

‘On originality’

“What is held up as originality is a myth, given the degree to which art evolves as a collective enterprise, with artists always building on other artists’ work... To talk to other artists’ work, and simultaneously to talk about the other artists’ work... Isn’t that what constitutes originality anyway?”

— Ian Burn in conversation with Imants Tillers 1993

Some months ago Luke Parker, a Sydney-based artist, invited me to write on the Australian artist Ian Burn (1939-1993). As I have spent much of the last decade writing on Ian I thought it would be more interesting to ask some artists interested in his work to respond to a comment he made about originality. I thank all the artists for participating particularly Luke and Tom Nicholson who brought others into the conversation.

Contributing artists:

David Akenson, letter

Barbara Campbell, *prompt for performance #89 of 1001 nights cast in situ*, Paris, 17/09/05

Narelle Jubelin

Bianca Hester, *5 propositions; notes on collectivity*

Andrew McQualter, *untitled (when I think of Ian Burn I think about the moral work of art)* toothpaste, mirror. Courtesy Scott Donovan Projects.

Susan Norrie, *Poisonous Fly Paper*

Catherine Rogers, *THIS IS NOT A LANDSCAPE* and *WIND SAND AND STARS*

Mark Titmarsh, *The Origin of the Work of Art in the Age of Collective Discursivity, a cine-text in eleven acts, directed by Mark Titmarsh*

Robert Pulie

Tom Nicholson, *Two images from the project Flags for a Trades Hall Council*, 2005. Photography: Christian Capurro

Christian Capurro *et al.*, *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette*, 1999 – 2005 +

Jeff Stewart, *Shangri-La/Benjamin/Burn*



Ian Burn. *This is not a landscape*, 1992, oil on wood panel, ink screen-printed on synthetic polymer sheet, wood, screws, 83.5 x 83.5 x 12.7 cm, collection Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, reproduced courtesy of the Ian Burn estate.

Ann Stephen is an art historian and curator at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Her biography ‘On Looking at Looking: The art and politics of Ian Burn’ is to be published by Miegunyah Press in 2006.

Dear Ann,

Thank you for the invitation to put forward work for the magazine. While my practice is most closely associated with the material practice of John Nixon, I have great respect and admiration for the clarity of thinking Ian Burn brings to art making. As an art student in the mid 90s the game of killing – whether it be authors, originality, painting, or art itself, was the right of passage in those days. But as you know, for Burn, or indeed anyone reading Barthes or Foucault with any degree of care, the problem of authorship and originality is a complex issue. I take from Burn the conviction that art, whether it goes by the name of reduction, or appropriation, it always value adding to art history. In the case of appropriation (I risk censure here in the company of Burn) it is Kant, and not Hegel – despite the theoretical link to Hegelian systematic closure that is implicit in appropriation – that should be invoked: Beauty is only what cannot be given as determinative – there is always more. Now, if you are still here, to my point. With Ian Burn's late works appropriation is used as a strategy, not to rehearse the death of originality but to add to our understanding of it. When I make a work for instance, I try to come as close to John Nixon as possible – so close that I begin to look nothing like him. I am, at this point, "looking through a piece of glass".

Look forward to hearing from you,

David Akenson

I would like to thank

Olive Cotton for her shadows,

Hellen Ennis for reminding us of Olive Cotton,

Jelle van den Berg for a crash-course in watercolours and
revealing the magic of painting reversed-out words,

Narelle Jubelin for half a life-time of bullying, challenging,
supporting and looking and for sending me on a mission to
Sennelier's of Paris,

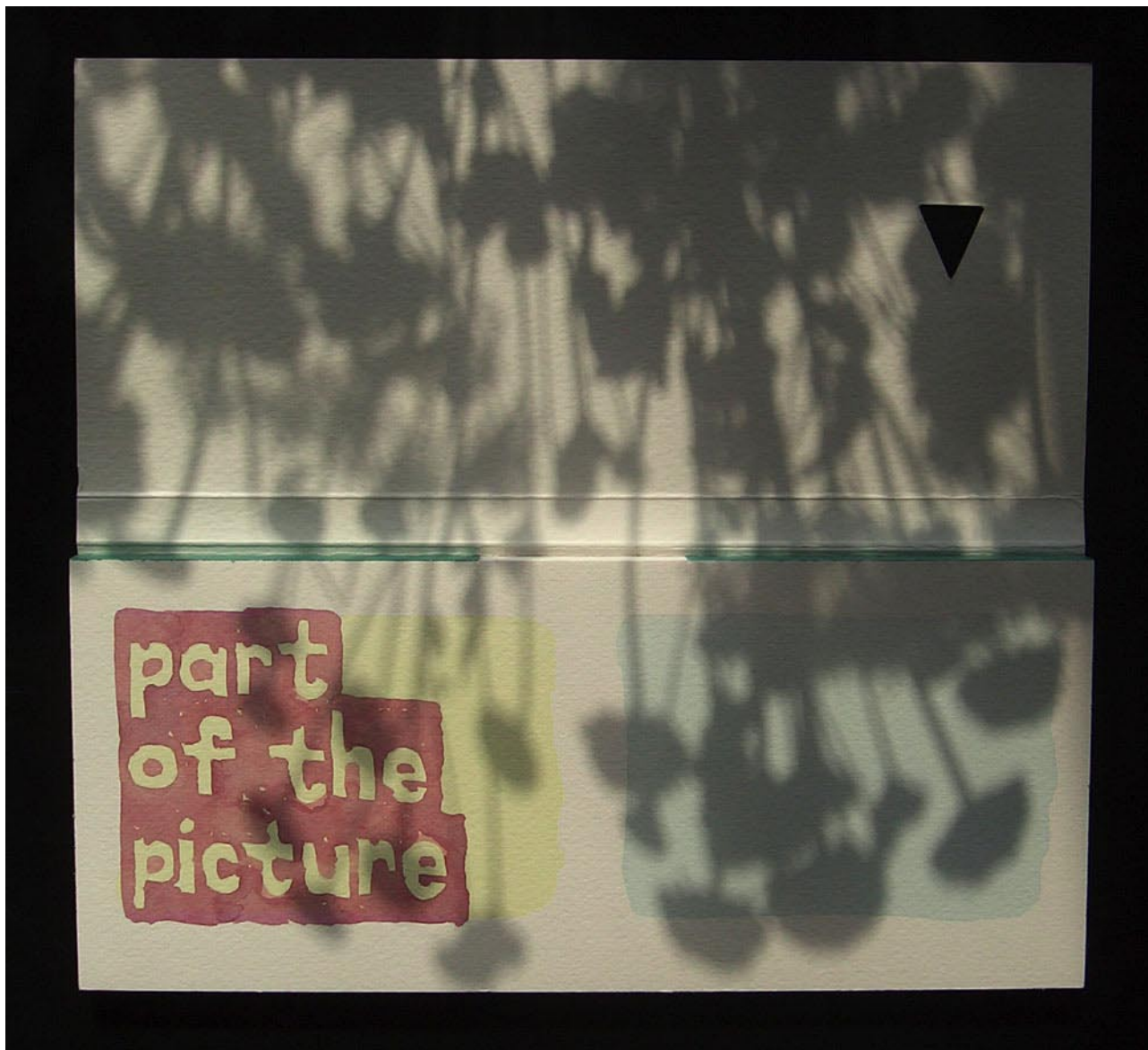
The house of Sennelier for making blocks of grain fin, format
panoramique, papier aquarelle,

