand laying claim to *LOTR* – "New Zealand is Middle Earth"⁸. *Mythopoeia* presents a pointed attack upon the uncritical acceptance of the trilogy by mainstream New Zealanders; their willingness to accept its Aryan narrative and depictions of landscape – wherein New Zealand is seen to be a blank canvas, devoid of peoples and their cultures.

In discussing the Christchurch Exhibition of 1905, Jock Phillips states, "international exhibitions provide an opportunity for governments and people to determine deliberately and consciously how to represent themselves and their countries to the world. Of course the representation which they produce is always puffery and self-promoting propaganda."⁹ *Prospect* and *LOTR* both present New Zealand much as it was in these earlier national expositions, as a cornucopia. And though it may not quite have the fantastical monumentality of *LOTR*, *Prospect* presents a view that is no less neo-colonial – for its emphasis of on largeness in scale and scope, and its highly competitive, nationalistic agendas (showing the best New Zealand art, which is in keeping with international art trends but still retains its local identity).

As Bugden states, "This is my list... a Top Ten, a Wish List, a Who's Who, a Top of the Pops"¹⁰; and while this shows the curatorial selection process to be based on little more than unabashed connoisseurship, it is equally telling of the City Gallery's own agenda creating *Prospect* in the first place. *Prospect* appeared to be a mishmash of successful solo shows from other institutions all lumped together – Et Al's *Abnormal Mass Delusions?* (Govett-Brewster), Ronnie Van Hout's *I've Abandoned Me* (DPAG), Scott Eady's *Delia* (DPAG), Maddie Leach's *Gallery Six* (Waikato), etc. And as the City Gallery seems to be more focused on showing retrospectives, design/craft and touring shows rather than contemporary New Zealand art, it appeared that this was an act of institutional 'keeping up with the Joneses', that *Prospect* was the City Gallery's last ditch attempt to prove that they are still relevant.

Notes

1. Phillips, J., "Exhibiting Ourselves: The Exhibition and National Identity", [in] Phillips, J. & Thomson, J. (Ed), *Farewell Colonialism*, 1998, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North, pp. 18
2. Wedde, I., "Prospect: No Worries", [in] *Telecom Prospect 2004 website*, (retrieved 25/9/04), www.telecomprospect2004.org.nz/opinions/ian.asp
3. John Kinder's *New Zealand* (an exhibition at Te Papa, which was shown simultaneously to *Prospect*) serves as a perfect illustration of this point.
4. For his work *White Drip* (2003), Hotere, using his uniform

corrugated iron painted gloss black, pours a line of white paint down the length of it and writes "TO MISTER Paul Holmes" – alluding to the recent scandal of Holmes calling Koffi Annan a "Cheeky Darkie".

5. Moore, M., "Episode 2: *Telecom Prospect 2004 New Art New Zealand*", [in] *Art New Zealand*, No. 112, Spring 2004, Auckland, Art Magazine Press, pp. 64
6. Farrar, S., "Darryn George", [in] *Telecom Prospect 2004 website*, (retrieved 25/9/04), www.telecomprospect2004.org.nz/artist/georgedarryn.asp.

Tukutuku are panels that line the interior of wharenui (meeting houses). George specifically looks at the Poutama motif.

N.B. Poutama is translated as 'stairway to Heaven' on the *Prospect* website – I would like to point out is not a translation but rather a Christian interpretation of this word. The closest translation that I am aware of is 'steps of knowledge'. It represents a process of linking: of whakapapa (genealogy), and states of being – Te Aomarama (the world of light) and Te Po (the world of dark); in this regards it is worth noting that tukutuku also means cobweb.

While George's work makes reference to the work of Walters and Theo Schoon (as well as Ellsworth Kelly, Daniel Buren and countless other European and North American artists) I do not see this as constituting appropriation. Appropriation, by definition, means to take possession of or make use of exclusively for oneself, often without permission (<http://dictionary.reference.com>). Furthermore, in using the word 'tradition', it is not my intention to say that mahi toi and hard-edge abstraction are 'traditional' – implying that they are practices that have ceased (this is not the case at all) – rather I wish to acknowledge that they are both practices that have history.

