

**And so he took the thing and interrogated it until it was willing
to speak in a way that was but only natural/**



I want to talk about style.

Simon writes, “I have believed in style as the right unit of measure”.

Simon talks about a plastic cup and a brown jug, trying to explain this point of my concern: style as a way of categorising, a way of lining things up, a way of making sense. My attention wavers for a moment as I take another swig of my beer, “...a nice tasteful blue”, he says. I have missed the specific context but there it is: *a nice tasteful blue*. That’s the style I want to talk about.

I do not think it is about tastefulness or niceness, or blueness, but there is that approach of his: that phrasing, that consideration, that thoughtfulness.

“I run on feelings”, he says. I nod, and he reaches for a beer.

I am thinking about counterpoint & J.S. Bach.

Counterpoint focuses on melodic interactions rather than harmonic effect – it is one of the most essential means

Left & Right: Simon Denny, *The flow of sentiment* (2004-5), Creative New Zealand courtyard, Auckland, March 2005.

in musical composition for generating “musical ironies”. A melodic fragment heard alone may make a particular impression, but when heard simultaneously with other musical ideas, or combined in unexpected ways with itself, new facets of meaning are revealed. And so an idea is developed, and shown to be conceptually more profound than merely a pleasing melody.

And so I am standing in front of a Simon Denny sculpture – specifically a contribution to the third and final instalment of his and Tahī Moore’s six week project at rm103¹. A bath towel is suspended on the back of a log and mounted on the wall – the towel has a particular wavy pattern to it. The blue and yellow rope that is also attached to the log echoes the same pattern, and so too does the green crepe paper that fans its way in and out along the side of a curved piece of mdf board (also attached to the wall) – the Memphis doodling on the inside surface of the mdf can not be ignored either. This is counterpoint indeed, this is the sound of a fugue.

Together Simon and Tahī talk about conversations, about



Left: Simon Denny, *Winter* (2005) as appeared in a project at rm103, Auckland, with Tahī Moore and Nick Austin, July and September 2005. **Right & Opposite page:** Simon Denny, *Arranging Sympathies*, Physics Room (as part of the *Volume* series), Christchurch, August 2005.

giving and receiving. There should be understanding, though there is a want to not be completely understood – do not think you can get smug about it. There must be room for silence and other expressions; one’s eyebrows should twitch.

And Simon’s counterpoint: I am now thinking about a three-part fugue (for piano). Three voices take their place – the left hand, the right hand, and the imaginary hand in-between. The musician must have the question and the answer, and the other response (it is the old rub-your-belly-and-pat-your-head routine). Though it is not about dividing personalities, rather it is leaning towards a wholeness. The voices need to be directed; it is the role of the musician to present these voices to us in a way that is meaningful, to offer us a conversation that is worth listening to.

Simon writes, “What we have before us are always the same things”, and it is through his self-acquired role as “designer” that he endeavours to renew our interest in these things (or this conversation). It is only a matter of thoughtfulness, reorganisation (no randomness here), or a rethinking (of the Universe, from the beginning), that is all. Simon talks about the hierarchy of objects.

*...and then there’s these wobbly bits, and this axe, and the shapes want to have a conversation with it.*²

There are many questions and responses as the thing never quite finishes – though it never really feels unfinished. When I saw *Arranging Sympathies*³ as an incomplete, un-installed work, despite the constant reminder that it was incomplete, I found myself observing it as being quite a happy, self-sustained whole. It was moving in a direction it was both conscious of and uncertain of at the same time – a wonderful position from which to convince. There was still a constant



juggling between the hands for the notes that do not know which end of the keyboard they should lie on. Yet always I felt a sense of direction – for the designer, like the musician, must direct with confidence, even when the thing to be directed is yet to be completely defined.

I wondered whether the sense of control I encountered was anything to do with the maneuvering of space (for studio space boundaries are there to be stretched, and some will not forget the incident with that huge obtrusive canvas tent). The thing was certainly spreading with ease, though also in a circumspect sort of way. A simply acquired northern orientation could provide a welcome sense of sanity, but this thing was far more interested in investing in a more open ended sort of exchange (or growth).

I can’t help but think about holistic detectives.

If I was to continue talking about wholeness I should talk about realities, systems or truths, though I am thinking about Dirk Gently⁴:

*If I could interrogate this table-leg in a way that made sense to me, or to the table-leg, then it could provide me with the answer to any question about the Universe.*⁵

To interrogate a table leg you could be out of your mind, or you might just have a profound belief in the validity of such a thing. Though first impressions might leave an absurd sort of taste, both Denny and Gently function more than a few



steps beyond that impression. For theirs is a belief in a less well defined order, an order that needs more time (though maybe less time than expected). Simon says, “it’s all about edges” – I take that to be a tradesman’s secret.

And then the naturalness.

Things evolve; beans and dirt, and pink foam and green plastics. The transition is likelier than not, if you just get a bit closer up, take another look at the edges I think.

At another point in time Simon and I discuss his new approach to installing his sculptures. Whereas once the separate parts were forced into arrangements, maybe ones they were unhappy with, or arrangements that had an undesirable clear start and *fin*. Simon now hopes his sculptures are less contrived, and that as a result he has not told us all the story, that the conversations will continue well into the night. He talks about the “natural evolution of the object”: time, (more) conversation, more information is what these sculptures want. You should take another look at the edges, you could even try and interrogate it yourself, you know.

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Notes

1. *They That Would Eat The Fruit Must Climb The Tree*, 24 August – 3 September, rm103, Auckland
2. Simon Denny, interview, 9 June 2005
3. *Arranging Sympathies*, 20 July – 13 August 2005, The Physics Room, Christchurch
4. Douglas Adams, *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency*, Pan Books, London, 1988
5. Douglas Adams, *The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul*, Pan Books, London, 1989