Simone and Felix Brunau for furnishing the studios of the
Cit  Internationale des Arts with black-topped work tables,

The flower-growers of France and the florist at Monceau
Fleurs for her 'arrangement cadeau' (I'm sorry I lied and said
it was a gift when it was actually only for me but I wanted
to see you perform the act of considering each stem for its
form and colour and placing it in harmonious relationship
with all the others and then watching as the secateurs bite
the stems down to a unified length for the vase, and finally
the careful wrapping in tissue, cellophane, tape, ribbon and
Monceau Fleurs sticker. Voila! Merci bien),

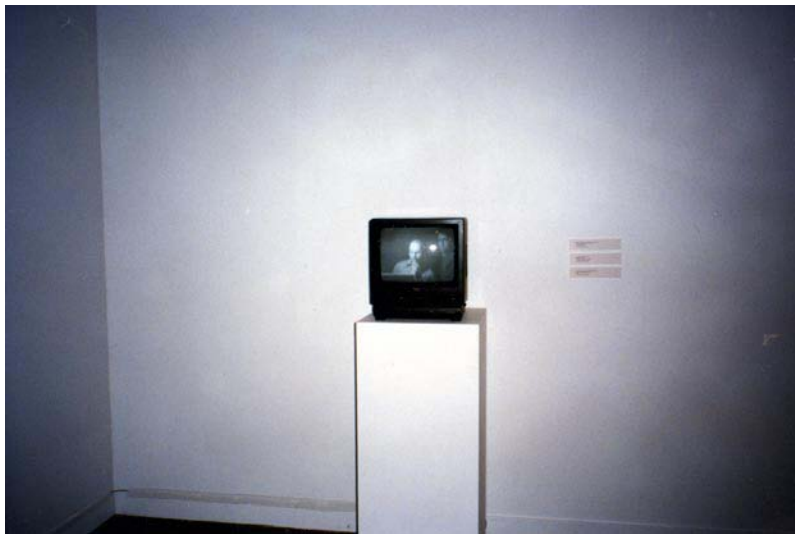
Ian Burn for taking the part for the whole,

And Ann Stephen for making this posthumous dialogue
possible.



Barbara Campbell

prompt for performance # 89 of *1001 nights* cast in situ,
Paris, 17/09/05.



Narelle Jubelin

Marcos Corrales, and video of Ian Burn and Marcos Corrales Nigel Lendon,
Monash University Art Gallery, Melbourne, 1996

5 propositions; notes on collectivity

1. All practices emerge from and participate in a thick communality over time. No matter how solo or singular a work seems, it invariably exists in, and summons the company of others. Each practice and each work teems with the presence of people across time. Individual activity need not be lost or subjugated within this collective sprawl, but constitutes a vital component. An individual practice exists in a multi-fold manner as a node that simultaneously draws from and contributes back into the glut.

2. Collectivity exists on many different scales and is present to different degrees and intensities both within a single work and throughout the duration of a practice.

3. Collectivity is situated by human relations; and therefore belongs to the realm of sociability, but it might also be thought of in terms that expand beyond the sphere of the human. Collectivity, imagined as a condition structured by a notion of proliferation and excess, becomes the site for material relations underpinned by the logic of difference. Collectivity posits things within the thickness of multiplicity.

4. Multiplicity proliferates identities and positions. A reductive logic of the singular distills the world down into manageable chunks, while a collective, inclusive or multiple kind of logic potentially opens things up to a myriad of ephemeral connections and transitional positions.

5. Collectivity imagined here is absolutely open, provisional and indeterminate – it is not about a uniformity of vision or about the imposition of ideals. This collectivity is unruly, anarchic, and always in a state of drift; it's a mass that holds together, but only just. A shaggy collectivity allows for, and values the desires, differences and discrepancies of the individuals who comprise it, and who set it into motion. It is not a product or an aim or something requiring maintenance, but an incidental and emergent entity that enables and depends on the supplementation of its parts.