7. Saatchi has also collected Uprichard's work.
8. Woods, E., [in] Sibley, B., *The Lord of the Rings Official Movie Guide*; Limited Collector's Edition, London, HarperCollins, 2001
9. Phillips, J., op cit, pp. 17
10. Bugden, E., "Welcome In: *Telecom Prospect 2004: New Art New Zealand*", [in] *Telecom Prospect 2004 website*, (retrieved 25/9/04), www.telecomprospect2004.org.nz/opinions/curator.asp

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Panning the Gold

“Panning for Gold: Curating New Zealand Now” as seen in relation to *Telecom Prospect 2004*

Discussions of the role and purpose of the curator can often be problematic. As a primarily reactive profession, the responsibilities and tasks of the curator are ever changing. Particularly from a local perspective, the increased emphasis on professionalism in New Zealand’s cultural industry has created a need to reevaluate the role of the curator within New Zealand’s visual arts sector.¹

This need was addressed during a fortnight of curatorial discussion throughout the North Island, where WINTEC’s ‘Spark’ conference featured discussions of project spaces and curatorial technique, the Govett-Brewster held an international symposium entitled “The Politics of Curating” and the City Gallery Wellington, Te Papa and the Adam Art Gallery co-hosted a symposium entitled “Panning for Gold: Curating New Zealand Now.”

Prospecting Prospect

Telecom Prospect 2004 is an interesting indication of the impasse within which curatorial practice in New Zealand currently resides. Of particular interest is the way in which the exhibition’s presentation and marketing problematised what would otherwise have been a very simple (if not slightly limited) curator-as-auteur style exhibition. This discrepancy between the curator’s conceptual agenda and those of the marketing and advertising departments of a large arts institution such as the City Gallery Wellington, particularly when they are in partnership with a large corporation, is indicative of the difficult terrain that the curator must navigate in order to develop and present an exhibition without being unduly affected by commercial or bureaucratic concerns.

This conflict is particularly evident when one examines the manner in which *Telecom Prospect 2004* was publicly presented. Released as a locked-down blanket explanation of the exhibition, the publicly issued press statement insisted that *Telecom Prospect 2004* offered “...a snapshot selection of the freshest most innovative artwork currently being produced in New Zealand. The exhibition provides an insight into some of the artists who have made, or are likely to make, a major impact on the thinking and identity of our time.” Implicit within this statement are a number of inconsistencies, which despite (or perhaps because of) the statement’s hyperbolic rhetoric, manage to lead the reader to question the accuracy of its claims.

The term ‘snapshot’ for example is an interesting choice. A snapshot is – no matter how seemingly random and casual – a subjective endeavour, if not a highly deliberate one. It is a well-considered and totally authored framing process. This in itself is not problematic. However, when combined with the next few words, “the freshest most innovative artwork currently being produced in New Zealand”, the statement becomes so. The definitive tone of this statement is bold and admirable, however, its accuracy

is quite dubious. Assuming that the exhibition is a snapshot selection, then the nature of the metaphor implies that a single person framed and snapped the scene. How then is it possible that one person has the ability to determine in such absolute terms what is the freshest most innovative artwork in the country? Certainty of this type is not just an enviable skill – it is also an impossible one. As determined by everything from post-structuralism to relational aesthetics to the simple physiology of sight and perception, subjective interpretation is surely the only consistent process for understanding artwork.

Another problematic claim within this statement is the quaint conceit that they can tell which art is actually able to have a “major impact on the thinking and identity of our time.” It does seem slightly anachronistic and definitely a little optimistic to suggest the artist’s role is that of a prophetic soothsayer whose position at the apex of the social pyramid allows them some objective sight capable of changing the course of our thinking and identity. Further complicating this claim is the fact that according to the statement, one person has chosen these artists. This in effect suggests that the position at the apex of the pyramid is actually already occupied by the curator who was responsible for deciding which artists were capable of “making a major impact on the thinking and identity of our time.” So, despite the pretensions of egalitarianism that rest on the surface of this statement, what it actually communicates is a covert though decisive proclamation of the greatness of the curator – whether the curator is interested in this position or not.

This statement’s paradoxical agenda and the implications of these conflicting ideas upon the actual exhibition are examples of why it was necessary to organise a critical forum to discuss these issues. The ensuing curatorial symposium, “Panning For Gold: Curating New Zealand Now” was, in its initial planning stages, intended as a forum within which paradoxes such as these could be addressed and therefore minimise the potential for further compromise to curatorial intention. The original forum was going to be a series of panel discussions that addressed current issues relating to the curation of visual culture in New Zealand against the background of *Telecom Prospect 2004*. It hoped to discuss different curatorial styles – such as thematic, survey, auteur, collection based or media specific, the issues involved in each and their relationship and/or relevance to New Zealand visual arts.