-j note 1
printROOM
Karin de Jong
Edouard van Rijn
A month of artist-produced publications three, essays and books from all over Europe
CLUBSProject
June 2003

-j note 2
CLUBSFeedback session
with Terri Bird, Scott Mitchell, Sanna Mestrom, Karen Burns, Mia Gajdik, Andrea Tu, Spiros Panigirakis, Andrew McQuail for the work, one thing another thing, some thing other, other things stagger and...
Bianca Hester
CLUBSProject
October 2003
<http://www.clubproject.org.au/feedback.php>

-j note 3
Playing House
Michelle Ussher
Detail of reading room section of project including sketchbooks from Terri Anne, Kenna Dowd - Rob Mc Haffie. This was couched in a large series of water colours coupled with weekend drawing workshops.
CLUBSProject
December 2004

-j note 4
Diagram poster made in conjunction with the project:
multipleMISCELLANEOUSalliances (mMa)
Organised by Bianca Hester and involving: Elisabeth Boyoi, Sandra Biddle, Terri Bird, Christian Caputo, DAMR, Josh Daniels, Kate Fulton, Tam Gibbe, Bianca Hester, Anthony Hunt, Kath Houston, Raastat Ishak, Helen Johnson, Lisa Kelly, KNOTWORK, Mick Douglas + Kate Bowman, Larasa Kosiolt, Damien Lawson, Sanna Mestrom, Azlan McLennan, Andrew McQuail, Scott Mitchell, N55 ROOMS, Tom Nicholson, Ocular Lab - Julie Davies + Alex Rickala, SPACE-PORK ADVENTURES - Julie Burke + Shelley Krycer + Jeanette Purkis + Deborah Bam King, April Phillips, Spiros Panigirakis, SPLINT - Jason Mailing + Torle Nimmervoll, STICKY books - Si-mone Evenson + Luke Sinclair, Stuart Ringhot, Office of Utopia Procedures - Bernhard Sachs,

Utako Shindo, Jessie Walsh, Helen Walter, West Space, Kyle Wilkinson, Keith Wong, Jason Workman.....
"multipleMISCELLANEOUSalliances (mMa) is an ongoing, unruly, ever-proliferating series of linkages and collaborative connections across diverse clusters of people across Melbourne and Sydney. It is a series of projects both pocketed and piggy-backing on top of and in-between other projects. It criss-crosses and interlopes between art spaces, web forums, telephone calls, lounge-rooms, email messages, chunks of collaborative production, public actions and face to face dialogues. It is an experiment with the construction of relations based in ever-shifting negotiations and cascading possibilities. It is transient, ongoing, confusing and delicious. It is open-source, anti-copyright, independent and un-controllably miscellaneous..."
This project was developed in conjunction with resistance through rituals co-ordinated by Lisa Kelly located between CLUBSProject + Westspace June 2004.
<http://www.clubproject.org.au/workshops.php>

-j note 5
critical mass
Riding over the Bolle Bridge
Melbourne
January 2004
* see related essay on pages 21- 25

-j note 6
Opening outside of Ocular Lab for the project active air
OSW
March 2005

-j note 7
skipping in the Fitzroy gardens with Saskia Schut, Helen Johnson, Scott Mitchell and Gareth Malone.
December 2004

-j note 8
Rehearsing with Manthras
Bianca Hester
Saskia Schut
Helen Johnson
CLUBSProject Studios
August 2004 - June 2005

-j note 9
wireless connection
Scott Mitchell
Temporary wireless Internet connection set up for CLUBSProject to utilize the Gertrude broadband connection during mMa
May 2004
<http://hypertext.mil.edu.au/~smitchel/>

-j note 10
Interest in the newly set-up connection in the studio of Helen Walter at CLUBSProject
June 2004

-j note 11
Detail of SOUL
Lizzy Newman
CLUBSProject
April 2004

-j note 12
Detail of MIR11
Lizzy Newman
April 2005
* see related essay on page 6

-j note 13
Detail of Luminous Fountain Work from: WITH
Spiros Panigirakis
(including Terri Bird, Anna Fern, Ruth Hansen, Andrew McQuail, Scott Mitchell, Helen Radloff, Saskia Schut and Fiona Symons, Fiona Gurney, Seb Harris, Ben Haskin, Louise Ingh, Adam Scott and Michelle Ussher. Set and costumes by Joe Hill, Dimitris Panigirakis, Andrea Makisimov, Spiros Panigirakis, David Prator, Sarah Roberts, Dominic Radtman and Jonathan Symons)
CLUBSProject
May 2005

-j note 14
Gravity is No Longer A Problem
Gwynneth Porter
Written + published in conjunction with the Dan Arps installation MODEL FOR A COMMUNE
in Prospect at the City Gallery
Wellington N.Z.
August 2004
<http://www.telecomprospect2004.org.nz/options/gwynneth.asp>

-j note 15
Page detail from Gravity is No Longer A Problem
Gwynneth Porter
<http://www.naturalselection.org.nz/>

-j note 16
CLICKOO bar
in conjunction with resistance through rituals
Gwyn Porter, Dan Arps, Jon Bywater
Westspace
May 2004
<http://www.clickoo.org.nz/>

-j note 17
MIKE
Performing at mMa
Jon Campbell, Chris Hill, Kain Picken, Olivia Dowling, Harriet Morgan, Shannon Smiley
May 2004

-j note 18
Public events poster
mMa
CLUBSProject
May 2004-j note 19
Cafe baked by Terri Bird and Andrew McQuail for the event WITH organised by Spiros Panigirakis

-j note 20
Audience at WITH waiting to set the table of cakes

-j note 21
a to he
Written by **Michael Farrell** and performed by Fiona Gurney, Seb Harris, Ben Haskin, Louise Ingh, Adam Scott and Michelle Ussher during the project WITH
May 2005

-j note 22
Detail of costumes worn in the a to he performance (comprising of a mosquito, a meshroom, a sun, a koala + a pigeon.....)

-j note 23
Detail of construction made by SPLINT
Jason Mailing + Tori Nimmervoll
Using their materialbook kit, splint constructed a series of devices in and around the architecture of CLUBS. This was a swing device slung from the main hole during mMa.
May 2004
<http://www.splint.info/>

-j note 24
Detail of scraps, food and work in the RMIT studios
August 2005

-j note 25
M.A.P.
Collaboration between
Justin Andrews
Masato Takasaka
Detail of the relation between Justin's painting and Masato's sculpture. The collaboration work was structured by the process of translation from painting-to-sculpture-to-painting. The result of this work was a series of 2 and 3 dimensional forms that developed relations along a line of investigation.
Gertrude C.A.S studio 12
November 2003
<http://www.gertrude.org.au/exhibition.php?id=38>

-j note 26
Image of upturned concrete taken in Albert Park while riding to the city
September 2005

-j note 27
Image of a pile of dirty clothes
February 2005

-j note 28
You must have been in Strange Places
Wall drawing by
Helen Johnson
Gertrude C.A.S.
February 2005

-j note 29
Detail of plasticine-gelox-silicone rubber-object stack on black melamine floor tiles, from the project: thickening diagrams >> collapsing, dispensing >> events multiple material (corner + corner), and stretching
Bianca Hester
ACCA
February 2005

-j note 30
Detail of student work generated from series of collaborative workshops at VCA school of art. These workshops culminated at the George Paton Gallery Melbourne University
Jordon Wood
April 2005

Bianca Hester

pages 04 - 05 from the publication; *things full of people 2002-2005*
a partial index of events + projects; individual, collaborative, collective



Andrew McQualter

untitled (when I think of Ian Burn I think about the moral work of art)
toothpaste, mirror



Andrew McQualter

untitled (when I think of Ian Burn I think about the moral work of art)
toothpaste, mirror

"There is a tendency to treat the eye as simply a tool of recognition, rejecting an archaeology in relation to the processes of perception. To only read pictures is to rely on a rhetorical vision which treats the picture as nothing but a rhetorical surface... An analogy that keeps coming into my head is of a painting being designed like flypaper, grabbing at bits of text as they fly past; then someone comes along and writes about what has stuck to the flypaper but does not bother to look at the flypaper itself. Personally I prefer an art which generates its own options and is in control of its rhetoric."

Ian Burn, "Less is More", *Art & Australia*, vol. 32, no.2, 1994, p.203.

Poisonous Fly Papers

Quassia chips.....150 parts
Chloride of cobalt..... 10 parts
Tartar emetic 2 parts
Tincture of long
Pepper (1 to 4) 80 parts
Water..... 400 parts

Boil the quassia in the water until the liquid is reduced one-half.

Strain, add the other ingredients, saturate common absorbent paper with the solution, and dry. The paper is used in the ordinary way.

11. Potassium biochromatic..10 ounces
Sugar..... 3 drachms
Oil of black pepper..... 2 drachms
Alcohol 2 ounces
Water..... 14 ounces

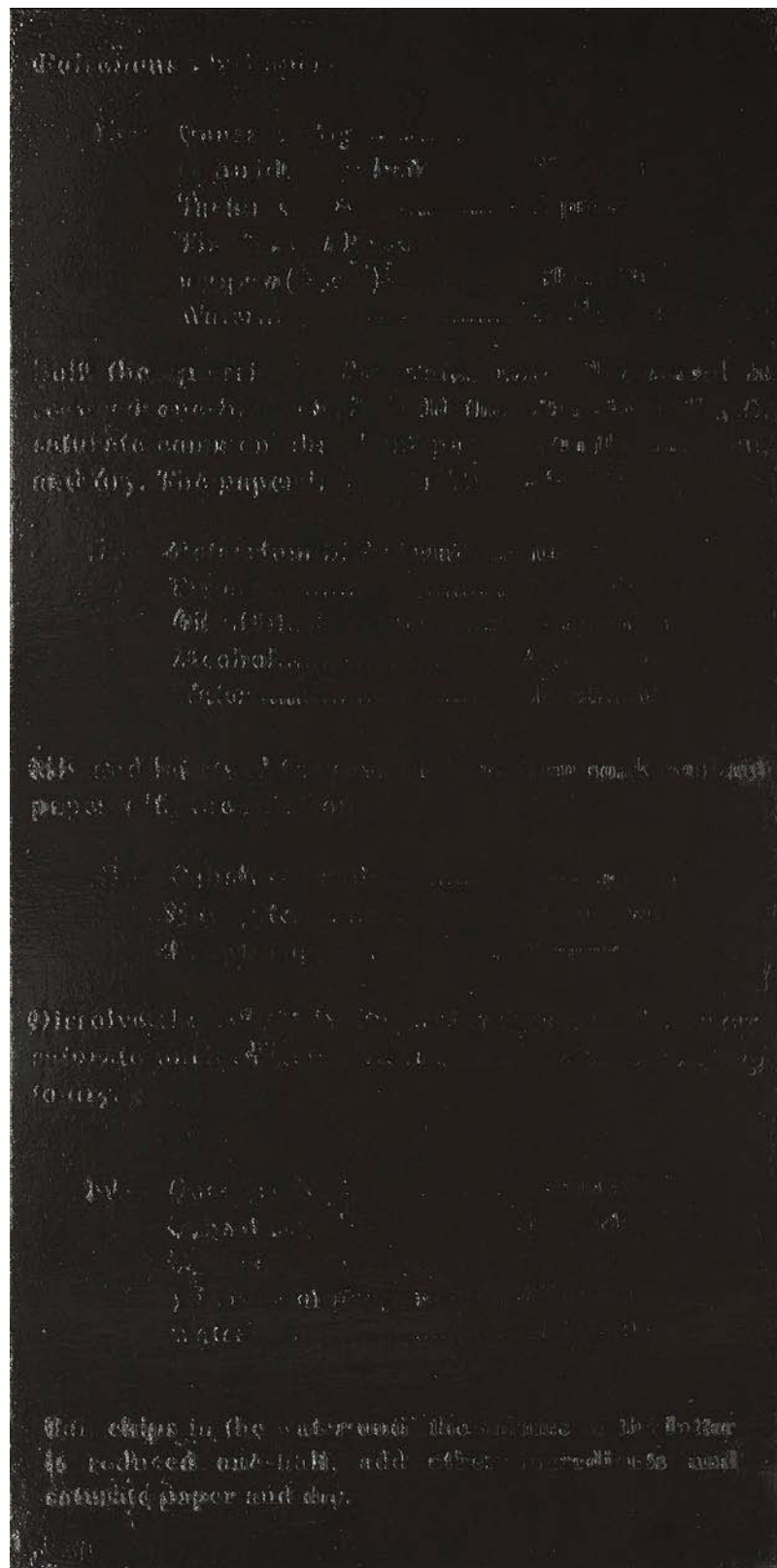
Mix and let stand for several days, then soak unsized paper with the solution.