The Symposium

The product of an alliance between the City Gallery Wellington, the Adam Art Gallery and Te Papa Tongarewa, “Panning for Gold: Curating New Zealand Now” was intended as a platform where *Telecom Prospect 2004*’s peculiar curatorial methodology and its public representation could be discussed within the wider context of New Zealand art history and with

particular emphasis on curating.²

As I have already mentioned the symposium was originally intended as a way to unravel the inconsistencies within the agenda of *Telecom Prospect 2004*. The involvement of the three institutions would theoretically ensure an objective forum within which to consider *Telecom Prospect 2004* in the much larger history of the survey exhibition in New Zealand. It was initially proposed that by comparing the curatorial techniques used in past survey exhibitions of New Zealand art with those employed in the creation of *Telecom Prospect 2004*, the exhibition could be discussed from a broader, more objective perspective. However, for a variety of predominantly financial and bureaucratic reasons, the symposium became a workshop with the gradual elimination of a critical discussion of curatorial techniques and of *Telecom Prospect 2004* in general from the agenda.

Despite the symposium's reluctance to address critical curatorial issues within its official agenda, it still managed to address several key points in the debate surrounding the role of the curator. As well as this, the symposium signified a heightened awareness and a piqued curiosity amongst the local arts community about the activities and intentions of curators.

The first panel discussion was entitled "The Job of a Curator" and included Rob Garrett (Creative New Zealand) as Chairperson, Tessa Giblin (Artspace), Charlotte Huddleston (Enjoy/Govett Brewster, Megan Tamati-Quennell (Te Papa Tongarewa) and Claire Regnault (The Dowse) as panellists. The discussion addressed the practicalities of the profession such as career options, money matters and funding choices and questioned the curators' responsibility to their audience. Most interesting within this discussion, partially due to the selection of panellists, was the lack of an international perspective. During the discussion of career paths and opportunities, there was no mention of the possibilities for off-shore professional development (which is possibly a reflection on the lack of international experience amongst New Zealand's young curators). This was a surprising omission, particularly when one considers contemporary art's fluid geographical territories and mobile centre. Perhaps the omission can be seen as a determined antithesis to decades of intense cultural cringe, however, the panellist's discussion was persistently local.

The lack of a global perspective in New Zealand curatorial practice and its (mis)representation in the media was further reiterated by Tobias Berger's half-time lecture entitled "Maybe a Few Good Works Are Not Enough." In his talk, Berger proceeded to provide multiple examples of the parochialism of New Zealand media, citing examples such as the scandal he caused through his selection of the winner of the Waikato Art Award in 2002 and the parliamentary debate on the choice of et al. to represent New Zealand at the Venice Biennale. Berger implied that because of our insistence on the primary importance of the local, our sense of perspective suffers, engendering small details with disproportionate importance and encouraging provocation when discussion would be more productive.

The second panel discussion was chaired by Christina Barton and featured Emma Bugden, Simon Rees, William McAloon and Natasha Conland and was

entitled "Inside the Head of the Curator". With the title suggesting a divisive, them and us mentality, the curator was, in this session, presented as an unknown elite whose 'pointy headed' esotericism would soon be revealed through the course of the discussion. Through the persistence of Barton, several pertinent issues were introduced to the discussion, which ensured a lively, if limited, debate about the role of the curator in New Zealand.

One aspect of curatorship that was of particular interest within this discussion was the actual process of curating. The panel discussed a variety of curatorial methods, techniques and approaches, including the extent to which one should be responsive as a curator rather than responsible, and the ethics of a curator being an educator, a mediator and an auteur. There was a general agreement amongst the panellists that models of curatorship that were dependant on a neutral exhibition space were ultimately flawed because of the profound impact that context has on the meaning of an artwork. This idea was teased out through Tina Barton's suggestion that curating was little more than 'following a hunch' in order to investigate meaning, in much the same way that an artist approaches the creation of an artwork.