111. Cobalt chloride.....4 drachms
Hot water 16 ounces
Brown Sugar1 ounce

Dissolve the cobalt in the water and add the sugar, saturate unsized paper in the solution, and hang up to dry.

1V. Quassia chips.....150 parts
Cobalt Chloride 10 parts
Tartrate antimony..... 2 parts
Tincture of pepper..... 80 parts
Water400 parts

Boil chips in the water until the volume of the latter is reduced one half and other ingredients and saturate paper and dry.



Susan Norrie

Inquisition: Poisonous fly paper painting II 1996-99

oil on canvas, 275.2 x 136.5 x 6.0 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Gurnett-Smith Bequest



Catherine Rogers
THIS IS NOT A LANDSCAPE
digital prints on paper



Catherine Rogers
WIND SAND STARS
digital prints on paper

The Origin of the Work of Art in the Age of Collective Discursivity

A cine-text in eleven acts

Scene 1.

Moodie Street, Sydney, 1993.

Ian Burn thinks for a moment, swivels in his chair and turns towards Imants Tillers saying: "What is held up as originality is a myth, given the degree to which art evolves as a collective enterprise, with artists always building on other artists' work... To talk to other artists' work, and simultaneously to talk about the other artists' work... Isn't that what constitutes originality anyway?"

Scene 2.

The offices of Art Monthly magazine, Canberra, 2003.

Imants Tillers stands at a window reading through the galley proofs of his conversation with Ian Burn. He thinks to himself, "Ten years pass so quickly and so much has changed. In 1993 we were still caught up in the trailing hem of the 1980s and all those issues of origins, originality, appropriation and quotation."

Narrator: In his mind's eye he sees Mel Ramsden's "Secret Painting" and his own appropriation of it.

Scene 3.

A rapid montage of the work of Hany Armanious, Mikala Dwyer, Mike Kelley, Jessical Stockholder, Tony Oursler, Katherine Grosse, Jim Lambie, Vanessa Beecroft, Rirkrit Tiravniya, Andrea Zittel and Pierre Huyghe.

Narrator: "Issues of origins and originality were made instantly historical by the end of 1993 with the arrival of grunge and abjection. And since then cyberism, relational art, global art..."

Scene 4.

The 7th Floor of the House of Fashion, Cooper Street, Sydney, 1998.

Robert Pulie bends down to the raw wood floor of his studio. He is taping a piece of string to a perspex sheet.

Narrator: "Yet the dynamic between art, artist and artworld as a community of doers and thinkers remains perennial. Each generation is called upon to decide where it stands in relation to this triad."

Robert holds the work up to the window, seeing through it to the canopy of trees covering Surry Hills. He reads the words

printed in vinyl lettering "A frayed knot" remembering the joke he told that night at the Beauchamp Hotel.

Scene 5.

New York, 1978.

Rosalind Krauss reaches through the arms of the typewriter to apply correcting fluid to one last error in her essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field."

Narrator: It is ironic that this essay should be primarily concerned with the re-definition of sculpture. Many of the artists discussed were painters migrating to 'sculpture' as a way of escaping the formal limitations of painting. By abandoning painting they expanded painting.

Scene 6.

In a light plane high above Amarillo, Texas, 1973.

Narrator: As Robert Smithson's engine cut out for the last time, he felt totally calm, the plane would glide for a moment, before tipping into a steep final descent. He thought of Borges' story of the poet who was permitted to complete his unfinished work in the time a bullet paused, midway in its journey from the firing squad to his heart. And so in an infinite instant Smithson constructed a glittering configuration of all his own work interwoven with a whole generation of painters, filmmakers and sculptors. He and they were indivisible and as one they converged on the same sense of place and the same idea of expanded media.

Scene 7.

New York, 1970.