Barton's suggestion that curating is an intuitive process implies that curatorship has as much to do with curiosity as it does with scholarship. When considered in this light, the similarities between the curatorial process and that of art making become clear. Both are essentially investigations of meaning and ideas and their material or conceptual representation. Yet, this relationship between art making and the practice of curating can be seen as problematic, and often the mediation of the exhibition space by the curator is seen as an imposition of meaning upon an already laden artwork. Opposed to this is the suggestion that the curator's role is to simply present artworks in a professional and respectful manner, where the works are foregrounded against a 'neutral' context rather than implicated within an investigation based on the curators 'hunch'.

However, assuming that the gallery space, simply because of its typically white walls and 'non-specific' architecture, is neutral is to deny the vital role that context plays in interpretation. Whilst the symposium discussion very rarely referred directly to specific examples, *Telecom Prospect 2004* provided an excellent background on which to play out a debate on curatorial practice of this kind. The exhibition as an auteur exhibition reinforced the exhausted notion of the curator as a gatekeeper of culture, whose word, however apparently playful, is responsible for the development of a collection of works that "have made or, are likely to make, a major impact on the thinking and identity of our time."

The curatorial methodology employed in the development and selection of a national survey such as *Telecom Prospect 2004* requires further analysis. It is not, for example, an accurate marker of the country's cultural moment (a highly problematic intention as it is), if the curator is positioned by the institution as a dictator of taste or currency, determining the artists' worth through a type of best of 'top ten'. Instead it could be useful for curators of this type of survey exhibition (may they rest in peace) to build an exhibition based not only on the conceptual and

aesthetic relationships between the works, but on the architectural connotations of the space and their wider cultural context.

In a group survey exhibition such as this, the display of the work is equally as problematic as the selection. The implication that the works would be able to 'speak for themselves' within a group exhibition of this kind is only true in so far as the artworks are able to 'converse' with the other objects in the exhibition space. One would suppose then that in lieu of the artists being more involved in the physical (and therefore conceptual) contextualisation of their works, which would be ideal but is a bigger undertaking than most institutions could manage, and, rather than presenting the works as a (not so) casual snapshot within an unmediated or 'unimposing' environment, it could be useful for the curator to investigate and understand the affect of the institutional environment upon the artworks.

The exhibition spaces that housed *Telecom Prospect 2004* were essentially textually unmediated environments. The groupings within the exhibition were often oblique or connected through the works' physical rather than conceptual aspects, and there didn't appear to be any attempt at contextualising the groupings with the use of wall texts or other didactic material. However, this 'hands-off' approach to this aspect of curating a group show such as this only extends the curiously paradoxical nature of *Telecom Prospect 2004*'s rationale. It is difficult to read this reluctance to 'impose' upon work as a desire to minimise curatorial interference, because, as has been discussed, this textually-absent curator is the same curator who purportedly made this very deliberate "snapshot selection of the freshest most innovative artwork currently being produced in New Zealand."

With curatorial practice in New Zealand institutions so lacking in criticality or cohesion, it is of little surprise that three curatorial symposiums were initiated to discuss the continually shifting role of the curator in New Zealand. Additionally, considering the complexity of the issue, it is also of little surprise that after the talk and fracas have passed the issues remain unresolved. With the 'guts' of the matter still hanging in the air, it is beneficial to consider that the discussions, their accompanying confusions and partial resolutions, all now reside in the perpetually expanding conversation that is and should be the role of the curator in New Zealand.

Notes

1. Evidence of this increased emphasis on professionalism can be found in the proliferation of postgraduate Museum Studies programmes internationally, support for internships and CNZ's increased support for professional development activities for young curators.
2. I wish to make clear my understanding that *Telecom Prospect 2004* was in no way the product of one single vision, nor were its failings due to any one person or organising body. Instead *Telecom Prospect 2004* was the product of a much larger mechanism that extended far beyond the City Gallery Wellington to include the greater corporate rhizome from which the project stemmed.

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**In 1534 a cache of gold was hidden in a small huaca (cave) in the side of Cerro Mandango (Vilacamba, South Equador). Over the centuries the precise location of the huaca was lost, however, at Easter, during Semana Santa, the entrance of the cave opens to one of true heart. Unfortunately there are three guardians of the gold- an old, cantankerous man, a dog and a rooster- but by placing a cigarillo, a bone and a kernel of corn at the opening one can distract all three and obtain the gold.
No one has yet to do it.**