Ian Burn is on the phone to Roger Cutworth, "Theoretical art has to introduce a new role for artists since there is no longer any personalised actions to make... Ideas are not personalisable things, they are accessible to anyone and everyone."

Narrator: The more Ian Burn moved away from painting the more condensed it became in his work by its very absence. Even his text works are the homeopathic distillation of painting.

Scene 8.

Cafe Sperle, Munich, 1933.

Walter Benjamin turns to Bertolt Brecht and says, "What a pompous git Heidegger is!"

End Titles: Any resemblance to persons living or dead is entirely tangential.

Brecht: "And a fascist! I have an idea for a play, a comedy based on parodies of his tautological, blood and soil, clap trap."

Narrator: And yet the similarity of concerns between Heidegger's, "The Origin of The work of art" and Benjamin's "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction" puts the two politically opposed thinkers into close intellectual affinity. A playful misunderstanding of Benjamin's work will become crucial to 1980s quotational art and the question of origins. For Heidegger art was the origin of the artist and not vice versa, thereby establishing another perspective on the idea of collective originality.

Scene 9.

New York, 1971.

Ian Burn is working at his day job in a picture framing shop. He is building a wooden safety frame around the edge of a large painting.

Narrator: "This day had been much like any other, until a collector delivered an original Jackson Pollock painting for framing."

Ian tacks the final section together taking great care not to touch the painted surface. As he does so a single thread comes away from the back of the canvas. Brushing the workbench clean he collects the thread and puts it into his trouser pocket.

Scene 10.

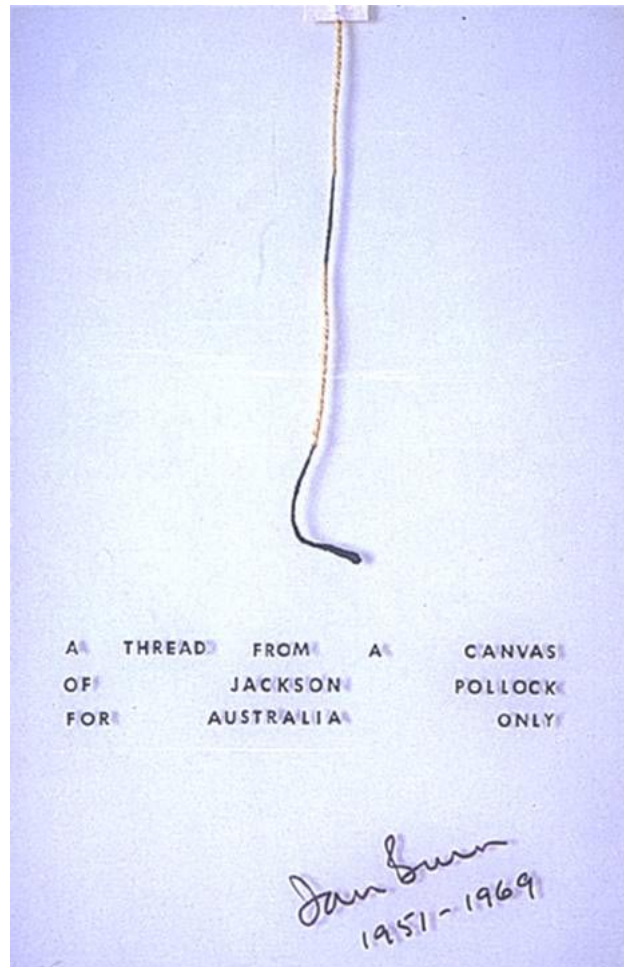
Close up of Ian Burn's "A Thread from a Canvas by Jackson Pollock for Australia Only" (1969).

Narrator: This work must rank as the only referential work that contains an actual fragment of the referent. Quotational art usually figures the referent by remaking it in another appearance. This work holds its referent like a piece of the true cross and offers it as a gift, only to you, Australia.

Scene 11.

Dissolving shots of Robert Pulie hanging his completed "A frayed knot" (1998), Scott Redford taking a photo in his Berlin studio that would become "Mirror Piece" (2002), Andrew McQualter asking his actor friends to pose for his painting "Looking at a Piece of Glass – after Ian Burn" (2005) and Mark Titmarsh watching the rapid prototyper as it printed "Purple Reflex" (2005).

Narrator: The work generates an ecstatic chain of interconnectivity, reaching backwards to ever refreshing origins, reaching forwards to collective discursivity.

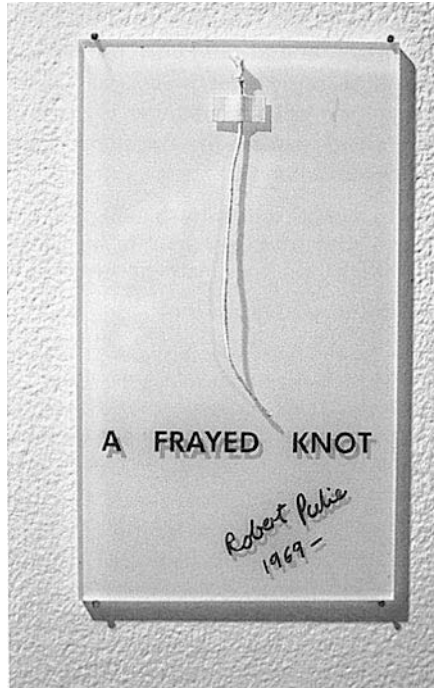


A THREAD FROM A CANVAS
OF JACKSON POLLOCK
FOR AUSTRALIA ONLY

Ian Burn
1951 - 1969

Ian Burn

A thread from a canvas by Jackson Pollock for Australia Only, 1969, canvas thread, paint, adhesive lettering on glass, 21.2 x 21.2 cm, reproduced courtesy of the Ian Burn estate.



Robert Pulie

A Frayed Knot, 1998, adhesive, string, vinyl lettering and marker pen on glass, 12. 2 x 21. 2cm, destroyed.



Tom Nicholson

Flags for a Trades Hall Council, 2005.

Photography: Christian Capurro



Tom Nicholson

Flags for a Trades Hall Council, 2005.

Photography: Christian Capurro

Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette 1999 – 2005 +

The work: A 246 page *Vogue Hommes*, September 1986, #92 (with Sylvester Stallone cover) erased by hand by 250 or so people. This remnant of a five-year mass collaborative erasure project has been shown at various sites from early 2004 onwards with accompanying talks by invited speakers.

Informed by what people do, by the exchanges we make in our lives, both with our time and our labour, and how that is valued, this artefact of *disproportionate expenditure* (and *disproportionate attention*) could be seen as embodying the residue of those less tangible or ‘pictureable’ things in our lives brushing up against a culture obsessed with the idea of visibility.

Its (un)making: Different individuals were asked to completely and anonymously erase, with a rubber, a page of this intact magazine. They were also asked to write in pencil on the page both the *time* it took them to do this and whatever *monetary value*, translated into an hourly rate(s), they currently received for their time. The sum of these expenditures gave each page a nominal value which, when added to that of all the other pages, established a value of sorts, for the work as a whole. The shortest time taken to erase a page was 9 minutes while the longest was around 3.5 hours. The value accrued ‘on’ each page ranges from nothing in a number of instances (some contributors were receiving no calculable money for their time) to one page ‘worth’ over \$US1000. These disparities are central to the work.

The sum: 267 hours 49 minutes and 5 seconds... valued at \$AUD11,349.18....

Some questions: What is time well spent?

How do you hold onto an image, or sense, of yourself when you are forever (re)negotiating the value of your time in the face of others? Is ‘holding on’ a viable, or desirable, option today? And, what are the costs?

What is valued in the work we do and how is this determined and manifested?

How many disproportionate investments do we make?

What does it mean when the more you work at something the less it appears yours and the more like everyone else’s it becomes?

Where does (the) work begin and end? Where and when and with whom does it reside?



To which images do we succumb?

Site #9: Albert Road Clinic, 29.01.05, 3pm.

Speaker: Justin Clemens, “Getting off your face with a destructive character: Christian Capurro’s *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette*.”

Site #8: St. Eustathios Greek Orthodox Church, 06.12.04, 6pm.

Speaker: Father Chris Dimolianis on the history, status and workings of the image in the life of the Orthodox Church.

Site #7: *Cycle Tracks Will Abound in Utopia*, ACCA, 07.08.04 – 26.09.04.

Site Talks: Sunday 5th September, 3pm, Christian Capurro.

Thursday 16th September, 6pm, Bernhard Sachs/Office of Utopic Procedures (cancelled).

Sunday 19th September, 3pm, Adam Bandt, “The octopus on the beach: fetishism, utopia, commodities and work.”

Site #6: The home of Louisa Bufardeci, 22.06.04 – 10.07.04.

Site Talk: Saturday 10th July, 3pm.

Speakers: Collaborators (the *et al*) on the (un)making of *AMPEdS* respond to the work in an open discussion.

Site #5: Collins Place Eyecare, 04.06.04 – 19.06.04.

Site Talk: Saturday 5th June, 1.30pm.

Speakers: Libby Brown (with Tony Perry), “Remains to be seen: R.E.M. and Eyeglasses of Kentucky.”

Site #4: Victorian Trades Hall Council, 11.05.04 – 30.05.04.

Site Talk: Saturday 15th May, 3pm.

Speaker: Adam Bandt, “The secret life of the commodity: labour, rates of pay and the value of 267 hrs, 49 mins and 5 secs of work.”

Site #3: Salvation Army Family Store, Abbotsford, 20.04.04 – 08.05.04.

Site Talk: Saturday 24th April, 3pm.

Speaker/Performer: Penny Trotter performs Dr. Ross Moore’s, “The dust of words: Christian Capurro’s squandered *Vogue*.”

Site #2: Fitzroy Public Library, 30.03.04 – 18.04.04.

Site Talk: Saturday 3rd April, 3pm.

Speaker: Christian Capurro on the *AMPEdS* project; its origins, artistic and social context and its (un)making.

Site #1: Worksense Haircutters, 09.03.04 – 27.03.04.

Site Talk: Saturday 13th March, 5pm.

Speaker: Tom Nicholson, “Actions and traces: Contemplating Christian Capurro’s *Another Misspent Portrait of Etienne de Silhouette* as a drawing.”

For further details contact Christian Capurro mail@christiancapurro.com or visit www.christiancapurro.com for an archive of the project that includes the site talk transcripts. A signed and editioned A1 poster is also available.

Shangri-La/Benjamin/Burn



In *Shangri-La*, an exhibition of paintings and objects for my father, Jack, I mounted and framed a sketch drawn on the back of a used carton in coloured pencil and biro by my father and his friend Laurie of a proposed cabinet for my father's stereo. Laurie informed me that he and my father had been trying to design the cabinet over an evening of visiting and drinking together. I found the flattened carton in my father's house, *Shangri-La*, while packing up after his death. I asked a friend, Patrick Jones, to make the cabinet for me to scale. I then painted it in the approximate colours indicated by the sketch. Finally I made a small oil painting of the cabinet Patrick had made. The three objects, the sketch, cabinet and painting were hung together.

There were other works in the exhibition that had 'begun' with my father. While cleaning out the sunroom I discovered a box Jack had made to hold his oil paints, brushes, solvents and palette. There were also photographs in it of the hills and paddocks around Shangri-La. With his paint box was a small

easel he had made from scrap timber, and two unfinished paintings. One was a rough sketch of three cockatoos on an undercoated board, the other was a landscape of, and I guessed, Lake Eildon. Jack was a Sunday painter. Using my father's paints brushes and photographs I completed two landscapes. Cutting boards to match those he had begun to paint on I redrew his cockatoos and 'finished' them as a painting, hanging our works together.

The exhibition of 24 objects, paintings and drawings were exhibited twice this year. Once in the community hall of the small country town my father had lived in for the past 35 years and the other in Melbourne at the Victoria St Gallery. The visitors to the Yarck Community Hall, all of them locals who had known my father, or had known of him, related stories either based on the works displayed or from other associations they had with Jack. Norma, the woman who was in charge of the hall told me my father used to attend dances there and she had danced with him herself. My

brother who lived locally had played badminton there often. Ian mentioned talking to and about other artists, as making being a type of 'collective enterprise'. I would suggest that the collectivity of making is much broader than associations through artists and the art world. The conversation that I was attempting to hold with my father through the making of these works and their display within his own community was in part about representation, the place of work within particular contexts, but primarily it was a conversation with and about fathers. Conversation as an act of intimately living.

I also have reservations about how 'originality' is apparently dismissed in Burn's quote. One may view originality in the sense of say Martin Heidegger when he speaks of authenticity. Not as a way to denote any aura of reification, but as a way of being, that is a constant questioning of self and the world. It is, in part, 'that moment of vision' where one comes to and recognises one's possibilities. And I see this as a relation to and with others. The myth as understood is still dispensed with; and making becomes a significant relationship between maker, object, place and witness, making anew. This is Burn's collectivity but with an acknowledgement of the other's alterity, one who participates on their own terms with reciprocity.

The Obedience of Corpses¹

Walter Benjamin's essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936) did much to dispel the myth of originality. Benjamin sought to expose the theoretical structures that lend themselves readily to Fascism. He hoped to introduce concepts "into the theory of art... that are completely useless for the purposes of Fascism,"² using originality and new technology as the locus. Considering both Burn's and Benjamin's concerns about 'originality' I would like to reframe the discussion by asking how is one to make and theorize in a time when Scott Parkin, a peace activist, is jailed and then deported for "encouraging spirited protest"?

Rob Starcy, president of Criminal Defence Lawyers Association says, "It basically means the end of the freedom of expression, the end of being able to question the policy of the current government."³ And what does it mean when Azlan McLennan's *Canberra's 18* is disallowed from being hung as a replacement artwork in the Platform Artists exhibition in Melbourne recently?⁴ The work depicts terrorist leaders with accompanying text locating the figures within a global historical context.

We live with violence that may not only maim and destroy, but also which makes people "play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility of action."⁵

A work, *please feel free to leave this bag where ever you loose*, recently emailed to a group of friends by Patrick



Jones, consisted of a photograph of a leather bag with the caption, *collision is unavoidable in nature*, in response to recent amendments of the Crimes Act. Another artist, Peter Tyndall, one of 28 others who received the email, responded by superimposing a colourful 'anarchist bomb' on the bag and sending it on to other friends who publish a What's On magazine. They will now use it as the front cover of their next edition. Patrick also sent this email:

Date: 16 September 2005 11:39:15 PM

'I have just returned from 2 days in Melbourne where, together with a friend, Jason Workman, created numerous experiments based on 'social space' in the city. The briefcase image was just one 'prop' we took with us. We lay around City Square, we posted business cards on artworks in galleries, we perched ourselves on things, we used giant dice, we placed props at bus shelters which posted governmental warnings about suspicious things and events, we were unspectacular as we amused ourselves, nevertheless drawing attention from at least one undercover agent – who we went camera-to-camera with at South Bank.'

These exchanges between friends, the visiting of sites, the blossoming of a practice were enacted on the same day as the McLennan work was being discussed in the press and radio, and a day after Scott Parkin was deported. The spontaneity of exchange via the free use of technology at one's disposal acts as a happy counter weight to what is a reoccurring and disturbing drift in our political and cultural life. Benjamin was attempting to theorize a way of working,

a way of thinking that was other than one based in fascistic structures, in opposition to fascism. He suggested film was the contemporary medium to counter the rise of oppressive ideologies. This in itself has not been the case. Neither is the rise of any new technology, which has no neutrality. Text messages are to be monitored in Thailand, where they have been a source of political organization. Monitoring, attempted freedom, attempted freedom, monitoring.

With these new legislations and acts of violence we react, repeating perhaps those totalities that would enact themselves upon us. It is not the object of the emails, the bag and its bomb, or the technologies themselves for me that break these cycles, it is the humour, the attempts at open dialogue and the thinking these exchanges raise.

Notes

1. "Eichmann in his trial oscillated between the virtues and vices of blind obedience, or obedience of corpses, *Kadavergehorsam*, as he himself called it." Hannah Arendt, *Eichman in Jerusalem*, Penguin Books, New York, 1969, p135.
2. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, Illuminations, Essays and Reflections*, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, p218.
3. *The Age* newspaper, 17 month? Saturday, 2005, p7.
4. See *the Age* newspaper article by Royce Millar and Lauren Martin, September 16, 2005, and interview on *The World Today* ABC Radio, 16 September also, between interviewer Lynn Bell, Azlan McLennan and Gary Singer from the MCC.
5. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity, an essay on exteriority*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1969, p21.